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**Holding Life in Suspension: Wellbeing Under UK Asylum Governance among Iranian
and Afghan Asylum Seekers**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the UK asylum system as a governing condition through which everyday life is shaped under prolonged uncertainty. Rather than approaching asylum primarily as a legal status or a sequence of procedural outcomes, the study analyses how legality, time, care, and wellbeing are organised and lived through administrative practices. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 Iranian and Afghan asylum seekers in England, the research examines how uncertainty, delay, and conditional support become enduring rather than temporary disruptions.

Asylum is therefore conceptualised not as a process confined to legal status determination, but as a prolonged governing condition requiring continual adaptation across material, subjective, and relational domains.

The thesis brings socio-legal approaches to legal consciousness into relation with multidimensional frameworks of wellbeing, examining how these domains are co-constituted under asylum governance. It develops the concept of transitional legal consciousness to capture how engagement with law becomes provisional and affectively charged, requiring continual recalibration in response to opacity, deferral, and shifting institutional demands.

Material wellbeing is organised through institutionalised insufficiency and managed scarcity, producing dependence, constraining autonomy, and regulating subsistence. Subjective wellbeing is shaped by prolonged uncertainty and instability, where endurance, containment, and practices of affective scaffolding sustain psychic coherence in the absence of structural resolution. Relational wellbeing is reorganised through dispersal, enforced cohabitation,

institutional dependency, and conditional forms of care, constraining recognition, reciprocity, and relational agency.

Across these domains, the thesis demonstrates that wellbeing under asylum governance is not only constrained but reconstituted through the interaction of legal uncertainty, material scarcity, affective strain, and relational constraint. By locating these processes within the institutional organisation and mediation of asylum governance, the study advances socio-legal and sociological understandings of how instability becomes institutionalised, how endurance is structurally demanded, and how life is sustained under conditions of prolonged legal and temporal indeterminacy.

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This thesis is dedicated to those whose lives are held in suspension within systems that promise protection while withholding certainty.

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Abbreviations and Key Terms

ACRS — Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme

ARAP — Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy

ASPEN — Payment card used to deliver asylum support

Asylum seeker — A person who has sought international protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention on the grounds of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, and whose claim is awaiting determination.

COVID-19 — Coronavirus Disease 2019

Eid — Islamic religious festival

EU — European Union

GP — General Practitioner

ID — Identification

Migrant Help — A UK-based charity contracted by the Home Office to deliver the Asylum Support Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) service. It functions as the primary point of contact for people seeking asylum to access, manage, or challenge asylum support, including accommodation and financial assistance, effectively mediating communication with the Home Office, which is often not directly accessible to applicants.

NGOs — Non-Governmental Organisations

NVivo — Qualitative data analysis software

OHCHR — Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Praxis — UK-based charity providing advice and support to migrants, refugees, and people with insecure immigration status

PTSD — Post-traumatic stress disorder

Refugee — A person whose claim for international protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, on the grounds of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, has been accepted.

Section 4 — Asylum support for destitute refused asylum seekers who have exhausted, lost, or cannot access Section 95 support, and who meet one or more statutory conditions, including where further submissions have been made and a fresh-claim decision is pending, where departure is temporarily not possible, or where support is necessary to avoid a breach of Convention rights.

Section 55 — A provision in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 that restricts access to support under sections 4, 95 and 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, and certain related accommodation provisions, where a person has claimed asylum but the Secretary of State is not satisfied that the claim was made as soon as reasonably practicable after arrival in the UK, subject to statutory exceptions including protection for households with dependent children and cases where support is required to avoid a breach of Convention rights.

Section 95 — Asylum support for individuals with pending claims under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

Section 98 — Initial asylum support providing temporary accommodation while a Section 95 claim is assessed

UK — United Kingdom

UN — United Nations

UNHCR — United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VSO — Voluntary Sector Organisation

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research Provenance and Problem Formation

This research did not originate within academia, nor did it emerge from a pre-formulated theoretical gap. It took shape through proximity to the asylum system as it is lived, navigated, and endured. Before assuming any professional role within refugee support, I underwent the asylum process myself. That experience marked an early encounter with the bureaucratic temporality, opacity, and conditionality that later became central to this study. Yet at the time, it was experienced primarily as personal disorientation. It was only through sustained exposure to others' struggles that this disorientation came to be understood as structurally produced rather than individually borne.

While completing my master's degree, I worked in an Iranian shop in London. Because I spoke English and had some familiarity with institutional procedures, I gradually became an informal point of orientation for asylum seekers and refugees moving through the system without language, familiarity, or ground beneath them. I interpreted, sat with people as they tried to hold letters open, and helped trace pathways towards support within a landscape that often felt impenetrable. These encounters frequently unfolded at moments where uncertainty was already saturated with fear. A misread sentence could unravel months of waiting. A missed appointment could feel like the quiet loss of a future. The absence of guidance magnified the weight of every administrative demand.

What became apparent through these encounters was not simply the difficulty of entering an unfamiliar legal system, but the extent to which access to information itself operates as a structuring force. Minor gaps in understanding, produced through language barriers, institutional opacity, or the withdrawal of guidance, could decisively shape life trajectories. These gaps did not only organise legal outcomes, but also permeated everyday emotional life, generating anxiety, self-doubt, and a persistent sense of precarity. Bureaucratic systems appeared to presume forms of knowledge, temporal capacity, and emotional steadiness that were unevenly distributed, exposing individuals to harm not through overt exclusion, but through procedural misalignment and informational scarcity that steadily eroded mental wellbeing.

At that stage, the issue appeared neither exceptional nor accidental. The repetition of similar crises across different individuals suggested that something was structurally misaligned. The distress I witnessed was not an expression of individual failure or poor decision-making, but an outcome generated through a system that demands procedural literacy, temporal flexibility, and adaptive capacity from those least positioned to provide them. The cumulative effect of uncertainty, silence, and conditional waiting was not merely practical hardship, but a slow erosion of mental and emotional wellbeing.

Following the completion of my master's degree, I applied for a Refugee Support role at the British Red Cross. My motivation was to support those in need and to work within a field I had already come to know through experience rather than formal qualification. During the interview process, it became apparent that much of what I understood about asylum procedures, institutional delay, and the affective consequences of prolonged uncertainty had been acquired outside formal training, through lived experience and informal mediation. I began this role in

the period after Covid-19. At the same time, there was a significant backlog within the UK Home Office, with large numbers of asylum cases remaining without correspondence for extended periods. This coincided with an increase in the number of people crossing the Channel and entering the asylum system. Together, these conditions shaped the wider environment in which support was sought and delivered, and the resulting administrative stagnation reverberated across the system, generating parallel backlogs among legal representatives and charitable organisations.

In this context, enquiry lines filled with calls from individuals in acute distress. People sought support across a wide range of issues, including accommodation, subsistence support, and the functioning of Section 95 payments, alongside attempts to secure legal representation at a time when many law firms had no capacity to take on new cases. Others feared they had missed a letter, an interview, or a deadline, or were convinced that a single administrative omission had placed their entire future in jeopardy. Often, there was little immediate intervention available. Where legal matters were concerned, representatives could offer no more than reassurance that delays were systemic rather than personal. Across the asylum system, the prevailing condition was one of waiting. Waiting, however, was not a neutral temporal state. It was lived as suspension, anxiety, and moral abandonment, with tangible consequences for mental wellbeing.

Simultaneously, public and political discourse increasingly framed asylum through the language of cost, burden, and containment, particularly in relation to hotel accommodation and public expenditure. These narratives circulated with little attention to the lived consequences of prolonged uncertainty, enforced dependency, and bureaucratic silence, or to the ways these conditions seeped into everyday emotional life and mental wellbeing. Against this backdrop, a

set of questions began to take shape. How do prolonged uncertainty and administrative delay affect their wellbeing over time? How are these effects registered, narrated, and sustained in the absence of resolution or institutional recognition? Through what channels are such experiences made visible, if at all, within systems oriented toward procedure rather than care? And who is able to listen, record, or speak for those whose lives are fragmented across helplines, delayed correspondence, and forms of distress that rarely enter official accounts?

It was at this juncture that the idea for this research fully emerged. What began as urgency, an impulse to document, to expose, to make visible, gradually transformed into a more sustained attentiveness. As the research progressed, indignation gave way to endurance as an analytical stance, a commitment to staying with the slow and attritional nature of harm rather than seeking moments of dramatic rupture. This shift did not signal detachment, but a recalibration of method and tone. It enabled an engagement with asylum not only as a legal or policy regime, but as a lived temporal condition that holds wellbeing across material, subjective, and relational dimensions.

This thesis is grounded in that trajectory. It approaches asylum not solely as a legal process, nor as a humanitarian problem to be managed, but as a form of governance that structures everyday life through uncertainty, delay, and conditional care. Within this framing, wellbeing emerges as a necessary analytical lens for understanding how asylum seekers remain intact psychically, materially, and relationally under conditions where resolution is deferred and recognition remains unstable. The conceptual vocabulary through which these dynamics are examined is set out in the following section.

1.2 Significance of the study

The concerns that emerged through this study are not incidental but speak directly to gaps in existing sociological and socio-legal analyses of asylum. This study therefore engages with a growing body of sociological, socio-legal, and psychosocial scholarship that has examined asylum as a site of legal precarity, institutional control, and moral governance (Gill, 2016; Mountz, 2011b; Tyler, 2010). Existing research has made substantial contributions to understanding asylum policy, legal exclusion, and the material conditions imposed on those seeking protection (Borelli et al., 2023; Burbidge et al., 2025; Calo et al., 2024; Crawley et al., 2011; Darling, 2022; Sales, 2002). However, much existing scholarship continues to prioritise discrete moments of decision, legal status outcomes, or policy evaluation, often treating uncertainty, delay, and waiting as background conditions rather than as central objects of analysis (Brun, 2015; Griffiths, 2014).

By contrast, this thesis foregrounds asylum as a governing condition that unfolds through duration, deferral, and everyday administration. Its significance lies in shifting analytical attention from episodic events to the slow and ordinary processes through which power is exercised and lived. In doing so, it contributes to sociological debates on governance, legality, and wellbeing by showing how harm accumulates not primarily through exceptional acts or formal exclusion, but through routine practices of asylum governance that normalise uncertainty, constrain agency, and reorganise everyday life over time (Darling, 2014a; Lipsky, 1980; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021)

The empirical and analytical work undertaken in this thesis is structured by the following research questions:

1. How do asylum seekers interpret, anticipate, and orient themselves toward law under conditions of legal instability and procedural uncertainty?
2. How do asylum seekers experience waiting within the UK asylum system, and how does it shape temporal orientation and everyday rhythms over time?
3. How are material, subjective, and relational dimensions of wellbeing shaped and sustained under conditions of asylum governance?

1.3 Key Concepts

The concepts set out in this section provide the analytical framework through which the thesis examines asylum as a governing condition. They are used as interconnected lenses that orient the analysis toward how power is exercised through ordinary administrative practices, alongside legality, time, care, and wellbeing, as these are organised and lived under conditions of prolonged uncertainty. Taken together, these concepts orient the thesis toward process rather than outcome, and toward everyday governance rather than isolated legal or policy events, reflecting sociological approaches that treat governance as embedded in ordinary practices rather than exceptional moments (Rose, 1999). They structure the analysis across chapters and guide how empirical data is interpreted in relation to material conditions, subjective life, and relational worlds.

1.3.1 Asylum as governance

This conceptualisation provides the grounding through which the thesis examines legal consciousness, wellbeing, care, and endurance across the chapters that follow. Governance is understood here as a dispersed and ordinary mode of regulation enacted through legal processes, welfare systems, accommodation regimes, and humanitarian infrastructures, shaping how life is lived under conditions of prolonged precarity. This understanding draws on

scholarship that locates governance in routine administration, discretionary practice, and institutional management rather than in sovereign command or overt coercion (Lipsky, 1980; Rose, 1999). Rather than functioning through direct coercion alone, asylum governance operates through deferral, managed scarcity, and institutional nonresponse, producing effects that accumulate gradually and unevenly over time (Anderson, 2013; Gill, 2016).

Approaching asylum as governance allows the analysis to move beyond isolated policy decisions or legal outcomes and to attend to the everyday practices through which regulation is enacted and endured. Letters that arrive late or not at all, support that remains conditional or insufficient, and requirements that are continually redefined operate together to structure dependency, limit autonomy, and regulate participation. Such practices resonate with scholarship on bureaucratic power and street-level governance, which demonstrates how discretion, delay, and administrative routine shape lived experience and moral worth (Darling, 2014a; Gill, 2016; Lipsky, 1980). These processes do not simply constrain action but reshape how time is inhabited, how futures are imagined, and how individuals relate to institutions and to one another (Griffiths, 2014; Mayblin, 2017).

Within this framework, asylum governance is treated as a structuring condition rather than a temporary interruption. Its effects are not confined to moments of decision or crisis but permeate material conditions, emotional life, and social relations, aligning with analyses that foreground temporality, uncertainty, and attrition as central features of contemporary migration governance (Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014; Mayblin, 2017). This conceptualisation provides the grounding through which the thesis examines legal consciousness, wellbeing, care, and endurance as interconnected responses to a governing system that remains unresolved and unstable.

1.3.2 Legal consciousness

Legal consciousness is conceptualised in this thesis as a dynamic and relational process through which individuals interpret, anticipate, and orient themselves toward law under conditions of instability. It is not treated as a fixed disposition or stable cognitive stance, but as something continually shaped by bureaucratic opacity, institutional silence, prolonged waiting, and mediated access to legal knowledge. This approach builds on socio-legal scholarship that understands legal consciousness as embedded in everyday life and social practice rather than confined to formal legal encounters (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Silbey, 2005). Law is encountered not only through formal decisions, but through letters, delays, non-response, and the anticipation of consequences that may or may not materialise, reflecting how legality circulates through ordinary administrative processes (Coutin, 2003; Griffiths, 2014).

Under asylum governance, legal consciousness emerges in conditions where legal categories, entitlements, and timelines remain uncertain and subject to change. Individuals are required to navigate a legal field that is neither fully accessible nor reliably predictable, often relying on intermediaries such as solicitors, charities, or informal networks to interpret its meaning. Research on migration and legality has shown how such mediated engagement with law shapes provisional and contingent orientations toward legal authority (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Menjívar, 2006). In this context, orientations toward law are adaptive and situational, shaped by repeated experiences of deferral, ambiguity, and constraint rather than by stable expectations of resolution.

Within this thesis, legal consciousness therefore provides a lens for examining how asylum seekers make sense of law under conditions of uncertainty, how they anticipate legal consequences in the absence of clear information, and how orientations toward legality are

formed through everyday encounters with administrative processes. This framing underpins the analysis of how law operates as an ordinary yet powerful mode of governance within the asylum system, with implications for wellbeing, agency, and endurance.

1.3.3 Wellbeing as a socially mediated process

Wellbeing is conceptualised in this thesis as a socially mediated and processual condition rather than an individual state or outcome. Drawing explicitly on the multidimensional framework developed by Sumner and Mallett (2013), wellbeing is understood to encompass material, subjective, and relational dimensions that are analytically distinct yet empirically intertwined. These dimensions do not operate independently but are shaped together through legal status, institutional arrangements, and the everyday practices of asylum governance.

Within this framework, material wellbeing refers to the conditions under which basic needs are met, including income, accommodation, food, and access to everyday infrastructures. Subjective wellbeing concerns the affective and experiential domain through which uncertainty, displacement, and dependency are lived and interpreted. Relational wellbeing addresses the conditions under which relationships of care, recognition, belonging, and participation are sustained or undermined. Across the thesis, these dimensions are examined in relation to one another, showing how material deprivation, affective erosion, and relational instability accumulate and interact over time.

This framing allows wellbeing to be analysed as a dynamic process shaped by governance rather than as a fixed attribute of individuals. Following Sumner and Mallett's emphasis on the relational and contextual production of wellbeing, the thesis treats wellbeing as something constituted through social and institutional conditions rather than possessed by individuals.

This conceptualisation provides the structure through which the subsequent chapters examine material, subjective, and relational wellbeing under conditions of asylum governance.

1.3.4 Care as a moral and relational field

Care is analysed in this thesis as a moral and relational field rather than as an inherently benevolent or unproblematic good (Tronto, 1993). It is approached critically, with attention to how care is organised, delivered, and experienced within conditions of legal precarity and institutional constraint. The thesis distinguishes between procedural care, which operates through formalised systems of support and provision, and relational care, which involves recognition, responsiveness, and ethical engagement. These forms of care do not necessarily coincide, and their separation often shapes how support is lived.

Rather than alleviating dependency, care is shown to be structured by power relations that regulate access, deservingness, and compliance (Fassin, 2012). Support can coexist with emotional distance, moral judgement, and expectations of gratitude, producing ambivalent experiences in which assistance is both necessary and constraining. By treating care as a relational field shaped by governance, the thesis examines how care practices simultaneously sustain life and reproduce vulnerability, with direct implications for material, subjective, and relational wellbeing.

1.3.5 Endurance

Endurance is used in this thesis to capture the affective and practical labour involved in sustaining everyday life under conditions of prolonged uncertainty, deprivation, and constraint. It refers to the ongoing effort required to remain intact where resolution is deferred and repair is limited, and where harm accumulates slowly through ordinary administrative processes

(Bourdieu, 2000). Endurance is not treated as a personal attribute or moral quality, but as a condition produced through governance and lived through everyday practice.

The concept is deliberately distinguished from resilience. While participants' practices might be described as resilience within policy or psychological literatures, this thesis conceptualises them instead as endurance in order to avoid framing survival under structural constraint as adaptation, recovery, or growth (Berlant, 2011; Brun, 2015; Mayblin, 2021). Endurance does not imply transformation or transcendence, but names persistence within harm, acknowledging the costs, fatigue, and attritional effects that accompany continued waiting and uncertainty.

By foregrounding endurance, the analysis attends to how people sustain life without resolving the conditions that undermine it. Endurance allows the thesis to recognise survival without celebrating it, and to keep structural harm visible rather than translating it into individual strength. It therefore provides a critical lens through which material, subjective, and relational wellbeing can be examined under conditions where governance produces continuity of constraint rather than closure.

1.3.6 Waiting as a governing condition

Waiting is examined in this thesis as a central mechanism through which asylum governance is enacted, rather than as a neutral administrative interval between procedural stages (Brun, 2015; Griffiths, 2014). It is understood as a governing condition that organises how time is experienced, how futures are imagined, and how everyday life is structured under prolonged uncertainty (Cwerner, 2001; Hage, 2009). Waiting is produced through deferral, institutional silence, and indeterminate timelines, and it operates not as a temporary disruption but as an enduring feature of the asylum process (Griffiths, 2014).

Under these conditions, waiting reshapes material practices such as budgeting, mobility, and access to services, as well as emotional life, generating anxiety, fatigue, and a persistent sense of suspension. It also extends into relational domains, affecting family life, social participation, and trust in institutions. Waiting does not simply delay resolution but accumulates as a form of attritional harm, with effects that compound over time and exceed the moment of legal decision (Canning, 2017; Nixon, 2011).

By conceptualising waiting as a governing condition, the thesis attends to how temporal uncertainty becomes a means of regulation. Waiting operates through the absence of action as much as through intervention, requiring individuals to adapt their conduct, expectations, and emotional life to a future that remains perpetually deferred. This framing situates waiting at the centre of the analysis of legal consciousness and wellbeing, revealing how governance is enacted through time itself rather than solely through formal authority.

1.3.7 Relational time

While waiting captures how asylum governance operates through temporal deferral at the level of individual conduct and everyday orientation, relational time is developed to describe the broader social and relational consequences of this deferral for shared rhythms, coordinated futures, and collective life. Time is treated in this thesis not only as individual waiting but as a form of relational dislocation produced through asylum governance. The concept of relational time is developed to describe how prolonged uncertainty, dispersal, and administrative delay disrupt shared rhythms, synchrony, and temporal participation across family life, community relations, and institutional interaction (Griffiths, 2014; Mayblin, 2017). Time is not simply experienced privately, but is reorganised collectively through asylum governance, shaping how relationships are sustained, deferred, or fractured.

Relational time draws attention to the ways governance intervenes in social life through temporal misalignment. Legal processes that remain unresolved, appointments that are postponed or cancelled, and futures that cannot be planned unsettle the coordination of everyday life with others (Griffiths, 2014). These disruptions affect caregiving roles, family responsibilities, social participation, and the capacity to remain embedded in collective routines. The erosion of shared temporal reference points produces isolation not only through spatial separation, but through asynchronous living.

By conceptualising time as relational, the thesis shows how waiting extends beyond individual endurance to become a social condition that reshapes belonging, care, and participation. Relational time provides a lens for understanding how governance operates through the slow unravelling of shared rhythms, with consequences that accumulate across material conditions, subjective experience, and relational worlds.

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis is organised across eight chapters, each of which contributes to an analytically layered examination of asylum as a governing condition. The introduction situates the study and establishes the conceptual orientation through which legality and wellbeing are brought into relation. The chapters that follow are structured to move from theoretical and methodological grounding to empirical and analytical development, tracing how asylum governance shapes material conditions, subjective life, and relational worlds over time.

Chapter Two develops the intellectual and theoretical foundations of the thesis. Part I reviews three intersecting bodies of scholarship on asylum governance, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing, examining how the institutional conditions of asylum,

engagements with legal authority, and the material, subjective, and relational dimensions of everyday life have been conceptualised. Part II develops the theoretical framework, bringing governmentality, institutional organisation, institutional mediation, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing into relation to conceptualise asylum as a governing condition organised through everyday institutional practices.

Chapter Three sets out the methodological, epistemological, and ethical architecture of the study. It explains how the research design developed iteratively through sustained engagement with the field of asylum governance and details the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted in Farsi and Dari and translated into English. The chapter situates knowledge production within relational encounters structured by power relations shaped by legal precarity, displacement, and institutional inequality, and treats reflexivity and positionality as constitutive conditions of analysis rather than supplementary considerations. It outlines the analytic process through which empirical material was interpreted and organised, and clarifies the ethical commitments, boundaries, and limitations that structure the scope and claims of the study.

Chapter Four develops the thesis's socio-legal contribution by examining how legal consciousness is lived under conditions of volatility and procedural uncertainty. It begins by situating the analysis within the development of the UK asylum policy and legal context, establishing the institutional conditions within which participants encountered and negotiated legal authority. It then revisits established frameworks of legal consciousness and identifies their limitations in contexts where legal rules, categories, and entitlements are continually redefined. In response, the chapter introduces and develops the concept of transitional legal consciousness to capture how asylum seekers are compelled into ongoing recalibration as law

itself remains unstable. Drawing on participants' accounts, it traces how orientations toward law are enacted through bureaucratic routines, delays, mediation, dependency, compliance, resistance, and surveillance, showing how legality operates as an everyday mode of governance rather than a stable source of resolution.

Chapter Five examines material wellbeing as it is organised and governed within the UK asylum system. Focusing on financial support, accommodation, and food, the chapter analyses how subsistence is structured through policies and administrative practices that operate at the margins of adequacy. It shows how welfare provision, housing allocation, and food delivery are characterised by managed scarcity, delay, and limited responsiveness to need, producing conditions of chronic material insecurity. Rather than functioning as neutral supports, these arrangements regulate autonomy, mobility, and dependence, shaping how everyday life can be lived under asylum. The chapter establishes the material terrain through which deprivation is normalised and endured, providing the structural foundation for the subsequent analysis of subjective and relational wellbeing.

Chapter Six examines subjective wellbeing as a fragile and contested interior shaped through displacement, prolonged uncertainty, and everyday encounters with constraint. It analyses how affective life is reorganised through waiting, limited legal awareness, institutional silence, and instability in asylum governance, tracing the cumulative erosion of emotional continuity, autonomy, and self-recognition over time. The chapter attends to how identity and self-perception are reworked through loss, stigma, and misrecognition, while also foregrounding the affective labour through which individuals attempt to remain psychically intact. Rather than presenting recovery or resolution, it conceptualises subjective wellbeing as an ongoing

negotiation, sustained through endurance, selective withdrawal, and small practices of affective scaffolding under conditions where repair is persistently deferred.

Chapter Seven examines relational wellbeing as it is structured, strained, and provisionally sustained under the conditions of UK asylum governance. It traces how bureaucratic encounters generate forms of relational neglect, how voluntary and charitable care operates through moralised asymmetries, and how recognition, dignity, gratitude, and deservingness become sites of relational labour rather than secure entitlements. The chapter explores how accommodation regimes impose proximity without mediation, producing relational exposure, withdrawal, and self-protection, while community and shared ethnic networks offer familiarity without guaranteed safety. It further examines how surveillance and self-monitoring shape everyday interaction, how kinship and caregiving roles are disrupted through dispersal and legal constraint, and how transnational ties are strained by immobility, separation, and prolonged uncertainty. Across these domains, the chapter theorises relational time, showing how the loss of shared rhythms and temporal synchrony erodes participation, care, and belonging, while asylum seekers continue to enact fragile practices of connection within structurally constrained social worlds.

The concluding chapter draws together the empirical and conceptual strands developed across the thesis and consolidates its contribution to sociological understandings of asylum governance. It returns to the relationship between legality and wellbeing, showing how administrative delay, uncertainty, and conditional care accumulate over time, shaping material conditions, subjective life, and relational worlds. Rather than treating harm as episodic or exceptional, the conclusion articulates how it becomes lived, normalised, and endured through

ordinary bureaucratic processes, and reflects on the implications of this analysis for how asylum is understood as a governing condition.

1.5 Final statement

This thesis approaches asylum as a governing condition that extends beyond moments of legal determination to shape how everyday life is organised and lived under prolonged uncertainty. Rather than treating asylum as a discrete legal status or procedural outcome, the analysis examines how legality, time, and care are lived through ordinary administrative practices. By bringing legal consciousness into relation with a multidimensional understanding of wellbeing (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Sumner & Mallett, 2013), the thesis shifts analytical attention away from event-based accounts of legality and outcome-focused accounts of wellbeing, toward the slow and cumulative effects of governance as it unfolds over time.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Asylum governance constitutes the institutional conditions within which legality, wellbeing, and everyday life are experienced and negotiated (Darling, 2014b; Darling, 2011; Gill, 2016; Mayblin, 2017). Rather than being confined to refugee status determination or the administration of immigration law, contemporary asylum is constituted through dispersed institutional arrangements that mediate legal status, temporality, material conditions, and social relationships (Darling, 2014b; Darling, 2011; Foucault, 1991; Gill, 2016; Rose, 1999). These institutional arrangements extend across the ordinary conditions of everyday life, shaping how legal authority, wellbeing, and everyday life are constituted under conditions of asylum governance (Darling, 2014b; Darling, 2011; Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014).

Three closely related conceptual perspectives have shaped contemporary understandings of asylum. Asylum governance directs analytical attention towards the dispersed institutional arrangements through which mobility, dependency, waiting, and everyday bordering are organised (Darling, 2011; Darling, 2014b; Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999). Legal consciousness extends this perspective by examining how legal authority is produced, encountered, and negotiated through routine institutional practices (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Hertogh, 2004), while multidimensional wellbeing follows these governing conditions into the material, subjective, and relational dimensions through which everyday life is experienced and organised (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013).

The chapter is organised into two parts. Part I examines how asylum governance, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing have been conceptualised within the existing literature. Part II establishes the theoretical framework through which governmentality, institutional organisation, institutional mediation, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing are brought into relation, providing the analytical architecture guiding the empirical chapters that follow.

Part I – Literature Review

Asylum governance, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing provide distinct but intersecting bodies of scholarship through which the institutional conditions of asylum, engagements with legal authority, and the material, subjective, and relational dimensions of everyday life have been conceptualised.

2.2 Asylum Governance

Asylum governance constitutes a central conceptual framework through which contemporary asylum systems have been understood. Scholarship has increasingly examined the dispersed institutional arrangements through which mobility, legal status, welfare provision, and access to everyday resources are organised (Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Mayblin, 2017).

Governmentality, waiting, and the hostile environment constitute three interconnected strands of the asylum governance literature (Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014; Mayblin, 2017). Together, these perspectives conceptualise the institutional, temporal, and bordering practices through which legal status, mobility, and everyday life are organised.

2.2.1 Governmentality and Asylum Governance

Governmentality has become a central perspective through which asylum governance has been conceptualised (Darling, 2011; Darling, 2014b; Darling, 2014a; Gill, 2016; Mayblin, 2017). Rather than locating governance within immigration legislation, state authority, or sovereign power alone, governmentality conceptualises power as operating through routine institutional practices, administrative rationalities, and governing techniques that organise everyday life (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999). Administrative practices, welfare institutions, humanitarian organisations, and bureaucratic processes consequently occupy a central position in shaping the conditions through which asylum seekers access resources, encounter institutional authority, and participate in everyday life (Darling, 2011; Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Rose, 1999).

Domopolitics extends this analytical perspective by locating the governance of migration within the political management of home (Walters, 2004). Everyday bordering extends bordering beyond the territorial frontier, conceptualising immigration control as dispersed through the institutional practices of everyday life (Anderson, 2013; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Surveillance operates across these institutional settings through routine practices of visibility, documentation, reporting, and institutional monitoring. Rather than operating solely through direct observation or enforcement, surveillance is embedded within administrative procedures and everyday institutional encounters through which presence, compliance, and eligibility are continually verified (Foucault, 1991; Darling, 2014a; Griffiths, 2014). Visibility consequently becomes a governing condition through which asylum seekers are continually rendered visible to administrative authority, embedding surveillance within the institutional organisation of everyday life.

The dispersal of asylum governance across state and non-state institutions has become central to contemporary accounts of how asylum is governed (Darling, 2011; Darling, 2014a; Griffiths, 2014; Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Mayblin, 2017). Across this scholarship, accommodation, welfare provision, immigration administration, local government, voluntary organisations, and private contractors are situated within interconnected institutional arrangements through which asylum is governed (Darling, 2011; Darling, 2014a; Darling, 2014b; Griffiths, 2014; Gill, 2016; Mayblin, 2017). Rather than operating as discrete policy domains, these arrangements function as administrative practices that organise mobility, dependency, visibility, and access to support (Darling, 2011; Darling, 2014b; Griffiths, 2014; Gill, 2016). The increasing organisation of asylum provision through contractual relationships with private providers introduces a distinct market dimension into these arrangements. Darling (2016a) conceptualises this development through the asylum market, locating privatised asylum provision within neoliberal rationalities of market competition, economic calculation, and profit. Martin and Tazzioli (2023) extend this political-economic analysis by conceptualising privatised asylum accommodation as a site of value extraction, through which the provision of support becomes incorporated within wider commercial and financial relations. Privatisation consequently extends beyond the organisational relocation of provision to encompass the market relations through which asylum support is organised.

Asylum governance has further been situated within longer colonial and racialised relations through which mobility, protection, and belonging are politically organised. Colonial and geopolitical formations have shaped the conditions through which asylum is differentially organised and access to protection determined (Chimni, 1998; Krause, 2021; Mayblin, 2017). Chimni (1998) within the geopolitical transformations surrounding the end of the Cold War, in which people seeking asylum from the Global South were increasingly constructed by Northern

states through suspicion concerning the legitimacy of their claims, their economic motivations, and their entitlement to protection. Mayblin (2017) situates these distinctions within longer imperial and racialised relations through which hierarchies of mobility, belonging, and access to protection continue to be reproduced. Krause (2021) situates the historical formation of refugee protection within colonial relations, locating colonialism within rather than outside its development. Colonial and racialised relations therefore enter asylum governance not only as historical formations but through the differentiated political and institutional conditions through which asylum, mobility, and access to protection are organised (Chimni, 1998; Krause, 2021; Mayblin, 2017).

Deterrence has increasingly been understood as integral to the governing rationalities of asylum systems (Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Mayblin, 2017; Mayblin, 2019; Mayblin, 2021). Restrictive welfare provision, work prohibition, and material deprivation are examined as governing practices through which migration is regulated and deterrence pursued (Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Mayblin, 2017; Mayblin, 2019; Mayblin, 2021). Restrictions upon employment further institutionalise dependency by constraining participation, autonomy, and the capacity to sustain skills while awaiting an asylum decision (Gibney, 2008; Maughan, 2010). Restrictions on the right to work have similarly been situated within deterrent approaches structured around the construction of labour-market access as an economic ‘pull factor’ (Mayblin, 2016). Mayblin (2021) positions purposeful impoverishment within these governing rationalities, illustrating how material deprivation becomes embedded within asylum governance. Mayblin et al. (2020) extend this analysis through the concept of the slow violence of the everyday, whereby cumulative restrictions upon welfare, material resources, and social participation produce enduring forms of harm without relying upon direct coercion. Moral regulation similarly conceptualises welfare through distinctions of deservingness,

dependency, and legitimate protection rather than rights-based entitlement (Anderson, 2013; Fassin, 2012; Mayblin, 2021).

Humanitarianism has increasingly been conceptualised as a dimension of asylum governance (Darling, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Hynes, 2011; Ticktin, 2011). Rather than operating independently of migration control, humanitarianism is understood as embedded within asylum governance, where practices of protection and assistance coexist with practices of regulation and restriction. Fassin (2012) locates humanitarian government within moral distinctions of vulnerability, compassion, and deservingness, positioning access to assistance as contingent upon institutional recognition of legitimate suffering. Ticktin (2011) conceptualises humanitarian protection as inseparable from migration governance, illustrating how humanitarian responses remain entangled with institutional conditions through which precarity is reproduced.

Care constitutes a further dimension of asylum governance (Darling, 2011; Hynes, 2011; Muehlebach, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). Muehlebach (2012) demonstrates how welfare restructuring redistributes responsibility for care from the state towards voluntary organisations, charities, and community networks while leaving the institutional conditions producing inequality fundamentally unchanged. Within asylum contexts, this restructuring is reflected in forms of material, practical, and emotional support increasingly provided through voluntary and charitable organisations, locating care within the everyday provision of asylum support (Darling, 2011; Hynes, 2011; Muehlebach, 2012; Ticktin, 2011).

2.2.2 Waiting and Temporal Governance

Waiting has increasingly been understood as organising the temporal conditions through which asylum seekers experience everyday life (Cwerner, 2001; Cwerner, 2004; Griffiths, 2014; Rotter, 2016a; Tazzioli, 2018). Rather than constituting a neutral interval preceding legal

determination, waiting is conceptualised as a governing condition through which legal status, mobility, and access to rights are organised (Cwerner, 2001; Cwerner, 2004; Griffiths, 2017; Griffiths, 2014; Tazzioli, 2018). Bourdieu (2000) argues that the capacity to make others wait constitutes a distinctive form of power through which institutional authority is exercised.

Temporal governance extends these understandings by locating the organisation of asylum within the management of institutional time (Griffiths, 2017; Tazzioli, 2018). Griffiths (2017) conceptualises asylum as organised through temporal practices that regulate everyday life beyond the formal administration of legal claims, demonstrating how uncertainty is produced through the management of time itself. Tazzioli (2018) similarly conceptualises borders through temporal techniques of acceleration, deceleration, suspension, interruption, and delay that differentially organise migrants' legal trajectories and mobility. Reneman and Stronks (2021) further demonstrate how asylum procedures incorporate forms of temporal discretion through which legal processes may be accelerated, prioritised, or delayed within the procedural boundaries of asylum law.

Waiting has been understood as extending beyond temporal delay into the everyday experience of legal uncertainty (Cwerner, 2001; Cwerner, 2004; Rotter, 2016a). Rather than constituting passive suspension, waiting is understood as an active social condition that continues to organise practical, affective, and relational life (Rotter, 2016a). Everyday life continues under conditions of prolonged legal uncertainty, demonstrating that waiting organises routine social practices while these remain mediated through institutional constraint (Cwerner, 2001; Cwerner, 2004; Rotter, 2016a). Recent scholarship has further examined the relationship between prolonged waiting and declining institutional and interpersonal trust among asylum seekers (Sohlberg et al., 2024). This development extends earlier conceptualisations of waiting

as a governing condition (Cwerner, 2001; Cwerner, 2004; Griffiths, 2014; Griffiths, 2017; Rotter, 2016a), by demonstrating how prolonged legal uncertainty reorganises relationships with institutional authority and interpersonal relations through declining trust (Sohlberg et al., 2024).

Waiting has been examined as a condition through which expectations of productivity, autonomy, and social integration are organised despite unresolved legal status (Vianelli et al., 2022). Vianelli et al. (2022) demonstrate how these expectations continue to structure conduct throughout prolonged periods of waiting, despite the institutional constraints placed upon individuals' capacity to realise them. Waiting is consequently understood not as institutional inactivity but as a governing condition through which future-oriented conduct continues to be organised under prolonged legal uncertainty (Vianelli et al., 2022). Jansson (2024) further develops this relationship between waiting and conduct through the concept of bureaucratically imposed waiting, conceptualising stuckness as a mode of governmentality rather than a condition of temporal suspension alone. Within this formulation, waiting operates productively by organising the conditions under which individuals are required to orient and govern themselves while enduring prolonged uncertainty and precarious conditions (Jansson, 2024).

2.2.3 Hostile Environment and Everyday Bordering

The hostile environment extends understandings of asylum governance by conceptualising immigration control as operating through the institutions and administrative practices that organise everyday life (Anderson, 2013; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Immigration control is no longer conceptualised as confined to immigration enforcement but as dispersed across welfare provision, housing, healthcare, employment, banking, education, and routine administrative practices through which legal status is continually verified and access to rights and public services regulated (Anderson, 2013; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018).

Everyday bordering further develops these understandings by conceptualising immigration control as reproduced through routine institutional encounters across everyday life (Anderson, 2013; Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Public institutions, employers, landlords, healthcare providers, educational institutions, financial organisations, and civil society become incorporated into the routine administration of immigration control, extending bordering beyond specialist immigration authorities (Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). This extension of immigration control beyond specialist immigration authorities has further been conceptualised as the delegation of immigration control to ordinary institutions, illustrating how responsibility for verifying legal status and regulating access to rights and services becomes embedded across everyday institutional practices (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021). Immigration control is consequently understood as embedded within the ordinary administration of everyday life, extending responsibility for bordering across institutions that would not conventionally be understood as part of immigration governance (Anderson, 2013; Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014; Griffiths & Yeo, 2021; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Bureaucratic bordering extends this dispersed understanding of bordering into asylum administration itself, where casework, evidentiary requirements, credibility assessments, and administrative classifications participate in the production of the bordered order (Morrell, 2025).

Deservingness further develops understandings of hostile environment governance by conceptualising access to rights, welfare, and protection through moral distinctions of legitimacy, entitlement, and belonging (Anderson, 2013; Fassin, 2012). Anderson's (2013) concept of the community of value demonstrates how distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate membership organise access to welfare, rights, and social belonging. Immigration governance consequently organises access to rights, welfare, and public services through

distinctions between those recognised as deserving of protection and those whose entitlement remains conditional upon immigration status (Anderson, 2013). Distinctions between the 'genuine refugee' and the 'bogus asylum seeker' are understood as moral distinctions through which access to humanitarian protection, welfare, and public support is differentially organised (Anderson, 2013; Fassin, 2012; Mayblin, 2021). The figure of the 'bogus asylum seeker' constitutes a politically produced category through which suspicion is organised and claims to protection become subject to moral judgements of legitimacy and deservingness (Mayblin, 2019; Sales, 2002).

The cumulative effects of hostile environment governance have further been conceptualised through hyper-precarity (Lewis et al., 2015). Lewis et al. (2015) conceptualise hyper-precarity as a condition through which welfare withdrawal, restricted access to public provision, and continuing legal uncertainty become mutually reinforcing rather than discrete forms of disadvantage. Material insecurity, social exclusion, and dependency are consequently understood as interconnected conditions organised through restricted rights and prolonged legal uncertainty rather than temporary experiences of hardship (Lewis et al., 2015; Mayblin, 2021).

Home has more recently been conceptualised as a governing dimension of hostile environment governance (Burbidge et al., 2025). Burbidge et al. (2025) conceptualise this through a 'domicidal hostile environment'¹, in which the material and affective conditions through which home is constituted are undermined by restrictive immigration, housing, and welfare policies.

¹ 'Domicide' refers to the destruction of home as both a material and affective space of security and belonging, encompassing not only physical loss but also the erosion of the conditions that make dwelling possible (Porteous & Smith, 2001). Within migration scholarship, the concept has been extended to examine how policies and institutional conditions can undermine the capacity to make and sustain home (Burbidge et al., 2025).

Home consequently extends beyond a place of residence to constitute a governing condition through which insecurity, dependency, and exclusion are reproduced. Dispersal, prolonged hotel accommodation, and insecure housing become mechanisms through which hostile environment governance reorganises the conditions of home (Burbidge et al., 2025).

2.3 Legal Consciousness in the Literature

Legal consciousness conceptualises legality as a socially and culturally constituted phenomenon that emerges through the ordinary practices of everyday life. Rather than locating law solely within formal rules, institutions, and legal decision making, this socio-legal tradition conceptualises legality as constituted through everyday practices, social relationships, narratives, and shared understandings of authority (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Merry, 1990; Silbey, 2005). This conceptualisation extends the analytical focus beyond law as a formal institutional order to the social processes through which legality is constituted, interpreted, and reproduced in everyday life.

Everyday life consequently occupies a central position within legal consciousness, constituting the social setting through which legal meanings are produced, interpreted, and culturally reproduced (Merry, 1990). Ewick and Silbey (1998) further conceptualise legality by distinguishing between law as the formal system of state-authorised rules and legality as the everyday meanings, cultural narratives, understandings of authority, and social practices through which legal authority is recognised, interpreted, and enacted. Their formulation of legal consciousness through the orientations before the law, with the law, and against the law conceptualises legality as a patterned social relationship through which legal authority is experienced, negotiated, and reproduced in everyday life. Silbey (2005) subsequently demonstrates how legality becomes embedded within the commonsense routines and ordinary

interactions of social life, through which legal authority comes to be experienced as a taken for granted feature of everyday life.

Giddens' (1984) conceptualisation of the reciprocal relationship between institutional arrangements and everyday practice provides an important sociological account of how legality is continually constituted. From this perspective, legality is conceptualised as an ongoing social accomplishment emerging through the reciprocal relationship between institutional arrangements and everyday practice rather than residing exclusively within formal legal institutions or individual interpretations (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Giddens, 1984; Silbey, 2005). Legal authority consequently emerges through the ordinary practices by which legality is interpreted, accommodated, negotiated, and resisted, illustrating how institutional arrangements are simultaneously sustained, reproduced, and contested through everyday social practice (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Giddens, 1984; Silbey, 2005).

Migration scholarship subsequently extended legal consciousness by conceptualising legality under conditions of mobility, uncertain legal status, and immigration governance (Abrego, 2011; Coutin, 1999; Coutin, 2003; Gleeson, 2010; Kubal, 2015; Menjívar, 2006). Rather than being conceptualised solely as a formal legal category, legal status is increasingly understood as a socially mediated condition organised through immigration systems, welfare institutions, employment regulation, administrative practices, and everyday encounters with state authority (Abrego, 2011; Coutin, 1999; Coutin, 2003; Gleeson, 2010; Kubal, 2015; Menjívar, 2006). Legality consequently extends beyond formal legal processes to encompass the institutional arrangements through which uncertain legal status and everyday life are organised under immigration governance (Abrego, 2011; Coutin, 2003; Kubal, 2015; Menjívar, 2006). More recent scholarship further demonstrates that asylum seekers' understandings of legality are

constituted through dispersed institutional encounters extending across legal representatives, humanitarian organisations, accommodation providers, and immigration administration, illustrating how legal authority is mediated through multiple institutional actors rather than formal legal authorities alone (Graca & Kapageorgiadou, 2025).

Liminal legality constitutes a central conceptual development within migration scholarship on legal consciousness (Menjívar, 2006). Rather than conceptualising legality through fixed distinctions between legal inclusion and exclusion, Menjívar (2006) conceptualises liminal legality as a socially mediated condition situated between these positions, through which temporary legal recognition coexists with continuing insecurity and uncertainty. This conceptualisation extends legal consciousness by illustrating how legality is lived through conditions of provisional recognition, where legal status remains contingent, unstable, and continually subject to institutional regulation. Subsequent developments, particularly the concept of legal precarity, further extend these understandings by conceptualising legal uncertainty as structurally organised through immigration governance, institutional regulation, and differentiated access to rights (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Gleeson, 2010; Kubal, 2015).

Collectively, socio-legal and migration scholarship locates legality within the relationship between institutional arrangements, legal status, and everyday social practice, while demonstrating how this relationship becomes conditioned by uncertainty, liminality, and legal precarity (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Giddens, 1984; Kubal, 2015; Menjívar, 2006; Silbey, 2005). This literature provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how legality is experienced under conditions of asylum governance.

2.4 Wellbeing under Asylum Governance

Multidimensional understandings of wellbeing conceptualise wellbeing as emerging through the interaction between material, subjective, and relational conditions rather than as an individual attribute (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). Rather than conceptualising wellbeing solely through health, happiness, or life satisfaction, wellbeing is understood as constituted through the reciprocal relationship between material conditions, subjective experience, and social relationships (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). Within asylum contexts, wellbeing is organised through the institutional conditions that shape legal status, welfare provision, accommodation, and access to everyday resources (Hynie, 2018; Phillimore, 2011). Material, subjective, and relational wellbeing consequently constitute interconnected dimensions through which everyday life is experienced and organised under conditions of asylum governance (Sumner & Mallett, 2013).

2.4.1 Material Wellbeing under Asylum Governance

Material wellbeing conceptualises the material conditions through which the resources necessary for everyday life become accessible, sufficient, and sustainable (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hynie, 2018; Sumner & Mallett, 2013). Within asylum contexts, material wellbeing extends beyond financial resources to encompass accommodation, food, healthcare, and the wider material conditions through which everyday life is organised (Ager, 2002; Hynie, 2018; Sumner & Mallett, 2013). Material wellbeing is consequently constituted through the legal and institutional organisation of asylum governance, through which access to accommodation, financial support, healthcare, and everyday resources is authorised, restricted, and distributed. Scholarship examining asylum governance demonstrates that welfare provision is mediated not solely through legal entitlement but through institutional judgements of deservingness, dependency, and legitimate protection, positioning material support as contingent upon broader political and moral rationalities rather than universal social rights (Fassin, 2012; Mayblin,

2021). Material deprivation consequently emerges as a material expression of asylum governance, through which legal restrictions upon employment, welfare, accommodation, and access to everyday resources are translated into the ordinary conditions of everyday life (Fassin, 2012; Mayblin, 2021; Mayblin et al., 2020).

Financial support constitutes a central dimension of material wellbeing under asylum governance. Access to financial resources is organised through asylum support systems that operate separately from mainstream welfare provision while simultaneously restricting access to paid employment (Bloch & Schuster, 2002; Hynes, 2011; Morris, 2010). Material deprivation consequently extends beyond the inadequacy of financial support to constitute a condition through which participation in everyday social life becomes materially constrained. Restricted financial support limits access to transport, communication, clothing, education, and other resources necessary for everyday life, illustrating how asylum support systems organise participation in everyday social life through the institutional regulation of material resources (Lessard-Phillips et al., 2021; Mayblin, 2019; Mayblin, 2021; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008; Ramachandran, 2024; Wells et al., 2024).

Accommodation constitutes a central dimension of material wellbeing under asylum governance. Housing is conceptualised not solely as the provision of physical shelter but as the material environment through which safety, stability, privacy, and everyday routines are constituted (Ager & Strang, 2008; Darling, 2011; Darling, 2022; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). Accommodation is consequently understood as an institutional condition through which material wellbeing is organised, positioning housing as integral to the everyday conditions of safety, autonomy, and social participation (Ager & Strang, 2008; Darling, 2011; Darling, 2022; Hynie, 2018; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). Dispersal, contingency accommodation, hotels, and

outsourced housing are consistently conceptualised as institutional conditions characterised by overcrowding, repeated relocation, inadequate housing conditions, and limited control over domestic space, illustrating how accommodation organises the material conditions of everyday life rather than merely providing physical shelter (Brake et al., 2023; Giacco et al., 2018; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021; Spira et al., 2025; Ziersch et al., 2017; Ziersch & Due, 2018).

Food has similarly emerged as a significant dimension of material wellbeing within asylum scholarship. Rather than conceptualising food solely through nutritional adequacy or availability, the literature examines the institutional organisation of food provision under asylum governance (Jones et al., 2022; Lambie-Mumford, 2017; Power & Baxter, 2026). Access to food is mediated through accommodation arrangements that frequently restrict opportunities to choose, purchase, prepare, and consume food according to individual, cultural, or religious preferences. Studies of hotels and contingency accommodation consistently identify poor food quality, limited choice, inadequate nutritional provision, and the inability to cook as central features of everyday life, illustrating how food provision is organised through institutional systems of control rather than individual autonomy (Jones et al., 2022; Lambie-Mumford, 2017; Power & Baxter, 2026). Food consequently extends beyond subsistence to constitute an institutional condition through which everyday autonomy, dignity, and material wellbeing are organised.

Access to healthcare constitutes a further dimension of material wellbeing under asylum governance. Although asylum seekers are formally entitled to NHS care (Home Office, 2026), the literature consistently demonstrates that healthcare access is constituted not through entitlement alone but through the institutional, material, and administrative conditions that shape its practical accessibility (Doctors of the World UK, 2025; Hynie, 2018; Martin & Sayer,

2026; Phillimore, 2011; Tomkow et al., 2020). Geographical dispersal, repeated relocation, poverty, transport costs, language barriers, limited health literacy, administrative uncertainty surrounding eligibility and GP registration, inadequate interpretation, and the practical demands of navigating an unfamiliar healthcare system collectively mediate access to treatment (Balaam et al., 2026; Doctors of the World UK, 2025; Martin & Sayer, 2026; Phillimore, 2011; Tomkow et al., 2020). Healthcare access is therefore conceptualised as an institutional condition organised through the wider infrastructures of asylum governance, in which the ability to obtain healthcare depends upon the interaction between healthcare systems, asylum policies, and the material resources required to navigate them, rather than upon formal legal entitlement alone (Balaam et al., 2026; Doctors of the World UK, 2025; Hynie, 2018; Martin & Sayer, 2026; Phillimore, 2011; Tomkow et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Subjective Wellbeing under Asylum Governance

Subjective wellbeing is understood as the affective dimension through which everyday life is experienced, interpreted, and made meaningful. While dominant psychological approaches frequently conceptualise subjective wellbeing as an individual state of life satisfaction or emotional functioning, such formulations presuppose conditions of stability, autonomy, and self-determination that are fundamentally disrupted under asylum governance (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Diener et al., 1999). A sociological understanding instead conceptualises subjective wellbeing as constituted through the institutional and temporal conditions within which emotional life is experienced and negotiated (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). Within asylum contexts, subjective wellbeing therefore extends beyond psychological functioning to encompass how emotional continuity is sustained and disrupted under conditions of prolonged legal uncertainty (Hynie, 2018; McGregor, 2007; Phillimore, 2011; Sumner & Mallett, 2013). Subjective wellbeing is further conceptualised through affective economies in which fear, hope, uncertainty, and anticipation circulate through

institutional arrangements rather than remaining confined to individual emotional experience (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant, 2011).

Legal uncertainty constitutes a central dimension of subjective wellbeing under asylum governance. Rather than referring to the absence of a legal decision alone, legal uncertainty is conceptualised as a governing condition through which everyday life becomes organised around indeterminate legal status, procedural delay, and uncertain futures (Griffiths, 2014; Rotter, 2016a). The inability to anticipate legal outcomes or establish temporal continuity positions legal processes as integral to the affective organisation of everyday life, where anxiety, fear, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress emerge through prolonged institutional uncertainty (Jannesari et al., 2022; Ottisova et al., 2016; Wells et al., 2024). Prolonged legal uncertainty further disrupts continuity between past, present, and future, producing experiences of temporal stagnation in which everyday life becomes increasingly confined to an extended and indeterminate present (Fuchs, 2013; Griffiths, 2014). Fragmented communication, bureaucratic ambiguity, and limited access to reliable information further mediate these conditions by producing uncertainty, mistrust, and dependency within everyday institutional encounters (Griffiths, 2014; Singer, 2019).

Trauma constitutes a central dimension of subjective wellbeing within asylum scholarship. Earlier scholarship predominantly conceptualised trauma through experiences of persecution, conflict, torture, and forced displacement prior to migration (Caruth, 2016; Van der Kolk, 2015). Subsequent developments increasingly situated trauma within the interaction between pre-migration experiences and post-migration conditions, demonstrating how prolonged uncertainty, insecure legal status, family separation, material deprivation, and restricted autonomy contribute to the persistence of psychological distress (Gerritsen et al., 2004; Li et

al., 2016; Miller & Rasmussen, 2017). This shift has extended understandings of trauma beyond the consequences of earlier experiences towards the institutional conditions through which distress may be sustained or reproduced after arrival, including repeated bureaucratic encounters and continuing legal insecurity, where asylum procedures may themselves become re-traumatising (Kenny et al., 2022; Miller & Rasmussen, 2017; Ottisova et al., 2016; Silove et al., 2017). More recent scholarship develops this institutional understanding through the ‘violence of uncertainty’, locating harm within prolonged exposure to indeterminate legal and administrative conditions rather than within discrete moments of violence alone (Grace et al., 2025). Haggar and Kienzler (2025) similarly conceptualise a ‘politics of exhaustion’ through which repeated waiting, uncertainty, dependency, and bureaucratic demands accumulate over time, progressively wearing down the emotional resources through which everyday life is sustained. Trauma is further conceptualised as an institutional category through which suffering becomes rendered legible within asylum procedures, positioning psychological symptoms and personal narratives as forms of evidence through which credibility, recognition, and protection are negotiated (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; Papadopoulos, 2002; Papadopoulos, 2021).

Emotional regulation constitutes a central dimension of subjective wellbeing under asylum governance. Rather than conceptualising emotional regulation as an individual psychological capacity, it is conceptualised as mediated through the institutional conditions within which emotional life unfolds (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant, 2011; Fuchs, 2013). Prolonged waiting, unstable living conditions, financial insecurity, restricted control over everyday life, and continuing legal uncertainty are conceptualised as cumulative institutional conditions through which chronic stress, emotional fatigue, disrupted sleep, diminished emotional regulation, and affective exhaustion emerge (Kenny et al., 2022; Li et al., 2016; Miller & Rasmussen, 2017; Ottisova et al., 2016; Silove et al., 2017). Institutional expectations regarding the expression of

suffering, vulnerability, gratitude, and emotional composure further organise emotional life by positioning emotional expression within broader regimes of recognition and moral judgement (Ahmed, 2014; Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). Emotional expression consequently becomes organised through contradictory institutional expectations, in which suffering is required to establish credibility while emotional composure remains integral to institutional judgements of legitimacy.

Recognition constitutes a central dimension of subjective wellbeing through which selfhood, emotional continuity, and the capacity for self-expression are sustained and negotiated (Butler, 2004b; Honneth, 1996). Rather than conceptualising recognition solely as interpersonal acknowledgement, recognition is understood as a condition through which individuals experience themselves as intelligible and legitimate within social and institutional life (Butler, 2004b; Honneth, 1996). Within forced migration scholarship, recognition is increasingly conceptualised as mediated through legal status, bureaucratic categorisation, and institutional judgement, illustrating how asylum seekers encounter forms of social invisibility, conditional legitimacy, and institutional misrecognition that can disrupt experiences of selfhood and emotional continuity (Bloch, 2008; Mayblin, 2017; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021; Tyler, 2020). Recognition is consequently mediated through broader moral and political distinctions that differentiate legitimate from illegitimate suffering, shaping whose distress becomes publicly acknowledged, believed, and acted upon (Fassin, 2012). The absence of stable recognition further contributes to experiences of affective displacement, through which legal uncertainty, family separation, linguistic barriers, and institutional estrangement disrupt emotional continuity and self-expression (Ahmed, 2014; Papadopoulos, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2017). Language consequently extends beyond communication alone to constitute a condition of recognition through which voice and self-expression become possible, positioning linguistic

exclusion as a form of structural non-recognition that constrains the capacity to articulate and sustain a recognisable sense of self within institutional encounters (Ahmed, 2014; Butler, 2004b; Papadopoulos, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2017).

Endurance constitutes a central dimension of subjective wellbeing under asylum governance. Rather than referring to recovery or individual resilience, endurance is conceptualised as the ongoing capacity to sustain everyday life under conditions of prolonged uncertainty and institutional constraint (Berlant, 2011; Brun, 2015). Contemporary scholarship conceptualises endurance through the everyday practices by which emotional continuity is sustained despite unresolved legal, temporal, and material conditions, including routine, faith, caregiving, family relationships, volunteering, and ordinary social participation (Jannesari et al., 2022; Papadopoulos, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2017; Wells et al., 2024). Hope consequently extends beyond emotional optimism to constitute an attachment through which orientation towards uncertain and continually deferred futures is sustained (Berlant, 2011). These practices are conceptualised not as evidence that structural constraints have been overcome but as socially and institutionally mediated forms of affective adaptation through which everyday life remains possible under conditions of continuing uncertainty (Brun, 2015; Jannesari et al., 2022; Papadopoulos, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2017; Wells et al., 2024).

Collectively, this body of scholarship conceptualises subjective wellbeing as constituted through the interaction between legal uncertainty, trauma, emotional regulation, recognition, and endurance. Rather than residing solely within individual psychological functioning, subjective wellbeing is understood as mediated through the legal, temporal, and institutional conditions within which emotional life unfolds. Emotional life consequently emerges not as a private psychological state but as a socially and institutionally mediated dimension of

wellbeing through which asylum governance is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant, 2011; Hynie, 2018; McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010).

2.4.3 Relational Wellbeing under Asylum Governance

Relational wellbeing has increasingly been conceptualised as the social dimension through which wellbeing is constituted, sustained, and negotiated. Rather than locating wellbeing solely within individual psychological states or material conditions, relational approaches understand wellbeing as emerging through relationships of recognition, care, trust, reciprocity, and participation that connect individuals to families, communities, institutions, and wider society (Atkinson, 2013; Fleuret & Atkinson, 2007; White, 2010). This perspective challenges individualised understandings of wellbeing by positioning social relationships not as external influences upon wellbeing but as constitutive of the conditions through which wellbeing becomes possible (Atkinson, 2013; White, 2010). Within asylum research, relational wellbeing has therefore been examined through the institutional and social environments that organise inclusion, legal status, welfare provision, and everyday encounters, demonstrating that relationships are fundamentally shaped by wider political and institutional arrangements rather than existing independently of them (Hynie, 2018; Phillimore, 2011). Consequently, relational wellbeing concerns the conditions through which recognition, care, belonging, and meaningful participation become possible under conditions of displacement, highlighting how opportunities to establish and sustain social relationships are mediated through asylum governance rather than being reducible to individual capacities or interpersonal support (Atkinson, 2013; Hynie, 2018; White, 2010).

Recognition constitutes a central dimension of relational wellbeing through which participation, legitimacy, and belonging are organised within social life (Butler, 2004b; Fraser,

2000; Honneth, 1996). Rather than conceptualising recognition solely as interpersonal respect, recognition is understood as the social and institutional condition through which individuals become acknowledged as legitimate participants within shared social life (Fraser, 2000; Honneth, 1996). Within forced migration scholarship, recognition is increasingly conceptualised as mediated through legal status, citizenship, and institutional judgement, illustrating how opportunities for participation and social membership remain conditional upon wider legal and institutional relations (Bloch, 2008; Mayblin, 2017; Tyler, 2020). Recognition consequently extends beyond formal legal status to encompass the conditions through which individuals are positioned as legitimate participants in relation to others, shaping possibilities for reciprocity, membership, and belonging (Butler, 2004b; Fraser, 2000; Honneth, 1996). Institutional uncertainty and conditional legitimacy can therefore constrain opportunities for participation and social belonging, positioning recognition as a relational condition through which membership within shared social life is negotiated (Butler, 2004b; Fraser, 2000; Tyler, 2020).

Care constitutes a central dimension of relational wellbeing through which dependency, interdependence, reciprocity, and support are organised. Rather than conceptualising care as an individual act of compassion or interpersonal goodwill, care is understood as a social and political relation constituted through interdependence, unequal capacities to give and receive care, and wider structures of power (Krause, 2014; Sevenhuijsen & Savage, 1998; Tronto, 1993). Within asylum scholarship, care is increasingly conceptualised through welfare provision, humanitarian organisations, voluntary support, and community networks, illustrating how caring relationships are mediated through the institutional organisation of asylum governance rather than existing independently of it (Darling, 2011; Krause, 2014; Muehlebach, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). Caring relationships are consequently constituted through

asymmetries of authority and dependency, in which access to protection, material assistance, and everyday support remains contingent upon institutional priorities rather than reciprocal social obligation (Ticktin, 2011; Tronto, 1993). These institutional arrangements further organise relationships of dependency in which opportunities for reciprocity, mutuality, and shared responsibility become constrained by the unequal distribution of power and resources (Darling, 2011; Krause, 2014; Tronto, 1993).

Institutions constitute a central dimension of relational wellbeing through which relationships between individuals, organisations, and the state are organised. Rather than functioning solely as providers of services or material resources, institutions are understood as relational environments through which possibilities for trust, recognition, participation, and exclusion are structured (Atkinson, 2013; Kohli et al., 2024; White, 2010). Within asylum scholarship, accommodation providers, welfare agencies, immigration authorities, healthcare services, and voluntary organisations are conceptualised as institutional actors that organise everyday relationships between asylum seekers and the state through routine administrative encounters (Darling, 2011; Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014). Institutional relationships are consequently shaped through practices of response, delay, interpretation, discretion, and bureaucratic silence, through which trust, recognition, participation, and exclusion are organised within everyday institutional life (Darling, 2011; Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014; Lipsky, 1980). Frontline institutional encounters are further conceptualised as organised through competing obligations of organisational accountability and ethical responsiveness, where responsibility for care is frequently displaced through referral practices, subcontracting, and organisational boundaries rather than residing solely with individual practitioners (Darling, 2011; Lipsky, 1980; Tronto, 1993).

Belonging constitutes a central dimension of relational wellbeing through which participation, connection, and social membership are organised (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Rather than referring solely to formal membership within a political community, belonging is conceptualised as the social condition through which individuals experience acceptance, recognition, connection, and participation within everyday life (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Within migration scholarship, belonging is increasingly understood as mediated through legal status, institutional recognition, and opportunities for participation, illustrating how legal uncertainty, spatial exclusion, and insecure immigration status produce fragile and contested experiences of belonging (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Experiences of discrimination, racialisation, and exclusion further constrain opportunities for recognition and participation, demonstrating that belonging is mediated not solely through legal status but through wider social processes of boundary making and social exclusion (Tyler, 2020; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). Belonging consequently emerges as a conditional rather than settled social relationship, remaining contingent upon institutional recognition, legal status, and sustained opportunities for participation (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Contemporary scholarship further demonstrates that belonging depends upon continuity in social relationships and participation over time, illustrating how prolonged legal uncertainty and repeated institutional disruption constrain the conditions through which belonging is established, sustained, and reproduced (Griffiths, 2014; Hynie, 2018).

Integration constitutes a further dimension of relational wellbeing through which participation, reciprocity, and social membership are organised within everyday life (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2011; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). Rather than conceptualising integration as a linear process of adaptation undertaken by migrants alone, contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualises integration as a relational process mediated through reciprocal

social participation and access to the institutions, relationships, and opportunities that organise everyday life (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2011; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). Within asylum contexts, opportunities for integration are mediated through legal status, prolonged uncertainty, and restricted access to employment, education, and sustained opportunities for social participation, illustrating how integration is organised through the institutional conditions of asylum governance rather than individual willingness or capacity to participate (Hynes, 2011; Phillimore, 2011; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). Integration is consequently conceptualised not solely as participation within social life but as a relational condition mediated through institutional expectations of compliance, deservingness, and acceptable conduct, positioning opportunities for participation, belonging, and social membership as contingent upon wider legal, political, and moral arrangements (Darling, 2011; Mayblin, 2017; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021).

Collectively, this body of scholarship conceptualises relational wellbeing as emerging through the institutional, social, and political conditions that organise recognition, care, belonging, participation, and integration. Rather than residing solely within interpersonal relationships, relational wellbeing is understood as mediated through the legal, institutional, and social arrangements that shape opportunities for recognition, reciprocity, and participation under asylum governance (Atkinson, 2013; Fraser, 2000; Hynie, 2018; Tronto, 1993; White, 2010).

Part II – Theoretical Framework

Part II develops the theoretical framework that guides the empirical analysis presented throughout this thesis. It brings governmentality, institutional organisation, institutional mediation, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing into relation to conceptualise asylum as a governing condition organised through everyday institutional practices.

2.5 Governmentality

Governmentality constitutes the principal theoretical framework through which this thesis conceptualises asylum governance. Rather than locating power primarily within sovereign authority or legislation, governmentality conceptualises power as operating through dispersed institutional practices, administrative rationalities, and forms of knowledge through which conduct is organised and everyday life regulated (Foucault, 1991). Within the theoretical framework developed here, its significance lies in conceptualising these practices as productive of the conditions within which particular forms of conduct, subjectivity, and possibility emerge, rather than solely as mechanisms of prohibition or coercion.

Within asylum governance, this productive exercise of power operates through administrative procedures, bureaucratic routines, professional forms of expertise, and institutional classifications through which populations are rendered governable. Bureaucratic governance constitutes a particular modality of this power, as administrative practices participate in organising populations, entitlements, and conditions of belonging rather than implementing predetermined legal rules alone (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999). Bureaucracy consequently extends beyond the implementation of immigration policy to participate in the production of bordering itself. Within the UK asylum system, casework, evidentiary requirements, credibility assessments, administrative categories, and procedural routines constitute forms of bureaucratic bordering through which distinctions of eligibility, credibility, and belonging are institutionally produced (Morrell, 2025). Bureaucratic bordering therefore locates the bordered order within administrative practice itself, as a governmental accomplishment continually constituted through bureaucratic processes rather than residing solely within territorial or legislative boundaries (Morrell, 2025).

Building upon Rose's (1999) extension of governmentality, asylum governance is further conceptualised as operating beyond the state as a singular institutional actor. Government at a distance locates governmental power within fields of administration, expertise, and provision extending beyond direct state administration (Rose, 1999). Within asylum governance, immigration control similarly becomes exteriorised beyond formal immigration administration, enabling state power to operate through actors and practices situated across state and non-state domains (Bhatia, 2020). The analytical significance of governmentality therefore lies not in identifying a fixed institutional location of governing power, but in conceptualising its operation across and beyond the boundaries through which state authority is conventionally located.

2.6 Institutional Organisation of Asylum Governance

Institutional organisation conceptualises the arrangements through which asylum governance is distributed across interconnected sites of administration, provision, and control. Rather than treating institutions as discrete settings in which immigration policy is implemented, it locates accommodation providers, immigration administration, reporting centres, legal representatives, healthcare services, local authorities, private contractors, and voluntary organisations within differentiated relations of authority, provision, and responsibility across state and non-state domains (Darling, 2011; Darling, 2014b; Gill, 2016; Hynes, 2011; Mayblin, 2017; Phillimore, 2011).

The distribution of these functions unsettles a distinction between the state as the location of governmental authority and non-state organisations as external providers of support or services. Immigration control can become exteriorised across actors and institutional domains whose formal functions extend beyond immigration administration, while remaining connected to

wider governmental objectives and constraints (Bhatia, 2020). Outsourcing and delegation further reorganise these institutional relations by locating administrative and provisioning functions within intermediary organisations, including private and voluntary organisations, through which the boundaries between state and non-state responsibility become increasingly porous (Borelli et al., 2023). Institutional dispersion consequently does not entail the disappearance of state power, but its organisation through differentiated relationships of delegation, provision, administration, and responsibility across a wider institutional field (Bhatia, 2020; Borelli et al., 2023).

These institutional arrangements are further constituted through differentiated forms of institutional presence and absence. Borelli et al.'s (2023) concept of ghost bureaucracy captures how governing authority can remain consequential while the state itself becomes difficult to locate or access, particularly where administrative functions are outsourced, procedures become increasingly remote, and intermediary actors occupy the space between individuals and state institutions. Institutional absence therefore does not necessarily signify an absence of governance; it can constitute a particular organisational form through which governing functions remain operative while institutional accessibility and responsibility become dispersed (Borelli et al., 2023). The institutional organisation of asylum is consequently characterised not only by the distribution of functions across multiple organisations, but by uneven configurations of presence, accessibility, and responsibility through which the location of governing authority can become institutionally diffuse.

2.7 Institutional Mediation of Asylum Governance

Institutional mediation locates asylum governance within the everyday institutional relationships through which authority, provision, and regulation are enacted. Formal rules,

categories, and entitlements do not enter everyday life uniformly but are mediated through institutional interpretation, discretion, communication, and practice (Hynes, 2011; Lipsky, 1980; Phillimore, 2011). The conditions through which individuals encounter institutional authority consequently depend not only upon formal rules and procedures, but upon how these are interpreted and enacted within institutional relationships.

Discretion occupies a central position within these relationships. Institutional actors exercise discretion not only through formal decisions but through the actions and inactions through which administrative requirements, access, and support are enacted. Bhatia (2020) locates the production of institutional harm within these everyday practices, showing how actions and inactions become consequential under organisational conditions structured by suspicion, restriction, and cultures of disbelief. Authority is therefore mediated through practices that can enable, restrict, defer, or withhold access rather than through formal decision making alone.

The mediation of institutional authority is shaped by the organisational conditions within which institutional actors operate. Andreetta and Nakueira (2022) demonstrate this through vulnerability, where formal administrative recognition does not necessarily correspond with substantive access to protection, provision, or entitlement. The practical meaning of vulnerability emerges through the interaction between procedural requirements, organisational resources, practical norms, and the interpretive and affective orientations of institutional actors. Institutional recognition and substantive access can therefore remain unevenly connected, with formal categories acquiring practical meaning through the institutional conditions of their enactment (Andreetta & Nakueira, 2022).

Institutional mediation extends to the relationships through which dispersed systems of governance become accessible. Under conditions of institutional remoteness, intermediary actors can mediate access to information, procedures, and institutional claims, giving practical form to relationships between individuals and otherwise difficult-to-access forms of governing authority (Borelli et al., 2023). Intermediation consequently becomes part of the enactment of governance itself, rather than an external form of assistance situated outside it.

2.8 Legal Consciousness as an Analytical Framework

Legal consciousness constitutes the principal socio-legal framework through which this thesis examines how asylum seekers encounter, interpret, and negotiate legal authority within the institutionally mediated conditions of asylum governance. Whereas governmentality conceptualises the operation of dispersed governmental power, and institutional organisation and institutional mediation locate the arrangements and processes through which that power acquires practical form, legal consciousness directs analytical attention towards how legal authority becomes meaningful within everyday life. The framework therefore connects institutionally organised forms of authority with the meanings through which legality is encountered and interpreted, enabling legal authority to be examined not solely through formal legal status or legal decision making but through participants' relationships with legality as these emerge within administrative procedures, institutional encounters, and conditions of continuing legal uncertainty (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Menjívar, 2006; Silbey, 2005).

Ewick and Silbey's (1998) orientations of before the law, with the law, and against the law provide the initial analytical vocabulary through which these relationships with legality are examined. Within this thesis, these orientations are mobilised not as fixed categories through which participants are classified, but as analytical positions through which relationships with

legal authority can be interpreted. This approach retains the patterned character of legal consciousness while locating its expression within the institutional and temporal conditions under which legality is encountered. Migration scholarship on liminal legality and legal precarity further informs this analytical positioning by situating relationships with legal authority within conditions where legal recognition, insecurity, and institutional dependency coexist (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Coutin, 2003; Menjivar, 2006). Legal consciousness is therefore mobilised relationally and contextually, with participants' orientations towards legality examined in relation to the institutional conditions through which legal authority becomes present within everyday life.

The analytical framework developed here consequently brings legal consciousness into relation with the wider theoretical architecture of the thesis. Governmentality conceptualises the operation of governing power; institutional organisation locates its distribution across institutional arrangements; and institutional mediation examines the processes through which these arrangements acquire practical form within everyday institutional relationships. Legal consciousness extends this framework by examining how authority encountered within these conditions becomes interpreted and negotiated as legality. This positioning enables the empirical analysis to examine relationships with legal authority within the prolonged and institutionally mediated conditions of asylum without presupposing that orientations towards legality remain stable across those conditions. The implications of these conditions for legal consciousness, together with their conceptual development through Transitional Legal Consciousness, are developed in Chapter 4.

2.9 Wellbeing as an Analytical Framework

Multidimensional wellbeing constitutes the analytical framework through which this thesis conceptualises how wellbeing is constituted under conditions of asylum governance across material, subjective, and relational dimensions. Rather than conceptualising wellbeing as an individual state or discrete outcome, multidimensional approaches conceptualise wellbeing as a socially produced process constituted through material conditions, subjective experience, and social relationships (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). Wellbeing consequently emerges through the conditions that organise everyday life rather than residing within individuals alone, providing the conceptual basis through which material, subjective, and relational dimensions are examined throughout this thesis.

Governance constitutes a central analytical principle through which multidimensional wellbeing is examined under conditions of asylum governance (Darling, 2011; Foucault, 1991; Mayblin, 2021; Rose, 1999). Asylum governance does not operate separately upon housing, income, emotion, relationships, or belonging (Darling, 2011; Mayblin, 2021). Rather, legal uncertainty, administrative practices, welfare arrangements, accommodation systems, and institutional encounters organise the conditions through which material, subjective, and relational wellbeing are constituted simultaneously (Darling, 2011; Mayblin, 2021). Governance therefore structures the conditions within which wellbeing becomes possible, constrained, and continually renegotiated, illustrating how multiple dimensions of wellbeing are reorganised through asylum governance rather than as discrete aspects of everyday life (Darling, 2011; Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999).

Temporality constitutes a further analytical axis through which the organisation of material, subjective, and relational wellbeing under conditions of asylum governance is conceptualised

(Bourdieu, 2000; Fuchs, 2013; Griffiths, 2014). Rather than being confined to any single dimension of wellbeing, temporality organises the institutional conditions through which everyday life unfolds across material, subjective, and relational domains. Waiting, interruption, repetition, and prolonged legal uncertainty are consequently understood not as discrete experiences but as temporal processes through which asylum governance reorganises the conditions of everyday life simultaneously across multiple dimensions of wellbeing (Bourdieu, 2000; Fuchs, 2013; Griffiths, 2014).

Slow violence operates within this framework as a conceptual lens through which forms of harm that accumulate across time become analytically visible (Mayblin, 2021; Mayblin et al., 2020; Nixon, 2011). Within asylum governance, its significance lies in locating harm not solely in discrete events or interventions but in the cumulative effects of prolonged restriction, impoverishment, dependency, waiting, and uncertainty (Mayblin, 2021; Mayblin et al., 2020). These processes extend across the material, subjective, and relational dimensions of wellbeing, allowing their effects to be examined as interconnected and temporally cumulative rather than as discrete forms of disadvantage.

Cross-dimensionality constitutes a central analytical principle of the multidimensional wellbeing framework (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). Rather than conceptualising material, subjective, and relational wellbeing as discrete domains of experience, multidimensional wellbeing understands these dimensions as analytically distinct yet mutually constitutive, through which the conditions that organise one dimension continually reorganise the others (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). Institutional arrangements therefore reorganise material, subjective, and relational wellbeing

simultaneously, with conditions organised within one dimension extending across and reorganising the others.

Material wellbeing constitutes the analytical dimension through which the material conditions of everyday life under asylum governance are examined (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). It conceptualises accommodation, financial support, food, healthcare, and access to everyday resources as institutional conditions through which subsistence, autonomy, dignity, and participation become possible or constrained. Material wellbeing therefore directs analytical attention towards the institutional organisation of everyday material life rather than the distribution of resources alone (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010).

Subjective wellbeing constitutes the analytical dimension through which the affective organisation of everyday life under asylum governance is examined (McGregor, 2007; Sumner & Mallett, 2013; White, 2010). It conceptualises legal uncertainty, waiting, institutional instability, and constrained living as institutional conditions through which emotional life is organised rather than as individual psychological experiences alone (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant, 2011; Fuchs, 2013). Subjective wellbeing therefore directs analytical attention towards the institutional organisation of fear, uncertainty, hope, temporal disruption, endurance, and emotional adaptation under conditions of asylum governance (Ahmed, 2014; Berlant, 2011; Fuchs, 2013).

Relational wellbeing constitutes the analytical dimension through which the relational organisation of everyday life under asylum governance is examined (Atkinson, 2013; Hynie, 2018; McGregor, 2007; White, 2010). It conceptualises recognition, care, trust, reciprocity, belonging, and participation as relational conditions organised through institutional

arrangements rather than interpersonal relationships alone (Atkinson, 2013; Honneth, 1996; Tronto, 1993; White, 2010). Relational wellbeing therefore directs analytical attention towards the institutional organisation of social relationships through which participation, dependency, recognition, and belonging become possible or constrained under asylum governance (Atkinson, 2013; Hynie, 2018; White, 2010).

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how asylum governance, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing have been conceptualised within existing scholarship and has established the theoretical framework through which they are brought together in this thesis. The literature demonstrates that contemporary asylum extends beyond the determination of legal status to encompass the dispersed institutional organisation of everyday life, where legal authority is encountered through routine institutional practices and wellbeing emerges through the interaction between material conditions, subjective experience, and social relationships.

Although these bodies of scholarship have generated substantial insights into asylum governance, legal consciousness, and wellbeing, they have largely developed along separate analytical trajectories. Comparatively limited attention has been given to how governance, legality, and wellbeing are mutually constituted through the everyday organisation of asylum or to how material, subjective, and relational wellbeing are simultaneously reorganised under conditions of prolonged legal uncertainty.

This chapter has established the conceptual architecture that guides the empirical analyses developed throughout this thesis. Governmentality provides the overarching framework through which asylum governance is conceptualised as a dispersed institutional field, while

institutional organisation and institutional mediation locate how governance is organised and acquires practical form within everyday institutional relationships. Legal consciousness provides the socio-legal framework through which everyday engagements with legal authority are examined, and multidimensional wellbeing provides the analytical framework through which material, subjective, and relational wellbeing is examined under conditions of asylum governance. The following chapters build upon this framework to examine how asylum governance is encountered, negotiated, and experienced through the ordinary conditions of everyday life.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological and epistemological approach adopted in this study and explains why a qualitative design was the most appropriate for examining the lived experience of the UK asylum process. It begins by detailing the research design and the rationale for using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Iranian and Afghan asylum seekers. It then describes the procedures for data collection and analysis, followed by an account of the reflexive and positional commitments that shaped the production of knowledge, and the ethical principles that guided the research. The chapter concludes by outlining the study's limitations.

3.2 Research Design

The research design of this study developed through an iterative rather than prescriptive process. It did not begin from a fixed blueprint but emerged through sustained engagement with the field of asylum governance, whose moral and bureaucratic structures resist linear planning. Designing research in this context required flexibility and responsiveness to conditions of access, precarity, and emotion that continually reshaped what could be known, by whom, and under what circumstances.

This research emerged from a conceptual and empirical gap in existing scholarship. UK asylum studies have commonly examined legal procedure, policy implementation, or third-sector

support (Darling, 2016b; Griffiths, 2014; Hamlin, 2014; Hynes, 2011; Mayblin, 2017; Willey et al., 2022), but far fewer have explored how these structures are lived, felt, and endured by those subject to them (Hoare, 2013; Nellums et al., 2018; Van Eggermont Arwidson et al., 2022). Wellbeing research has likewise tended to privilege psychological or quantitative indicators (Miller & Rasmussen, 2017; Siriwardhana et al., 2014), overlooking the relational and moral dimensions through which law and welfare are experienced (Kohli et al., 2024). This study responds to that gap by investigating how the asylum process obstructs and regulates wellbeing as a social, affective, and political condition within the hostile environment.

At its core, the study sought to understand how the UK's asylum process structures the wellbeing of asylum seekers. It examines how legality, dependency, and recognition are experienced and negotiated within everyday life. This required a methodological architecture capable of grasping meaning, affect, and relation as constitutive dimensions of social reality. A qualitative interpretive design therefore provided the most appropriate framework. It allowed the study to follow participants' own vocabularies of endurance and hope, and to treat knowledge as situated and co-produced.

The design was informed by a relational epistemology, which understands knowledge as emerging through encounter rather than detached observation (Finlay, 2005; Proctor, 2008). Research on asylum was therefore conceived as a process of engagement shaped by uneven relations of authority, communication, and moral responsibility. I approached reflexivity as an ongoing part of the research process. I kept fieldnotes and analytic memos throughout data collection and analysis and discussed emerging interpretations with my supervisors to reflect on how my positionality and the research context shaped the production of knowledge. These practices are discussed further in the sections on data collection and positionality.

The design developed through a continuous exchange between data and theory. Insights from the first interviews helped refine the research questions and focus, while later findings drew attention to new aspects of experience. This ongoing process reflected the uncertainty and change that characterise the asylum system, keeping the research both grounded and adaptable to what emerged in the field.

3.3 Qualitative Research Method

This research consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Iranian and Afghan asylum seekers living in the UK. The focus on Iranian and Afghan participants was analytically motivated; the methodological grounds for this choice are set out in the Sampling Methods section. Using a qualitative approach made it possible to move beyond generalised or policy-level accounts of asylum and to attend instead to the specificity of people's experiences as they navigate dispersal accommodation, legal uncertainty, and prolonged waiting. This approach recognises that social life is organised through meaning, interpretation, and embodied experience rather than through fixed variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It enables access to how individuals understand their own circumstances, how they interpret institutional encounters, and how they negotiate fear, hope, dependency, and disruption in everyday life (Brinkmann, 2012; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Recent methodological work has emphasised the value of qualitative approaches in contexts marked by precarity or complex governance, because they illuminate how people make sense of power and uncertainty in situ (Lim, 2025). Semi-structured interviews, in particular, allow participants to narrate their experiences in their own temporal and emotional terms (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), making visible the affective, relational, and moral dimensions of the subject that would not surface through structured or quantitative designs (Seidman, 2019).

In this context, qualitative methodology therefore provided the necessary depth to understand how legality, wellbeing, and everyday life are lived and interpreted under the conditions of the UK asylum system.

3.4 Rationale for the Use of a Qualitative Research Method

The choice of a qualitative method was not merely practical but epistemological. My approach to this thesis required a way of understanding how legality is felt, how it enters the body through stress and vigilance, how it reshapes the home through dispersal and surveillance, and how it inhabits the imagination through uncertainty, hope, and fear. A qualitative approach enabled attention to these emotional, embodied, and relational registers through which asylum is lived, and wellbeing is continually negotiated under conditions of precarity, monitoring, and moral judgement (Darling, 2014a; Griffiths, 2014). It also recognises that knowledge about asylum is co-constructed, with meanings arising within the relational space of the interview, shaped by trust, cultural familiarity, linguistic proximity, and the asymmetries of vulnerability that structure the asylum process. This relationality is central to asylum research, where disclosure is never neutral and where narratives emerge in tension with institutional fear and expectation (Kohli et al., 2024).

My working experience in the UK's asylum context made me acutely aware that the hostile environment transforms everyday life into a terrain of suspicion, waiting, and conditionality. A qualitative design made it possible to attend to these lived textures, the ways people articulate endurance or despair, the silences that hold contradiction, and the interpretive work through which they situate state neglect, regulation, or care within their everyday lives. The ethical complexity of working with individuals under precarious legal status further required a method that allowed participants to determine pace, depth, and boundaries, offering a flexibility that

institutional encounters rarely permit. Qualitative research was therefore essential for capturing the temporalities of asylum, waiting, suspension, abrupt shift, that cannot be grasped through static or decontextualised methods (Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths, 2014).

This methodological orientation was also necessary because participants did not form discrete demographic or cultural groups whose experiences could be meaningfully compared; instead, their narratives were shaped by structurally produced forms of waiting, dispersal, and precarity characteristic of the UK asylum regime (Gill, 2016; Griffiths, 2014). Despite profound differences in age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and migration histories, participants described strikingly similar patterns of waiting, dispersal, dependency, and legal uncertainty. Qualitative methods enabled me to trace how this convergence was produced not by cultural similarity but by the structural conditions of the asylum regime itself. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to narrate these experiences in their own tempo, revealing the emotional and moral textures of a journey that is systemically homogenised through bureaucratic practice.

Furthermore, my standpoint as a refugee heightened my awareness of why this methodological choice was required. Having entered the UK as a refugee more than a decade ago, I had experienced how the emotional, bureaucratic, and temporal dimensions of asylum exceed what standardised or quantitative approaches can capture. This experience underscored the importance of a qualitative design capable of holding contradiction without collapsing complexity, one that allows participants to speak in their own time and creates space for forms of meaning that are muted or foreclosed within institutional settings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Smith et al., 2022). Qualitative methods were therefore essential for producing knowledge that reflects the lived realities of asylum rather than reproducing the abstractions of policy or administrative categories.

3.5 Criticism of the Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research, while indispensable for this study, is not without its methodological tensions. Its strength, the ability to access the interior, affective, and relational dimensions of lived experience, is also what renders it open to critique for subjectivity, selectivity, and interpretive bias (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Hammersley, 2013; Tracy, 2013). Within the asylum field, where narratives are already politicised and moralised, proximity between researcher and participant can be both a source of insight and a potential distortion. Socio-legal asylum research emphasises this dilemma, as accounts are shaped by fear, strategic silences, and the need to manage how one's story is interpreted by authority figures (Kohli, 2006), making the interpretive work inherently complex. My engagement with asylum systems heightened this tension, as I was intimately familiar with the bureaucratic and moral structures I sought to analyse.

Critics of qualitative research also raise concerns about sample size and generalisability, arguing that small, non-representative samples limit validity (Bryman et al., 2022; Silverman, 2024). Yet the purpose of this study was never to generalise across all asylum experiences but to illuminate the social and moral conditions under which such experiences become thinkable and narratable. Qualitative research aims for analytic rather than statistical generalisation; depth, not breadth, provides insight into how legality, uncertainty, and wellbeing are lived. As Lim (2025) notes, qualitative methods produce situated knowledge rather than universal laws, foregrounding how meaning arises within specific historical, linguistic, and relational contexts.

Finally, qualitative research often requires procedural and temporal flexibility. Interviews in this study had to be adapted around sudden Home Office relocations, emotional distress, or shifting personal circumstances, as well as my own professional schedule within the British

Red Cross, which meant arranging interviews during evenings, weekends, or short windows of availability. This adaptability, central to qualitative practice, aligns with what Hennink et al. (2020) describe as the necessity for qualitative methods to remain responsive to participants' contexts and needs. Flexible research design is widely recognised as essential for producing ethically grounded and contextually valid data (Fossey et al., 2002).

Thus, while qualitative research cannot claim neutrality or replicability, it offers something crucial for sociological work on asylum; it makes visible the social, affective, and moral dynamics through which meaning is produced and contested. In embracing its limitations, this study affirms that situatedness is not a methodological weakness to be corrected but the very condition of ethical and critical understanding.

3.6 Research Participants and Access

Access to participants required navigating both formal institutional structures and the informal relational networks through which asylum seekers live, move, and support one another. These networks were shaped by dispersal policies and the spatial and moral economies that organise asylum life in the UK (Darling, 2011; Hynes, 2011). In accordance with an agreement with the British Red Cross, the research was conducted entirely independently of my professional role. I did not use organisational systems, contacts, or data, and the agreement explicitly prohibited me from involving anyone with whom I had prior professional contact. This ensured a complete separation between employment and research activity.

In total, thirty adult participants took part in the study, comprising twenty-three Iranians and seven Afghans. Eligibility criteria required that participants be Iranian or Afghan nationals, be adults as assessed by the Home Office, be currently within the UK asylum process, be living

in the UK at the time of interview and be able to participate in Farsi or Dari. An overview of participants' demographic characteristics is provided in Table 1. Participants ranged in age from twenty-five to sixty-seven and had been within the asylum process for periods ranging from one month to three and a half years. The sample included eleven women and nineteen men, all residing in England outside the devolved nations.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Duration in asylum system (months)	Iranian (n)	Afghan (n)	Total
1–3	3	0	3
3–6	3	0	3
6–12	4	2	6
12–18	6	2	8
18–24	4	3	7
24–30	2	0	2
30–36	0	0	0
36–42	0	0	0
42–48	1	0	1
Total	23	7	30

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in locations that balanced privacy, safety, and the constraints of asylum accommodation. Most took place in quiet corners of hotel lobbies or communal areas within dispersal accommodation. Hotel-based sites required signing in and showing identification, a routine that underscored the securitised and surveilled nature of these environments. Dispersal houses required no check-in; one interview was conducted in a local

library with a participant living with his brother. In each setting, care was taken to ensure that participants could speak without being overheard.

Reaching participants often involved significant logistical and physical effort. Many accommodations were remote, located on the outskirts of towns with poor public transport links. Some required long walks from the nearest bus stop; others required taxis to return safely after dark. Appointment times frequently changed due to participants' shifting schedules, Home Office interviews, GP appointments, or solicitor meetings, and rescheduling required persistence and flexibility. These movements across dispersed geographies and unpredictable routines became part of the research itself, revealing how asylum life is organised through spatial isolation and temporal disruption.

Participants received detailed information sheets in Farsi and English and provided written or, where necessary, verbal consent prior to participation. For one non-literate participant, consent was obtained orally in accordance with University of Essex ethics procedures. All participants were informed that the study was entirely independent of any organisation and that participation or refusal would have no bearing on their access to services or support.

Access, therefore, was not only logistical but sociological. Each encounter required navigating the bureaucratic geography of dispersal and the everyday uncertainty it produced. The practical difficulties of travel, scheduling, and communication mirrored the instability structuring participants' daily lives, transforming access itself into a site of empirical and conceptual insight.

3.7 Sampling Methods

This research draws on in-depth interviews with asylum seekers from Iranian and Afghan backgrounds living in the UK. The focus on these groups was analytically motivated rather than demographically representative. Iranian and Afghan nationals have, in recent years, ranked among the top three nationalities claiming asylum in the UK (Home Office, 2025b), and have frequently been subject to prolonged decision-making, repeated policy changes, and fluctuating eligibility conditions. As such, their experiences offered a particularly concentrated lens through which to examine how legal volatility is encountered, interpreted, and endured in everyday life.

The selection of this sample was therefore guided by the research questions rather than by claims of generalisability. The study does not seek to represent the experiences of all asylum seekers, nor to compare national groups. Instead, it prioritises depth of engagement with a population for whom legal uncertainty, administrative reversal, and extended waiting were structurally salient features of their asylum trajectories. This focus enabled close analysis of how instability operates as a governing condition and how individuals adapt to shifting legal terrains over time.

Practical and ethical considerations also shaped the sampling strategy. Conducting interviews primarily in participants' first language reduced reliance on third-party interpretation and minimised the risk of distortion in accounts of legal experience, affect, and decision-making. This facilitated sustained, detailed interviews and supported the study's commitment to capturing participants' narratives with precision and care. Taken together, these considerations situate the sample as methodologically coherent, analytically focused, and appropriate to the study's conceptual aims.

At the same time, this sampling decision carries methodological limitations. By focusing on Iranian and Afghan participants, the study narrows its cultural and linguistic range, and does not capture experiences shaped by other national, linguistic, or diasporic contexts within the UK asylum system. While this concentration enabled depth and interpretive coherence, it may also limit the extent to which the findings reflect the full diversity of experiences across the wider asylum population. Shared language and partial cultural familiarity may have facilitated trust and narrative detail, but they also carry the risk of assumed understanding or thematic convergence. The findings should therefore be understood as analytically situated within this specific national and linguistic frame.

Recruiting participants for this study required a sampling strategy that was sensitive to the realities of asylum governance, where people are dispersed across multiple accommodation sites, frequently relocated without notice, and often cautious about engaging with unfamiliar actors. I therefore used a combined purposive and snowball sampling approach, not as a procedural choice but as an ethical and practical necessity. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who met the study's criteria, and snowball sampling complemented this by generating further participants through trust-mediated referrals. This dual strategy is widely recommended for populations who are structurally hard to reach, geographically mobile, or wary of institutional engagement (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Noy, 2008).

Purposive sampling involved colleagues in the British Red Cross who, when speaking with the asylum seekers they were already supporting, informed them that a university researcher was looking for participants. They did not disclose my professional role within the organisation, nor did they present the research as connected to the British Red Cross or linked to any form of service provision. Their involvement was limited to asking whether the individual wished

to receive my contact details. If the person agreed, they opted in by taking my contact information, and all further contact was initiated independently by the participant.

Snowball sampling developed organically throughout the fieldwork. After their interviews, several participants asked whether I wished to speak with someone they knew, another resident in their hotel, a friend, or an acquaintance with similar experiences, and, with that person's consent, passed on my dedicated research number so they could contact me directly. Additional referrals came from volunteers within my personal networks who supported asylum seekers in informal, non-institutional ways and shared my details only when individuals expressed interest. A further recruitment route emerged through a nationwide WhatsApp group for Farsi-speaking members of a faith community.

Combining these approaches also ensured access to people who had no contact with the British Red Cross or any other third-sector organisation, reaching individuals who were otherwise entirely outside institutional visibility.

Once participants reached out, I arranged interviews at times that fitted around both their circumstances and my own work schedule. Because I was working remotely in my professional role during the fieldwork period, interviews were conducted during evenings, weekends, or annual leave to maintain a clear distinction between research and organisational duties. This flexible approach aligns with qualitative methodological guidance emphasising responsiveness to participants' changing contexts rather than rigid procedural sequencing (Hennink et al., 2020).

The composition of the Afghan sample required particular clarification. My initial intention was to compare Iranian participants, who typically arrive in the UK independently and lodge an asylum claim on arrival or shortly thereafter, with Afghan participants, many of whom entered through state-managed pathways such as the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) or the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). However, it became apparent during fieldwork that Afghans arriving via these schemes were granted refugee status rapidly and therefore did not experience the asylum process examined here. As a result, inclusion of this group would not have aligned with the research aims. The seven Afghan participants included in this study were therefore those who had also travelled independently, outside any formal resettlement corridor, and who were navigating the same prolonged uncertainty, dispersal, and bureaucratic precarity as the Iranian participants.

Individuals were excluded if they were children or undergoing age-dispute procedures; if they had already been granted refugee status; if they were unable to participate in Farsi or Dari despite being from Iran or Afghanistan; or if they had any prior contact with me through my role in the British Red Cross or personal life.

3.8 Data Collection

Data collection unfolded as a sustained process of encounter, structured by ethical protocol yet continually reshaped by the unpredictability of asylum life. Between October 2023 and January 2024, I conducted twenty-seven interviews, followed by three further interviews between April and May 2024 to explore the early-stage experiences of newly arrived asylum seekers.

Before each interview, I initiated a brief explanatory exchange to answer questions about the study, clarify confidentiality, and check that participation felt safe. Many participants carried

anxiety about institutional visibility, and these preliminary conversations were essential for establishing the minimal relational security required to speak about experiences shaped by fear, dispersal, and legal uncertainty.

Regarding interview structure, I entered each conversation with a set of core questions informed by the research aims, but I did not present these to participants. Instead, after confirming consent and clarifying confidentiality, I explained simply that I was interested in hearing about their experiences of the asylum process in the UK. I then invited them to begin wherever they wished. Many started with their arrival in the UK; others began with their journey, an earlier memory, or a current difficulty in dispersal accommodation. I allowed accounts to unfold in their own order and tempo, intervening only to ask for clarification, explore something they raised, or follow up on an emotional thread. Once participants finished narrating their experience, I returned to my question guide to cover any areas that had not naturally emerged. If anything remained unclear, I asked brief follow-up questions at the end.

Most interviews lasted around one hour, though several extended to ninety minutes or longer when pauses, silence, or tears required time. I treated these interruptions not as obstacles but as part of the empirical record, recognising pauses, silence, and emotional distress as meaningful elements of how experiences were narrated under conditions of precarity. When distress surfaced, I paused the interview, reminded participants that they could take a break, continue at their own pace, or stop altogether, and only resumed if they explicitly wished to do so. Emotional safety remained central throughout. I also made sure that participants knew where to access support after the interview.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated by me from Farsi and Dari into English. I kept translator's notes documenting pauses, hesitations, and affective inflections, recognising these as part of the data rather than incidental features of speech. Each transcript therefore embodied both the participant's narrative and my interpretive involvement in its production. All participants' names were anonymised at transcription, and pseudonyms are used in later chapters to preserve confidentiality while retaining individuality.

I wrote brief fieldnotes during interviews and expanded them immediately afterwards. During conversations, I made brief notations about non-verbal cues or changes in tone; afterwards, I expanded these into detailed reflections on atmosphere, setting, and interactional dynamics. I documented the sensory and material contexts in which participants lived, footsteps echoing through hotel corridors, the smell of reheated food from sealed communal kitchens, the absence of private space, and the monotony of routines shaped by dispersal accommodation.

I also wrote short analytical memos after each interview, noting what facilitated or hindered communication, how particular questions landed, and how environmental or emotional conditions shaped the interaction. These memos formed an audit trail linking data collection to later interpretation. Although emotional responses inevitably surfaced, I recorded them not as personal reflection but as part of the methodological record, clarifying the affective and practical conditions under which knowledge was being produced.

3.9 Data Analysis

The analysis unfolded as an iterative and reflexive process that developed alongside data collection, translation, and the conceptual refinement of the thesis. Although I used NVivo to organise and retrieve material, the interpretive work remained grounded in repeated close

engagement with transcripts, fieldnotes, and the emotional and spatial contexts in which narratives were produced. Following Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance on reflexive thematic analysis and Hennink et al.'s (2020) recommendations on structured qualitative analysis, I adopted a staged analytic approach in which inductive reflexive thematic analysis allowed themes to emerge from participants' accounts, and a subsequent framework analysis organised these themes through conceptual models relevant to legality and wellbeing.

At the outset, I expected that differences in background or migration trajectories might produce distinct narratives among participants. However, as the interviews unfolded, it became increasingly clear that these anticipated distinctions, whether based on nationality, gender, legal stage, age, or education, were overshadowed by the shared structural conditions of the asylum system. Long before formal coding began, participants' accounts consistently returned to the same core experiences. This early realisation redirected the analysis away from comparing Iranian and Afghan participants and toward examining the institutional logics of asylum that shaped experience across individual differences.

The first phase of analysis involved open inductive coding of all thirty interviews. I read each transcript line by line and generated descriptive codes reflecting emerging themes, emotions, and social dynamics. Early codes centred on waiting, fear, exhaustion, dispersal, isolation, bureaucracy, frustration, hope, and gratitude. Fieldnotes were also imported into NVivo and coded for spatial and emotional content, providing contextual grounding for understanding how confinement, noise, and lack of privacy shaped participants' experiences.

As coding developed, I organised the material through two conceptual frameworks as analytic heuristics rather than settled theoretical commitments. The first drew on Ewick and Silbey's

(1998) tripartite typology of acting before, with, and against the law. This served as an initial heuristic for exploring how participants oriented themselves toward legality. Yet it soon became clear that the typology could not capture the fluidity of asylum seekers' experiences. The limitations of this typology led me to develop the concept of transitional Legal Consciousness, which better captured the oscillatory and contingent orientations to legality produced by the volatility of the asylum system.

The second analytical framework I used was Sumner and Mallett's (2013) tripartite model of wellbeing, material, subjective, and relational, which helped me to structure and refine the growing code system. This framework enabled me to trace how the asylum system permeated bodily conditions, emotional life, and social relations without imposing rigid boundaries. It also made visible how these wellbeing dimensions intersected rather than stood apart. For instance, waiting appeared materially as deprivation, subjectively as temporal suspension, and relationally as enforced isolation.

In the next analytic stage, I refined and expanded sub-codes within each wellbeing dimension, allowing empirical material to guide theoretical development. Multi-coding, assigning the same extract to multiple themes, was used deliberately as a methodological principle to reflect the interdependence of wellbeing domains. During writing, I revisited overlapping extracts to identify their dominant analytic function in each chapter. A narrative about food deprivation, for example, illustrated material hardship in one context and moral disregard in another.

Fieldnotes remained integral throughout the analysis. They documented the atmospheres and material conditions of dispersal accommodation, the affective charge of long-term confinement, and the interactional dynamics of the interviews. These observations offered

contextual cues such as tone, pacing, setting, and silence that informed interpretation of emotional intensity and narrative structure.

Analytic reflexivity shaped the interpretive process. Following Finlay (2005) and Braun and Clarke (2022), I treated interpretation as inseparable from my linguistic and cultural proximity to participants. I documented moments where my familiarity with Farsi idioms, emotional registers, or bureaucratic contexts might influence how I understood and coded particular narratives. These notes acted as methodological safeguards, ensuring that emerging themes remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than in my own assumptions or resonances. The analytic process also involved recognising my own emotional responses to the material. Listening repeatedly to accounts of fear, uncertainty, and institutional neglect sometimes generated a tension between my role as a researcher documenting experience and my professional inclination to intervene or offer assistance. Rather than suppressing these reactions, I recorded them in analytic memos and treated them as part of the reflexive process, noting where feelings of urgency, frustration, or empathy might shape interpretation. This reflexive attention helped maintain analytical clarity while acknowledging the ethical weight of working with narratives of precarity and distress.

The analysis also remained responsive to the shifting policy landscape that shaped participants' everyday realities. Throughout 2023–2024, I monitored changes to asylum questionnaires, backlog strategies, and dispersal arrangements, integrating these developments where they illuminated emerging patterns in the data. During my fieldwork, the asylum system itself was undergoing significant change, which intensified the uncertainty participants described and the relational dynamics of waiting and comparison. By mid-2024, the total number of people in the asylum system exceeded 220,000, with more than 90,000 still awaiting an initial decision

(Home Office, 2025b). At the same time, the introduction of the Streamlined Asylum Processing policy in February 2023 replaced substantive interviews with written questionnaires for certain nationalities (Home Office, 2024d). In practice, this created further confusion and inconsistency. Some participants had not heard about the new process; others were unsure whether they would be called for an interview or sent a questionnaire, or whether either route carried an advantage. Several compared themselves with peers who had arrived later yet already received interview dates or status decisions. Rumours about potential legal changes, including family reunion provisions, circulated through informal networks and church groups. These shifting procedural conditions formed part of the lived context of the research and deepened the sense of instability and inequality that shaped participants' legal consciousness and everyday wellbeing. This responsiveness aligns with contemporary qualitative guidance emphasising flexible and adaptive research approaches in complex and changing contexts (Ty Miller & Thai Vu, 2021).

The final stage involved synthesising the coded material into a coherent interpretive structure. Insights from the legal consciousness analysis shaped the organisation of the legal chapter, while Sumner and Mallett's (2013) framework guided the structure of the subsequent wellbeing chapters and illuminated how legality, precarity, and wellbeing were interconnected.

3.10 Positionality and Reflexive Practice

Reflexivity is a foundational principle in qualitative research. It involves a continuous process of examining how the researcher's assumptions, values, social identities, and experiences shape the production and interpretation of knowledge (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2005). Rather than assuming that research can ever be fully neutral, reflexivity recognises that researchers bring particular perspectives to the field, and that these perspectives influence how relationships are

formed, how data are generated, and how meaning is constructed (England, 1994; Pillow, 2003).

Positionality refers to the constellation of social positions, such as nationality, migration background, gender, professional role, and linguistic identity, that situate the researcher in relation to participants and to the broader structures being studied (Holmes, 2020). These positions create both proximity and distance. In some contexts, shared experiences or identities may facilitate trust; in others, they may intensify power imbalances or shape what participants feel able to disclose. Feminist and critical scholars emphasise that making these dynamics explicit is essential to address power relations and the researcher's influence on knowledge production (Berger, 2015; England, 1994).

In asylum research, where participants navigate legal precarity, surveillance, and structural vulnerability, reflexivity and positionality are not optional methodological considerations but essential conditions for ethical and credible knowledge production (Moralli, 2024). Understanding how the researcher is positioned, socially, institutionally, and emotionally, is central to interpreting narratives produced within unequal conditions of power.

In what follows, I outline the multiple positionalities that shaped this research, including my standpoint as a refugee, an Iranian woman, a refugee support caseworker, and a researcher who was affectively engaged in the field. I begin by situating these identities within the broader insider–outsider and multi-positionality debates that structure this study. I then examine each positionality in detail, tracing how it influenced access, interpretation, and relational dynamics, before turning to the ethical and relational dimensions of my role within the field.

3.10.1 Insider/Outsider Dilemma and Multi-positional Reflexivity

The classic distinction between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ has long shaped qualitative debates about access, bias, and authority (Merton, 1972). More recent scholarship, however, emphasises that this binary is overly simplistic. Researchers move through fluid, situational, and relational positions rather than occupying fixed categories (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Holmes, 2020). This has led to the concept of the ‘in-between’ or ‘partial insider’, where researchers share some aspects of identity or experience with participants while differing markedly in others (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Kerstetter, 2012).

In migration and displacement research, these positional shifts are not theoretical abstractions but lived dynamics. Researchers may share histories of movement, loss, or minoritisation with participants, while simultaneously occupying positions of institutional security, legal stability, or academic authority (Mullings, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 2011). This proximity can deepen interpretive understanding, facilitating trust and cultural resonance, yet it can also intensify ethical and epistemic tension, raising questions about over-identification, selective empathy, or the risk of assuming similarity where structural and temporal conditions diverge.

In this study, I occupied a consistently multi-positional stance rather than a neatly defined insider or outsider role. I moved between positions as a refugee, an Iranian woman, a researcher, a professional familiar with asylum support structures, a bilingual Farsi/Dari speaker, and a listener who shared certain forms of migratory vulnerability while also holding secure status and academic authority. These intersecting identities shaped how participants perceived me and what they felt able to share. The methodological task was not to stabilise these roles into a single identity but to remain reflexively attentive to how they shifted and

what each position made visible or obscured, as discussed in contemporary work on multi-positional reflexivity (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Holmes, 2020).

Linguistic and experiential proximity positioned me, at times, as an insider. Speaking Farsi and Dari and sharing experiences of moving to the UK created an immediate ground of recognition. Opening questions about where I was from or how long I had lived in the UK functioned as acts of mutual recognition through which legitimacy and trust were negotiated (Berkovic et al., 2020; Chavez, 2015; Sari, 2025). These dynamics were unique to this positional frame and not reducible to language competence or cultural familiarity alone.

Yet positionality also shifted. Even when participants and I shared language and aspects of biography, my secure status, academic affiliation, and role in documenting their narratives positioned me simultaneously as an outsider. This dual positioning is widely noted in contemporary work on multi-positional research within marginalised communities (Berger, 2015; Holmes, 2020). Outsiderhood in this context was not fixed but emerged through the structure of the research encounter itself, particularly through my control over the framing, pacing, and interpretation of the interview.

Rather than moving between two fixed poles, my positionality operated across multiple, sometimes conflicting, coordinates (Holmes, 2020). I was ‘one of us’ through shared migratory history and cultural knowledge, and ‘not one of us’ through legal stability, institutional affiliation, and the power to interpret and publish participants’ words. This layered positioning produced a form of reflexive mobility, the ongoing movement between closeness and distance, required to interpret participants’ accounts without collapsing their experiences into my own or into institutional narratives (Finlay, 2005).

Knowledge in this study emerged from working reflexively across these positions. Insider lenses enabled recognition of shifts in tone, humour, and reserve; outsider lenses allowed me to situate these expressions within broader structures of bureaucratic power, waiting, and dependency (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018; Fassin, 2012; Griffiths, 2014). The insider–outsider dilemma was therefore not a problem to be resolved but a condition to be inhabited. It kept questions of representation, power, and accountability at the centre of the research and underscored that empathy is situated and that neutrality is neither possible nor desirable.

These shifting insider–outsider positions were not abstract methodological concerns but were lived and negotiated through the specific identities I carried into the field. Each dimension of my positionality, including my refugee background, my gendered and racialised identity as an Iranian woman, my professional role within the humanitarian sector, my bilingualism, and my secure legal status, activated different relational dynamics across encounters. In what follows, I examine these positionalities in turn, tracing how each shaped access, trust, disclosure, and interpretation, and how they intersected to produce the reflexive, multi-layered standpoint from which this research was conducted.

3.10.2 Refugee Positionality

My first positionality in this research is shaped by my own history of refugee migration, a background that continues to inform how I encounter and interpret the asylum system. I entered the UK asylum system more than a decade ago, and although the context at that time was markedly different, the experience has continued to shape how I understand displacement, vulnerability, and the long work of rebuilding a life. When I went through the process, asylum claims were typically decided within months, and although the system was far from easy, it was considerably faster and more stable than it is today. People in asylum accommodation received buffet-style meals and a daily financial allowance of around £5. My own

circumstances meant that I did not have to rely on asylum support, but I lived alongside those who did, and I witnessed a system that, while bureaucratic, was not marked by the prolonged immobility or extreme uncertainty that characterises the contemporary asylum process.

Being a refugee myself meant that I could recognise the emotional and existential contours of participants' stories, the dislocation, the work of rebuilding a life, and the slow renegotiation of identity after rupture. Even though I arrived with fluent English and had previously lived in the United States and Malaysia, it still took me years to understand the cultural and institutional landscape of the UK. I did not find British society particularly easy to integrate into, and it took considerable time to find work aligned with my qualifications and expertise. There were also practical barriers that confirmed my outsider status in daily life. I could not purchase a SIM card on a contract basis, rent a property, or access basic services because I lacked a three-year residential history or any credit record in the UK. Rebuilding a sense of self that felt whole, rather than fractured by displacement, was a slow process. This was the case despite having housing, financial independence, and a four-month asylum determination period, and despite not being retraumatised by the system itself. Even with access to mental health support, the trauma of the past continued to surface.

In contrast, most of the participants in this study had been in the asylum process for more than a year, lived in Home Office accommodation, and were unable to support themselves financially. Those placed in hotel accommodation received meals on a no-choice basis and a weekly allowance of only £9, while those in dispersal accommodation received £49 per person weekly to cover all living expenses. Many did not speak English and struggled to understand the systems around them. They were navigating an asylum environment characterised by constant policy changes, uncertainty about timelines, and severe restrictions on autonomy.

Several were raising children while living in hotel rooms or dispersal sites with minimal control over their daily lives.

My own experience as a refugee therefore shaped how I listened and what I was able to recognise in participants' accounts. It also made visible the extent to which the asylum system has deteriorated over the past decade. The contrasts between my experience and theirs were stark and revealing, sharpening my awareness of the intensified hardship and prolonged uncertainty embedded in the current asylum regime.

At the same time, this shared status required active reflexivity to ensure that moments of identification did not lead me to conflate my past with their present. Similarities in loss, cultural adjustment, and identity rupture did not erase the significant differences in context, policy landscape, and severity of conditions. I had to remain attentive to how my own history might shape interpretation, empathy, or emotional response, while ensuring that each account was approached on its own terms and grounded in the specificity of participants' contemporary circumstances (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2005).

3.10.3 Iranian Cultural–Linguistic Identity

My positionality as an Iranian shaped the research encounter in ways that extended beyond shared language. It provided a cultural ground through which participants could speak without fear of being misunderstood or culturally misread. Iranian participants often expressed relief at being able to use idioms, metaphors, and emotional registers specific to our shared cultural world. They did not need to translate the moral weight of family expectations, the social meaning of shame or dignity, or the subtle differences between regional ways of speaking. This cultural proximity helped establish rapport and reduced the emotional labour normally required

when explaining oneself across cultural boundaries (De Andrade, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Temple & Young, 2004).

This sense of recognition extended to several Afghan participants as well. Many of them told me that it was a relief to ‘finally speak to someone in my own language’. Others commented that, during their journey to the UK, while living in Iran, and also after arrival in the UK, they had often formed friendships with Iranian people and felt that our cultural worlds were familiar and deeply intertwined. They often described Iranian and Afghan cultures as closely aligned and expressed confidence that I would understand what they were describing.

Participants sometimes asked how long I had lived in the UK, how I had experienced ‘British culture’, or what it felt like to navigate life here as an Iranian woman. One participant, while walking me to the bus station after our interview, asked why I did not own a car, drawing on a shared cultural logic in which driving and mobility signal stability and successful settlement. I explained that I had never learned to drive, which surprised her and led to further conversation about adapting to life in the UK. These small exchanges became part of the relational fabric of the interview.

At the same time, this cultural closeness required careful reflexivity. Familiarity can easily produce an illusion of sameness, leading me to assume greater similarity between my experience and theirs than truly existed. Being Iranian did not mean that my own trajectory, shaped by different political conditions, timelines, and opportunities, aligned with theirs. I remained attentive to the possibility that shared cultural scripts might shape how I interpreted their narratives or how they presented their stories to me. My task was to draw on cultural affinity where it supported trust and understanding, while ensuring that it did not become an

unexamined lens through which I read their experiences (Chavez, 2015; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Holmes, 2020).

3.10.4 Professional Positionality

My ongoing work in the asylum support sector formed another dimension of my positionality. I was already closely familiar with the institutional structures that shape asylum life, including eligibility thresholds, referral pathways, safeguarding procedures, accommodation contracts, and the gradual erosion of welfare entitlements. The shift from hearing these issues through casework to witnessing them directly sharpened my understanding of how policy decisions materialise in the smallest textures of daily life.

This professional familiarity also shaped how some participants related to me. Even though I made clear that the research was independent from any organisation, a few participants oriented to me as a potential helper and asked about legal aid, asylum timeframes, or access to basic support. These moments exposed the moral economy of the field, where the figure of the listener is always potentially a conduit to assistance (Fassin, 2012).

In recruitment, participants were initially introduced to the study as a university research project, and my professional role within the British Red Cross was not disclosed during recruitment. During interviews, however, some participants inferred from my questions or familiarity with asylum procedures that I possessed knowledge of the asylum support system. As a result, a number of participants occasionally asked practical questions about waiting times, policies, or organisations that might provide assistance. These questions typically emerged either toward the end of the interview or informally after the recording had stopped. In a small number of cases, participants also became aware through conversation that I worked within the refugee support sector. When such moments arose, I clarified the boundaries of the research

relationship and explained that I was participating in the interview solely in my capacity as a doctoral researcher and could not intervene in individual cases. These interactions were managed carefully to maintain the independence of the research while acknowledging the practical realities of conducting fieldwork in a community where professional knowledge is often visible.

Navigating these expectations required continual ethical calibration. This meant recognising the hope attached to my presence, being transparent about the limits of my role, and protecting the independence of the research relationship while responding with empathy (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998).

Being professionally embedded in the asylum support sector required deliberate ethical and academic positioning. I ensured that my presence did not reproduce the authority or expectation associated with casework roles, and that I was explicit about what I could and could not provide, including refraining from case advice and signposting instead to appropriate services where needed (Hugman et al., 2011; Pittaway et al., 2010). Throughout the research, I positioned myself as someone who could recognise institutional forces without speaking from the position of the institution.

3.10.5 Researcher Positionality

My primary responsibility in this role was to maintain analytic clarity and ensure that participants' narratives led the development of themes rather than allowing theoretical assumptions or personal expectations to predetermine interpretation. Recent qualitative scholarship emphasises that reflexive thematic analysis requires analytic decisions to remain grounded in the data rather than being driven by the researcher's prior conceptual commitments (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry et al., 2017). To uphold this, I engaged repeatedly with

transcripts, moving back and forth between participants' words and the emerging conceptual frameworks, and adjusting analytic direction whenever early assumptions risked narrowing the field of meaning. Reflexivity operated as an ongoing discipline rather than a discrete stage. I kept analytic memos to mark moments when my interpretations needed to be re-examined, when a formulation seemed overly speculative, or when I needed to return to the data to check the grounding of a theme (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2005).

Being a researcher also meant occupying a position of epistemic authority, deciding which parts of a narrative were foregrounded, how they were contextualised, and how lived experiences were transformed into sociological insight (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009; Riessman, 2008). Contemporary debates on qualitative epistemology highlight that researchers inevitably shape the narratives they analyse, and that interpretive authority must be exercised with care and transparency (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Tracy, 2013). I approached this authority cautiously, recognising that participants entrusted me with accounts shaped by uncertainty, fear, and emotional strain. Throughout coding and writing, I adopted an iterative process that prioritised fidelity to participants' meanings while also attending to broader patterns and conceptual implications. This ensured that analytic development remained accountable to the data rather than driven by theoretical preference.

Finally, occupying a researcher role required maintaining a clear boundary between empathy and interpretation. While interviews often involved emotionally charged moments, my role required me to notice these moments analytically rather than respond to them therapeutically or personally. Scholars emphasise that emotional resonance is an inevitable part of qualitative research but must be held within a reflexive analytic frame to avoid conflation of participants' experiences with the researcher's own emotional responses (Bott, 2010; Dickson-Swift et al.,

2009). This separation enabled me to respect participants' experiences while preserving the interpretive integrity and analytic accountability of the analysis.

3.10.6 Witness Positionality

A further dimension of my positionality in this research was that of an affectively engaged witness. Scholars of forced migration emphasise that researchers do not only collect narratives but also bear witness to the material and social conditions in which those narratives take shape (Brennan, 1992; Pittaway et al., 2010). By being physically present in hotel corridors, communal kitchens, and dispersal accommodation, I encountered the spatial constraints, sensory atmosphere, and everyday fatigue that participants described. This proximity offered forms of embodied knowledge that I could not have accessed through verbal accounts alone.

Several participants told me that I was the first person who had ever entered their accommodation or asked how they were truly doing, in a way that recognised them as individuals rather than cases. For some, my visit seemed to signal that their circumstances were finally seen and taken seriously. Yet this reaction spoke less about my role than about the depth of isolation surrounding them, the absence of recognition, social contact, and care in their everyday lives. These moments made visible how scarce recognition had become and how easily even minimal attention could take on disproportionate moral weight in such conditions.

Witnessing in this sense created a form of relational accountability. As I became present to others' precarity, I inhabited what Kleist & Thorsen (2016) describe as an ethical relation structured by recognition and responsibility. My presence in these spaces exposed the distance between policy abstractions and the lived realities they produce, while simultaneously positioning me within the social world I sought to understand.

At the same time, witnessing required analytical discipline. The immediacy of these environments could subtly shape how I interpreted what I saw, and I remained reflexively attentive to the possibility that my embodied responses might shape meaning-making (Finlay, 2005; Hubbard et al., 2001). To maintain clarity, I wrote reflexive memos distinguishing what participants articulated from what the environment evoked for me, ensuring that analysis remained grounded in their accounts rather than in my own perceptual or affective reactions.

3.10.7 Ethical and Relational Positionality

Conducting research with people navigating the UK asylum system required sustained attentiveness to the ethical and relational dynamics shaping each encounter. Participants were living within conditions structured by surveillance, uncertainty, and limited autonomy, and these realities inevitably informed how they engaged with me and how I engaged with them. The following sections outline the central ethical and relational considerations that guided the research.

a) Power imbalance

Power asymmetry shaped every stage of the research encounter. Speaking with people whose rights, mobility, and autonomy were already heavily restricted meant that I entered each conversation from a position of relative stability and security. Regardless of my intentions, participants could perceive me as someone with institutional knowledge, social capital, or influence that they did not (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2005).

Managing this imbalance required sustained reflexive attention to the structure of the interview itself. I monitored how my presence, my questions, and my manner of listening might be read, and I clarified the limits of my role whenever uncertainty surfaced so that the encounter remained centred on participants' experiences rather than any perceived possibility of assistance. This aligns with power-sensitised reflexivity, which emphasises awareness of how

researchers are positioned and how those perceptions shape the encounter (Proctor, 2008; Spong & Hollanders, 2003).

Power was also embedded in the procedural architecture of the interview. I controlled the direction, pacing, and scope of the conversation. To soften this dynamic, I invited participants to decide where to begin, followed their narrative rhythm, and intervened only with brief clarifications when needed. These practices redistributed some agency within the encounter while maintaining analytic clarity.

b) Trauma-informed Engagement

All participants had lived through displacement, uncertainty, and disruption that carried the potential for emotional distress. Conducting interviews in this context required me to adopt a trauma-informed approach that prioritised safety, agency, and attentiveness (Alessi & Kahn, 2023; Isobel, 2021). I paid close attention to tone, pace, and non-verbal cues, and when someone became withdrawn or tearful, I paused immediately and reminded them that they could take a break, move to a different topic, or stop altogether.

Being trauma-informed also meant recognising that descriptions of waiting, insecurity, or past experiences could evoke emotional responses even when participants did not label them as traumatic (Herman, 2019). I therefore avoided pressing for detail and allowed participants to determine the depth and direction of their own narratives. My questions followed their lead rather than steering them toward particular topics.

Participants guided the flow of each interview, choosing where their story began and how much they wanted to elaborate. At the end of every conversation, I returned to the wellbeing and

support information included in the participant information sheet and reminded them that they could contact those services independently if the interview raised difficult feelings.

Trauma-informed engagement did not remove the emotional intensity of these conversations, but it allowed the interview to remain grounded in care, respect, and participants' control over how their experiences were narrated.

c) Emotional Labour and Researcher Limits

Conducting this research involved sustained emotional labour. Listening to accounts shaped by fear, prolonged uncertainty, and significant material hardship required careful empathic engagement, and it was impossible to remain unaffected. Some interviews stayed with me long after they ended, and at times I needed to slow down transcription or analysis to ensure that my responses did not become shaped by emotional fatigue. This is consistent with the recognised impact of emotionally demanding qualitative work (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018; Smillie & Riddell, 2023).

While this emotional labour formed part of the context in which analysis was carried out, it did not determine the findings. Reflexive practices, including analytic memos, return-to-data checks, and continual grounding of interpretations in participants' words, acted as safeguards, ensuring that emotional resonance did not override analytic clarity. Acknowledging the emotional burden strengthens the credibility of the study, because it makes visible the affective conditions under which the research unfolded while affirming the methodological rigour that kept interpretation accountable to the data.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibility formed the foundation of this research. The study received approval from the University of Essex Faculty Research Ethics Committee and adhered fully to its requirements. This included voluntary informed consent, anonymity at all stages, secure data management, and the separation of research from any organisational role I held. Ethical clearance was granted on these assurances. As described above, participants received a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form in English and translated into Farsi and Dari. Both documents explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw without consequence. Before each interview, I summarised this information and invited questions to ensure full understanding. Written consent was obtained before recording. Participants were clearly informed that participation or refusal would have no bearing on their access to services or support. Several participants expressed apprehension about signing any document, fearing that it might affect their asylum claim. To address this, I reiterated that the research was entirely independent from the Home Office, Migrant Help, the British Red Cross, or any other organisation, and that confidentiality was protected under the ethical and legal standards governing academic research. I also explained that recordings would be stored securely on encrypted drives accessible only to me, and that nothing shared would be passed to any authority unless it related to imminent risk of serious harm. These reassurances were repeated whenever uncertainty resurfaced.

Because participants were accustomed to institutional settings where consent is often nominal, I adopted a dialogic approach that foregrounded agency. Questions such as ‘Who will read this?’ or ‘Will it help others like me?’ reflected participants’ wish for reassurance and reciprocity. Explaining the aims and uses of the research was therefore part of an ethics of care, one that recognised consent as relational and iterative rather than bureaucratic formality.

Confidentiality was explained clearly to participants in non-technical language. They were informed that it would be upheld except in cases of immediate risk to life or safety, such as threats of self-harm or serious harm to others (Kaiser, 2009). No such disclosures occurred during fieldwork.

Given participants' legal vulnerability, confidentiality was then operationalised through strict data-management procedures. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and all identifying details, including names of towns, hotels, or case identifiers, were removed at transcription. Audio files were stored on encrypted, password-protected drives accessible only to me; recordings were deleted from devices immediately after upload. Transcripts and consent forms were stored separately, in line with the University of Essex Data Management Policy. All materials will be securely destroyed five years after completion of the study.

Interviews occasionally evoked distress, silence, or tears. Participants were reminded they could pause or withdraw at any time. I remained attentive to signs of fatigue, distress, or disengagement and offered breaks whenever needed. At the end of each interview, participants were given information sheets in Farsi or Dari listing relevant support services, local charities, and the British Red Cross Refugee Support.

An explicit boundary was maintained between my academic research and my professional role in the asylum support sector. When participants requested help with legal aid, clothing, or financial support, I signposted them to appropriate services but did not intervene. This separation balanced an ethical duty of care with the principle of non-maleficence, ensuring that participation did not create dependency, confusion of roles, or breaches of confidentiality (Israel & Hay, 2006).

The ethics application also acknowledged potential emotional risk for the researcher. Listening to accounts of fear, deprivation, and uncertainty required both emotional and methodological stamina. I addressed this through supervision, reflective journaling, and self-care practices consistent with trauma-informed research. These reflexive activities were not treated as personal therapy but as methodological discipline, tools for recognising how affective responses might shape perception and interpretation.

Translation carried its own ethical responsibilities. Rendering Farsi and Dari narratives into English required attention not only to semantic accuracy but to preserving tone, idiom, and moral resonance. Some expressions, particularly those involving religion, fear, or endurance, had no direct equivalents; in such cases, I retained key terms in the original language with brief explanation. Following Temple and Young (2004), I treated translation as a site of power and sought to make that mediation visible rather than subsume participants' voices within an Anglophone academic frame.

Ethics extended beyond data collection to the interpretive and textual stages. NVivo was used not merely for organisational rigour but to document analytic decisions transparently. Reflective memos recorded how codes evolved and how excerpts were selected, linking ethical accountability to methodological traceability.

Quotations were chosen to illustrate complexity, ambivalence, and agency, not as illustrations of victimhood. Writing was treated as an ethical act, an effort to convey participants' voices with fidelity while situating them within the structural conditions that produced their hardship. In this sense, analysis and representation were governed by the same relational ethic that structured the fieldwork, attentiveness, restraint, and accountability.

Ethical practice in this research rested on care, transparency, and relational responsibility. Formal approval provided procedural legitimacy, but ethical engagement was lived through the everyday gestures of listening, translation, and writing. To research within asylum contexts is to inhabit moral and emotional tension, requiring the maintenance of proximity without intrusion, empathy without appropriation, and analysis without detachment. The ethics of this study therefore mirrored its epistemology, reflexive, situated, and grounded in an ethic of care that treats understanding itself as a moral practice.

3.12 Limitations of the Study

This study is shaped by a series of structural and epistemological constraints that delimit what can be claimed. These are not methodological failures but conditions of knowledge production within a highly controlled and unequal field.

The study is qualitative and interpretive. It offers situated rather than representative knowledge. The data reflect the narratives of thirty asylum seekers from Iran and Afghanistan at particular moments in their asylum trajectories; they cannot stand for ‘the’ experience of asylum in the UK. The asylum system’s fragmentation, across regions, accommodation types, legal advisers, and shifting policy regimes, means that generalisation in a statistical sense is neither possible nor conceptually appropriate.

Knowledge in this project is also relational rather than neutral. Interviews were co-produced encounters shaped by my positionality as an immigrant woman, university-based researcher, and caseworker in the asylum support field. What participants chose to disclose, emphasise, or silence was influenced by how they read my presence, sometimes as someone ‘like them’, sometimes as a professional, sometimes as someone connected to institutional authority. This

inevitably shaped the narratives generated. The analysis is therefore limited by the interpretive frame and social position of the researcher, even as this positionality also enabled depth of understanding.

The sample size and composition impose clear limits on scope. Thirty participants provided a rich dataset but cannot capture the full heterogeneity of asylum experiences in the UK. The focus on Iranian and Afghan adults, while methodologically justified by linguistic and cultural proximity, necessarily excludes other nationalities whose trajectories, social networks, or legal pathways may differ significantly. Children, unaccompanied minors, and asylum seekers with severe disabilities are absent as direct narrators; their experiences appear only indirectly through the accounts of adults.

Sampling proceeded via snowball and network-based recruitment. This approach ensured trust and safety but may have skewed the sample towards those more willing or able to speak at length about their experiences. People who were more isolated, more mistrustful, or more ambivalent about narrating their lives may be under-represented. In addition, all participants were living in England outside the devolved nations; policy and practice differences in Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland are beyond the empirical reach of this study.

Fieldwork was conducted primarily between October 2023 and May 2024. The study therefore captures a temporal slice of the asylum regime during a period of intensified political hostility and extended use of hotel accommodation. The asylum system is, however, dynamic; policies, guidance, dispersal practices, and legal interpretations continue to shift. Participants' legal status, housing conditions, and wellbeing may have changed since data collection.

The design is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. It cannot track how individuals' wellbeing or legal consciousness evolves across time, for instance through the transition from asylum seeker to refugee, fresh claim, or removal. The analysis therefore focuses on the structures and experiences of waiting and uncertainty as they appeared at the moment of interview, rather than on long-term trajectories.

My professional familiarity with asylum support systems is both a resource and a limitation. While the research was conducted independently of any organisation, participants occasionally associated me with forms of institutional authority or potential assistance. Some may have moderated criticism of services; others may have emphasised hardship in the hope of being heard. These dynamics are not 'errors', but relational performances shaped by power and expectation. They nevertheless limit the extent to which participants' accounts can be treated as transparent access to experience; they are always already shaped by the encounter itself.

Language is another site of limitation. Conducting interviews in Farsi and Dari enabled depth and nuance, but translation into English inevitably involved loss and transformation. Certain idioms tied to faith, dignity, or endurance have no exact counterparts; tones of irony, shame, or restrained anger may be partially flattened. My role as both translator and analyst means that I functioned simultaneously as conduit and filter. Although I retained some key terms in the original languages and annotated their meanings, the English text remains an approximation of the affective and moral worlds participants described.

This linguistic focus also defined the scope of the study. By working exclusively with Farsi- and Dari-speaking participants, the research reflects the experiences of Iranian and Afghan asylum seekers while excluding other nationalities present within the asylum support system.

Their perspectives, shaped by different linguistic, cultural, and migratory contexts, remain outside the frame of this analysis.

Thematic analysis also entails selection and emphasis. Certain narratives are foregrounded because they crystallise shared patterns or tensions; others remain less visible, not because they are unimportant but because they do not sit as neatly within the analytic architecture. The findings should therefore be read as one possible, theoretically informed account of the material, emotional, and relational consequences of the UK asylum regime, rather than a definitive mapping of asylum seekers' lives.

Finally, the analytic focus of the thesis imposes its own limits. The decision to examine experiences through the lenses of legal consciousness and material, subjective, and relational wellbeing foregrounds particular questions and necessarily sidelines others. Gender, religion, class background, education level, and transnational family obligations all appear in the data but do not receive the same level of sustained conceptual elaboration. Similarly, structuring the analysis around three 'domains' of wellbeing introduces an analytical separation into phenomena that, in lived experience, are tightly intertwined.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological, ethical, and reflexive foundations of the study, situating knowledge production within relational encounters shaped by legal precarity, displacement, and unequal power. The qualitative and interpretive design adopted here was not merely a methodological choice but a necessary condition for accessing how asylum is lived, felt, and navigated in everyday life.

By foregrounding participants' narratives, affective registers, and situated meanings, the methodology establishes the analytical ground through which legality, wellbeing, and the relational dimensions through which these are lived and negotiated are examined across the thesis. The following chapter draws on this foundation to analyse how asylum seekers make sense of, relate to, and orient themselves toward law over time. Legal consciousness is thus approached not as an abstract legal category, but as an emergent and embodied practice shaped through prolonged uncertainty, waiting, and bureaucratic encounter.

Chapter 4

Legal Consciousness and Volatility

4.1 Introduction

The UK's asylum system is marked by volatility, procedural opacity, and uncertainty. For those seeking protection, law is not encountered primarily in courtrooms or policy documents but through the dispersed bureaucratic structures that govern everyday life, including unexplained letters, shifting eligibility criteria, mandatory reporting, and indefinite waiting for decisions. These ordinary mechanisms render law simultaneously pervasive and inscrutable. These conditions emerge through a wider policy and legislative trajectory in which asylum governance has become increasingly organised through restriction, conditionality, dispersal, and deterrence. Understanding how asylum seekers live, interpret, and endure such conditions requires a framework attuned not only to formal rules but to their lived texture, attending to the emotional, relational, and temporal dimensions through which legality is apprehended and negotiated in daily life.

The study of legal consciousness examines how individuals perceive and act upon law beyond its formal institutions (Abrego, 2011; Coutin, 2003; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Graca & Kapageorgiadou, 2025; Menjívar, 2006; Silbey, 2005). Extensions of this framework to migrant contexts have tended to foreground freedom, dignity, or exclusion rather than the instability of legal rules themselves. This body of work expands the analysis of law from statutes and courts to the ordinary practices through which legality is reproduced, contested, or reimagined. Central to this framework is the distinction between law, understood as the formal system of state-authorised rules and institutions, and legality, defined as “the meanings, sources

of authority, and cultural practices that are commonly recognised as legal, regardless of who employs them for what ends” (Ewick & Silbey, 1998, p.22). Their typology identifies three patterned orientations toward law, described as before the law, where law appears as an objective and transcendent authority; with the law, where it is approached as a strategic terrain; and against the law, where it is confronted as an oppressive or unjust force.

While foundational, this typology presumes a degree of stability in both law and legality. Ewick and Silbey’s (1998) respondents, citizens with secure status, could treat law as a fixed backdrop against which legality circulated as cultural practice. Within the asylum regime, this stability collapses. The UK system is characterised by continual redefinition, as categories shift, procedures are revised, and bureaucratic discretion introduces unpredictability at every stage of the process. In this environment, legality no longer circulates independently from law but becomes saturated by it. Formal rules permeate daily life through administrative routines, dispersal policies, and reporting obligations, producing a condition in which legal consciousness is continually reorganised by uncertainty.

Existing socio-legal frameworks illuminate aspects of this instability yet often treat uncertainty as a continuous condition rather than a patterned volatility that demands ongoing recalibration. Menjívar’s (2006) liminal legality captures suspension between inclusion and exclusion, partial recognition without full membership. Abrego and Lakhani’s (2015) legal precarity extends this analysis, revealing how insecurity and vulnerability are not anomalies but structural features of immigration governance. Coutin (2003) further shows that illegality operates as a social condition, shaping belonging and visibility as much as it regulates rights. Collectively, these works expose how migrants experience legality as conditional and affectively charged, yet they

tend not to foreground contexts in which the rules themselves are unstable and continually remade through administrative and policy shifts.

This chapter addresses that gap. It examines how asylum seekers in the UK experience law not as stability, suspension, or static vulnerability, but as perpetual movement within a shifting legal terrain marked by uncertainty, repetition, and enforced recalibration. Building on the socio-legal tradition of legal consciousness, the chapter develops a framework capable of capturing this volatility and explores how legality, rather than operating primarily as a sphere of interpretation and meaning-making, becomes an instrument of everyday governance.

The chapter therefore develops an alternative way of understanding legality under conditions of instability. It begins by tracing the historical, policy, and legislative development of the UK asylum regime, establishing the institutional conditions within which participants' encounters with law and legality are situated. It then re-examines socio-legal theories of legal consciousness to trace how the distinction between law and legality becomes unsettled within the asylum regime, where authority operates through administrative routine and continual procedural change. Building on this foundation, the analysis turns to asylum seekers' accounts to explore how legality is lived, interpreted, and endured amid volatility and procedural uncertainty. Through this movement from conceptual to experiential terrain, the chapter demonstrates that legal consciousness under the asylum system is not a matter of stable orientation or cultural meaning-making, but a lived negotiation of instability, the shifting ground upon which struggles for recognition, security, and belonging are waged.

4.2 Background of UK Asylum Policy

In the post-war period, refugee reception in the UK was shaped by labour demand, welfare state reconstruction, and the emergence of international protection frameworks (Glennister, 2007; Holmes, 1988). While formal commitments to refugee protection developed through instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, access to rights remained conditional and uneven, structured through racialised hierarchies, geopolitical considerations, and immigration control (United Nations, 1948; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951; Hansen, 2000; Spencer, 1997). These dynamics reflect a broader tension between humanitarian commitment and regulatory constraint that prefigures later developments in asylum governance (Bloch & Schuster, 2002; Gibney, 2002).

From the early 1990s into the New Labour period, asylum governance was increasingly structured through measures that narrowed routes to protection, expanded administrative discretion, and restricted access to welfare and work. The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 formalised ‘safe third country’ reasoning to limit claims made in the UK (UK Parliament, 1993), while subsequent reforms tightened access to appeal and mainstream provision. The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 restricted entitlement to support and introduced accelerated treatment of claims from countries presumed to be ‘safe’, effectively increasing the burden placed on claimants to evidence risk (Bloch & Schuster, 2005; Lambert, 2012; UK Parliament, 1996). The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 introduced dispersal as a core technique of governance, relocating asylum seekers on a no-choice basis and disrupting social networks and specialist support (Phillimore & Goodson, 2008; Sales, 2002; UK Parliament, 1999). The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 further reduced appeal rights and introduced Section 55, restricting access to support for applicants deemed not to

have claimed ‘as soon as reasonably practicable’ (Bloch & Schuster, 2005; UK Parliament, 2002). During this period, restrictions on the right to work were also tightened, contributing to dependency and limiting the capacity to sustain skills, routine, and autonomy (Maughan, 2010). Together, these reforms embedded an approach in which welfare exclusion, dispersal, and constrained legal remedies functioned not as incidental side-effects but as governing instruments intended to deter claims and manage settlement (Bloch & Schuster, 2005; Sales, 2002).

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, asylum and migration became increasingly entangled in public narratives of fiscal pressure and welfare strain, intensifying the political salience of ‘burden’ and ‘control’ framings (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Saggar & Somerville, 2012; Sales, 2002). Within this climate, asylum support remained set at a level substantially below that available to the general population, while accommodation provision continued to rely on dispersal and conditionality through the asylum support service, further distancing individuals from social support and specialist services (Sales, 2002). Employment restrictions meanwhile deepened enforced dependency and limited opportunities for participation, skill maintenance, and social inclusion (Gibney, 2008). Where cashless support mechanisms were used, they produced stigma and everyday constraint, narrowing the capacity to meet basic needs with dignity (Sales, 2002). Across these arrangements, the interaction of restricted welfare, enforced unemployment, and unstable housing has been repeatedly linked to elevated stress, anxiety, and depression among asylum seekers, with protracted waiting and procedural uncertainty compounding these effects (Ager & Strang, 2008; Laban et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2018).

This trajectory intensified under the Coalition Government through the development of the ‘hostile environment’. In 2012, then Home Secretary Theresa May articulated the government’s intention to create a ‘really hostile environment’ for irregular migration (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021). The Immigration Act 2014 subsequently extended immigration control across everyday domains including private renting, banking, driving licences, and access to services, while the Immigration Act 2016 strengthened restrictions relating to employment, housing, banking, and immigration enforcement (House of Commons, 2018; UK Parliament, 2014; UK Parliament, 2016). These measures further dispersed immigration control across employers, landlords, banks, and other public and private actors, embedding immigration-status verification within everyday institutional relations (House of Commons, 2018).

Alongside these deterrence-oriented developments, the UK expanded the use of resettlement schemes in response to specific conflicts, producing a stratified reception landscape. Following the Syrian crisis, the death of Alan Kurdi in September 2015 contributed to the expansion of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme (Home Office, 2017; Morris, 2021). In response to the crisis in Afghanistan, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme was announced in 2021 with commitments framed around phased numbers over subsequent years (Home Office, 2025a). Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, new routes such as the Ukraine Family Scheme were introduced to facilitate entry and temporary protection for eligible applicants (Home Office, 2022). These developments contributed to a sharper distinction between those selected through resettlement or bespoke routes and those claiming asylum on arrival, with the latter increasingly framed through suspicion and ‘abuse’ narratives (Green & Watch, 2021; ITV News, 2019). As a result, access to mainstream benefits and labour-market pathways has often been more straightforward for resettled cohorts, while spontaneous arrivals continue to face intensified conditionality and restriction (Crawley, 2016).

This differentiation was further institutionalised through the New Plan for Immigration, which proposed a more explicit tiering of entitlements according to mode of arrival. The Illegal Migration Bill 2022 to 23 advanced this logic by proposing tougher enforcement and faster removals focused on irregular routes, while presenting ‘legal pathways’ as the preferred channel for protection (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021; Gower et al., 2023). Critics argue that such reforms simultaneously restrict access to asylum and deepen dependency on voluntary sector provision, while leaving unresolved the structural absence of safe and accessible routes for many fleeing persecutions (Saenz Perez, 2023).

Extending this trajectory, the post-2020 phase of asylum reform in the UK has consolidated a shift from welfare provision to bordered conditionality, embedding deterrence as a governing logic. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 operationalised the New Plan for Immigration by tightening inadmissibility rules, criminalising irregular entry for those unable to obtain visas, and formally embedding the ‘safe third country’ principle (UK Parliament, 2022; Right to Remain, 2022). The Act introduced a legal distinction between ‘Group 1’ and ‘Group 2’ refugees, based on mode of arrival and compliance with conditions relating to lawful entry and timely asylum claims, granting the latter a downgraded status with weaker rights to family reunion and settlement (Right to Remain, 2022; The Law Society, 2025b). This was not a mere administrative differentiation but a legal codification of deservingness, transforming the Convention refugee into a stratified subject whose rights are conditional upon the performance of ‘good’ mobility. It reflects what scholars have identified as the consolidation of the figure of the ‘bogus asylum seeker’ within asylum governance, aligning immigration control with welfare chauvinism, whereby access to welfare is restricted along lines of perceived deservingness, and irregular entry is treated as a moral rather than structural problem (Mayblin, 2019; Sales, 2002).

The Illegal Migration Act 2023 intensified this logic by significantly restricting access to asylum for those entering ‘illegally’ (UK Parliament, 2023b). The legislation imposed a duty on the Home Secretary to remove individuals arriving through irregular routes, typically small boats, either to their country of origin or to a designated ‘safe third country’, rendering their claims inadmissible regardless of protection needs (British Red Cross, 2023; UNHCR, 2023; UK Parliament, 2023b). Humanitarian and legal commentators argued that the Act effectively outlawed spontaneous flight, transforming a core principle of the Refugee Convention into a mechanism of exclusion (British Red Cross, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). It also restricted access to modern slavery protections and to discretionary leave, embedding a presumption of abuse that blurred the boundary between trafficking victims and irregular migrants. These measures exemplify what Mayblin (2021) terms “purposeful impoverishment” (p.46), a form of deliberate deprivation that Burbidge et al. (2025) show operates through the ‘hostile environment’, where destitution functions not as policy failure but as an intentional mode of governance.

The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 consolidated this trajectory. It compelled courts and decisionmakers to treat Rwanda as a ‘safe country’ as a matter of law (UK Parliament, 2024b), enabling removals without substantive examination of asylum claims in the UK (British Institute of Human Rights, 2024; The Law Society, 2025a). In effect, the Act sought to externalise Britain’s obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention by legislating ‘safety’ in defiance of judicial findings to the contrary. Legal commentators have read this as a constitutionally troubling attempt to redefine reality by statute, extending the inadmissibility regime of the Nationality and Borders Act and normalising extra-territorial containment as an acceptable humanitarian practice (British Institute of Human Rights, 2024; The Law Society, 2025a). Through this mechanism, the asylum seeker is displaced both geographically and

symbolically, removed from the moral community of the nation and recast as an object of deterrence rather than of protection.

These legislative developments unfold within a context of escalating crisis narratives. Recent Home Office statistics, as reported by the Migration Observatory, indicate elevated levels of asylum applications in 2024, with a further substantial volume recorded by mid-2025 (Home Office, 2025b; Migration Observatory, 2025). Government discourse continues to depict this as evidence of a system ‘overwhelmed’, while the structural causes of backlog, slow decision-making, enforced unemployment, and prolonged hotel accommodation, remain consequences of deterrence-oriented policy design. The same system that constructs asylum seekers as a fiscal and social burden thus reproduces the very dependency and destitution that it then condemns.

A further regression in this trajectory is reflected in reported changes to the refugee family reunion route in late 2025. From 4 September 2025, new applications were paused pending revised Immigration Rules, compelling recognised refugees to apply instead under the Family Migration route designed for British citizens and settled persons (Anon, 2025; Muvija, 2025; The Migration Observatory, 2025). Framed as an administrative review, these changes have been interpreted by advocacy organisations as significantly restricting one of the remaining protection-based routes for family reunification, with disproportionate implications for women and children, who are more likely to depend on such pathways to access safety, particularly where family members remain in conditions of conflict or displacement (Boaz Trust, 2025; British Red Cross, 2025b; Right to Remain, 2025b). They extend the deterrence logic of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 by transforming family unity from a right grounded in humanitarian law into a conditional privilege dependent on status, route of arrival, and economic means. In sociological terms, this constitutes a form of governed social severance, where kinship itself

becomes a terrain of migration control and separation is reproduced as a policy effect rather than a tragic exception.

4.3 Legal Consciousness under Conditions of Instability

This section develops the theoretical foundations through which the chapter examines asylum seekers' encounters with law. Drawing on the socio-legal tradition of legal consciousness, it revisits key conceptual distinctions in order to examine their limits under conditions of instability. Beginning with Ewick and Silbey's (1998) typology of legal orientations, the discussion then turns to subsequent extensions, Menjívar's (2006) liminal legality, Abrego and Lakhani's (2015) legal precarity, and Coutin's (2003) account of illegality as a social condition, to identify where these frameworks require recalibration in contexts marked by volatility.

4.3.1 The Socio-Legal Tradition of Legal Consciousness

Building on the discussion in Chapter 2, this section turns to the socio-legal formulation of legal consciousness in order to clarify its analytical purchase under conditions of instability. Rejecting a view of law as confined to courts or codified statutes, this body of work explores the ways law is lived, interpreted, and reproduced through the mundane actions and meanings of everyday life (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Silbey, 2005).

Ewick and Silbey's (1998) influential study *The Common Place of Law* provided the conceptual scaffolding for this tradition. They drew a critical distinction between law, the formal system of rules, institutions, and procedures authorised by the state, and legality, understood as the everyday meanings, practices, and sources of authority through which law is recognised and enacted in social life. This distinction enabled an important shift, moving

analysis away from law as text or institution to how legality becomes embedded in social life, in everyday reasoning, speech, and interaction.

In their typology, Ewick and Silbey (1998) identified three recurring orientations toward law that individuals adopt in their encounters with legality. The first, *before the law*, conceives of law as transcendent and impartial, a majestic, rational order standing above ordinary life, embodying fairness and predictability. The second, *with the law*, treats legality as a field of strategy, a game governed by rules that can be learned and used to one's advantage. The third, *against the law*, frames law as an instrument of domination or exclusion, provoking acts of avoidance, acts of resistance, or quiet subversion. Together, these orientations depict legal consciousness as a repertoire of meaning-making practices through which individuals engage with, and reproduce, law's authority in everyday life.

What made Ewick and Silbey's (1998) framework transformative was its move beyond formalism. They showed that legality is not simply imposed but co-produced, enacted and sustained through the very practices of those who experience it. Law, in this view, exists not only in statutes but in stories, metaphors, and micro-interactions. Yet their model rests on an implicit assumption of stability, insofar as law functions as a coherent and predictable system against which these orientations unfold. The citizens in their study, situated within relatively secure socio-political contexts, could treat law as a fixed backdrop, even when they resisted or manipulated it. Law's authority was taken as given; the challenge lay in negotiating its meaning, not its continuity.

This assumption becomes problematic in contexts where law itself is unstable, discretionary, and volatile. For populations subject to shifting regimes of control, such as asylum seekers,

undocumented migrants, or temporary residents, the distinction between law and legality collapses. Here, law does not appear as a distant authority but as an immediate, mutable force that shapes the boundaries of existence. In such settings, Ewick and Silbey's (1998) typology requires extension, as the very conditions that make their orientations meaningful, predictability, stability, and interpretive agency, are no longer present.

This recognition has prompted a generation of socio-legal scholars to revisit and expand the concept of legal consciousness within contexts marked by mobility, displacement, and precarity.

4.3.2 Extensions and Limits in Migration Contexts

Scholars examining migration and asylum have sought to adapt the framework of legal consciousness to conditions where law's authority is experienced as uncertain, conditional, and unstable. Three key contributions, by Menjívar (2006), Abrego and Lakhani (2015), and Coutin (2003), have been especially influential in tracing how legality is lived under such circumstances.

Menjívar's (2006) notion of liminal legality captures the ambiguous status of migrants who exist at the threshold between inclusion and exclusion. Drawing on ethnographic work with Central American migrants in the United States, she describes a condition in which individuals possess temporary or partial recognition, with access to certain rights without full membership. This liminality produces a pervasive sense of uncertainty, such that migrants are included enough to be visible to the state but excluded enough to remain vulnerable to its sanctions. Menjívar's (2006) analysis illuminates how migrants inhabit legality as a suspended condition, in which belonging is provisional and revocable. Yet her framework, while powerful, tends to conceptualise this in-between position as relatively fixed. Liminal legality captures suspension,

but it does not fully account for the incessant movement and redefinition that characterise asylum seekers' experiences in more volatile regimes.

Abrego and Lakhani (2015) extend this conversation through the concept of legal precarity, shifting attention from liminality to structural vulnerability. They argue that insecurity is not accidental but embedded in the architecture of immigration law, designed to sustain uncertainty as a tool of governance. Legal precarity thus names a system in which the absence of secure status produces enduring forms of exploitation and control. It highlights how migrants must navigate institutions that simultaneously recognise and marginalise them. Yet, like liminal legality, legal precarity tends to frame instability as an ongoing condition rather than as a patterned process, a form of being precarious rather than a continual oscillation between conditional recognition and withdrawal.

Coutin's (2003) work introduces a further dimension by theorising illegality as a social condition. For undocumented migrants in the United States, she argues, illegality shapes not only legal status but also modes of subjectivity, spatial belonging, and moral worth. Those deemed 'illegal' become simultaneously hyper-visible to enforcement agencies and invisible within civic life, present yet excluded, seen yet unheard. This duality reveals how law produces social existence as much as it regulates it. Illegality, in Coutin's (2003) account, is lived as a contradiction, understood as a state of being that is both constituted and denied through law's power.

Together, these scholars have profoundly deepened our understanding of how law is lived under regimes of insecurity. They show that legality is not a neutral terrain but a differentiated and unequal space, one that constructs migrants as governable subjects through uncertainty

itself. Yet a limitation remains. Each framework, liminal legality, legal precarity, and illegality as social condition, implicitly assumes that instability, however pervasive, unfolds with a degree of continuity. They describe enduring vulnerability and structural uncertainty, but they do not fully capture the cyclical and repetitive disruptions that asylum seekers face when policy shifts rapidly, decisions are reversed, and categories of eligibility are redefined without warning.

In asylum systems such as that of the UK, uncertainty is not simply a backdrop but an active instrument of governance. Law's volatility is not incidental but constitutive, ensuring that individuals remain in a state of perpetual adjustment. It is this gap between enduring insecurity and enforced recalibration that leads to the conceptual development that follows.

4.3.3 Conceptual Gap

The existing socio-legal literature captures how migrants experience law as uncertain, conditional, and exclusionary, but it rarely accounts for how these conditions are sustained through constant change. Recent scholarship has documented how asylum governance across European contexts is experienced through continual rule change and bureaucratic uncertainty (Graca & Kapageorgiadou, 2025, pp.7–9). Building on these observations, this chapter conceptualises these dynamics as volatility, understood as the continual redefinition of rules, categories, and entitlements that structure everyday encounters with legality. Shifting bureaucratic and policy frameworks compel asylum seekers to recalibrate their expectations and strategies repeatedly. Similarly, within the UK, the asylum regime operates through ongoing policy revision and administrative discretion, producing conditions in which uncertainty becomes routinised as a mode of governance (Graca & Kapageorgiadou, 2025, pp.17–18).

This conceptual gap, between enduring vulnerability and perpetual recalibration, provides the foundation for the framework I develop here, which I term transitional legal consciousness. The term describes a mode of engagement with law characterised by forced and cyclical movement between orientations before, with, and against the law, as individuals respond to abrupt changes in procedure, policy, and categorisation. Where Ewick and Silbey's (1998) respondents exercised interpretive freedom in positioning themselves vis-à-vis law's authority, asylum seekers are compelled to reposition themselves continually as the very coordinates of legality change.

This framework foregrounds instability as governance. It reframes legal consciousness not as a repertoire of voluntary orientations but as an enforced adaptability, a continual recalibration demanded by the volatility of law itself. In this way, transitional legal consciousness extends existing socio-legal theory by situating instability, rather than stability, liminality, or vulnerability, at the centre of how legality is lived.

The following section develops this conceptual argument in detail, elaborating how transitional legal consciousness captures the distinctive conditions of asylum under the UK regime and how volatility becomes both the structure and substance of legality in everyday life.

4.4 Developing the Concept of Transitional Legal Consciousness

This section develops the concept of 'transitional legal consciousness' as a way of theorising how asylum seekers experience law under conditions of volatility. Building on the preceding discussion of socio-legal frameworks, it elaborates a perspective in which instability itself functions as a governing condition. The discussion proceeds in three stages, beginning with a definition of the concept and its relation to existing models of legal consciousness; moving on

to a theoretical positioning that outlines how it reconfigures ideas of agency, interpretation, and adaptation; and concluding with illustrative testimonies that render these dynamics tangible. Together, these subsections establish transitional legal consciousness as both a conceptual and analytical lens through which the lived experience of legality in the asylum regime can be understood.

4.4.1 Defining the Concept

The collapse of the distinction between law and legality under the asylum regime provides the starting point for what I term transitional legal consciousness. In this condition, the interpretive freedom that Ewick and Silbey (1998) attribute to legality collapses under the weight of uncertainty and volatility, producing forced and cyclical recalibrations. Law and legality no longer stand apart as distinct domains; they bleed into one another, creating a terrain in which everyday life is continually reorganised by shifting demands of policy, procedure, and categorisation.

In this sense, transitional legal consciousness is not simply an extension of prior socio-legal frameworks but a reframing of how legality is lived under conditions of instability. It designates a world in which legality itself is unstable, where the rules of engagement are perpetually rewritten and where the capacity to orient oneself to law depends not on understanding its principles but on enduring its unpredictability.

4.4.2 Theoretical Positioning

This conceptual move builds upon and departs from earlier socio-legal scholarship in several important ways, particularly in relation to how instability is understood. Ewick and Silbey (1998) conceptualise legal consciousness as a repertoire of cultural orientations through which individuals interpret and respond to law. Their framework emphasises how actors move

between positions of being before, with, or against the law within a relatively stable cultural field. Transitional legal consciousness, by contrast, describes a situation in which such interpretive discretion is continually disrupted. Asylum seekers do not move freely between orientations; rather, their positioning is repeatedly unsettled by abrupt shifts in policy, procedure, and categorisation. In this context, legal consciousness becomes less a matter of interpretive choice and more a response to institutional volatility.

This emphasis on volatility also distinguishes the concept from earlier analyses of migrant legality. Menjívar's (2006) notion of liminal legality captures the condition of migrants suspended between recognition and exclusion. While this insight remains crucial, the experiences described by asylum seekers in this study suggest not only suspension but continual movement. Rather than occupying a stable threshold, participants described cycles of provisional recognition followed by reversal, moments of hope punctured by renewed uncertainty. The asylum system therefore resembles not a threshold but a recursive process in which legal position is repeatedly destabilised.

Similarly, Abrego and Lakhani's (2015) concept of legal precarity demonstrates how vulnerability can be embedded in law itself. Their work highlights the enduring exposure and insecurity that shape migrant lives under restrictive legal regimes. Transitional legal consciousness extends this argument by foregrounding the temporal volatility through which such insecurity is produced and maintained. In the asylum system, uncertainty operates not merely as a condition but as a governing technique, sustained through policy revisions, administrative discretion, and prolonged waiting.

Finally, Coutin's (2003) analysis of illegality as a social condition shows how legal exclusion reorganises everyday temporal and spatial experience. Transitional legal consciousness builds on this insight by emphasising the role of bureaucratic temporality in continually reconstituting legality itself. For asylum seekers, illegality is not simply a fixed status but a persistent possibility, reactivated through expiring documents, shifting procedures, and delayed decisions. Bureaucracy thus operates as a temporal apparatus through which legality is repeatedly made and unmade.

Taken together, these departures situate transitional legal consciousness within a broader socio-legal genealogy while clarifying its distinctive contribution. Rather than treating legal consciousness as a stable orientation toward law, the concept foregrounds the cyclical and volatile dynamics through which legality is continually recalibrated. Where earlier frameworks illuminate uncertainty, exclusion, or precarity, transitional legal consciousness emphasises how instability itself becomes a governing feature of legality within the contemporary asylum governance.

4.4.3 Illustrative Testimonies

Transitional legal consciousness takes shape in the ordinary narratives through which asylum seekers render volatility intelligible. These accounts do not merely describe instability; they enact it, translating abstract dynamics of uncertainty into embodied and affective experience. In this sense, the theoretical concerns traced in earlier sections (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Menjivar, 2006) converge here in lived form, as legality appears less as a framework of rules than as a rhythm of repetition, disruption, and survival.

Homa, a 30-year-old Iranian woman who had been in the asylum process for approximately a year, described this instability while reflecting on the repeated changes communicated to her

about potential housing arrangements during her time in asylum accommodation. Over several months she had been told that a move might occur, only for these plans to be withdrawn or postponed, requiring her to continually adjust her expectations. She explained:

One month they [Migrant Help] say you'll be moved to new housing, the next month they say it's not possible. You have to change your plan all the time. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Her words exemplify the recursive quality of transitional legality, in which recognition and exclusion are not sequential stages but alternating conditions, compelling constant adjustment. Each administrative communication redefines the boundaries of legality, transforming certainty into confusion and compliance into vulnerability. This dynamic echoes Griffiths' (2014) analysis of waiting as a temporal mechanism of governance, in which time itself functions as a means of control.

I spoke with Taha in the lobby of the hotel where he had been living while waiting for a decision on his asylum claim. At 50, he had spent around 16 months in the asylum process, while his family remained in Afghanistan. During our conversation he reflected on the repeated procedural changes and uncertain timelines that had shaped the previous months of waiting. Describing how each new communication seemed to reset his expectations, he said:

It makes you feel like you are always starting from zero, every letter, every new rule. (Participant 24, Afghan man)

Here, instability assumes a temporal form. Progress collapses into recurrence, and law's authority is experienced as the demand to begin again. The psychological and embodied weight of such repetition exposes legality not as an abstract framework but as a structure of affective governance, consistent with Coutin's (2003) argument that illegality operates not merely as

legal status but as a mode of existence, shaped through continuous exposure to law's contradictions.

These testimonies make tangible the dynamics elaborated in the preceding discussion. Under the asylum regime, legality is not a stable field of interpretation but a constantly shifting terrain that compels recalibration. The familiar orientations before, with, and against the law (Ewick & Silbey, 1998) persist, but they are no longer elective or discrete; they unfold as enforced oscillations generated by a system whose instability is itself a mechanism of control. In this sense, transitional legal consciousness names a lived relation to law defined less by understanding than by endurance, a condition in which movement replaces certainty as the organising principle of legal life.

4.5 Living Transitional Legal Consciousness

The preceding discussion established how asylum seekers' encounters with law unfold within conditions of volatility and uncertainty. Under the UK asylum regime, legality is not a stable field of interpretation but a shifting terrain that demands continual adaptation. The concept of transitional legal consciousness captures this instability as a lived relation to law, one shaped by repetition, dependency, and the constant recalibration of expectation and response.

As socio-legal scholarship has shown, legality extends beyond statutes and courts, operating through everyday practices and dispersed forms of authority (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Silbey, 2005). Yet, under regimes of migration control, this everyday legality becomes saturated by instability (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Coutin, 2003; Menjívar, 2006). Within the UK asylum system, uncertainty operates as a mechanism of governance (Griffiths, 2014), compelling claimants to navigate procedures whose meanings and consequences continually shift.

This section turns to how these dynamics are lived. Through letters, interviews, reporting routines, and everyday negotiations with bureaucratic authority, legality becomes felt rather than merely understood. The following narratives reveal law as omnipresent yet faceless, uncertainty as an atmosphere that structures daily life, and translation, dependency, and surveillance as the mediating forces through which legality is experienced.

The analysis proceeds thematically across five interrelated domains. The first examines bureaucracy and the reach of law, showing how documents and classifications simultaneously structure and obscure authority. The second explores volatility and uncertainty, where recognition remains fragile and reversibility defines legal status. The third considers knowledge, mediation, and dependency, tracing how access to law is filtered through interpreters and intermediaries. The fourth turns to compliance, resistance, and constrained agency, illustrating how tactical navigation replaces overt autonomy. The final section addresses surveillance and everyday governance, revealing how legality is enacted through dispersed practices of monitoring and control.

Together, these themes show that transitional legal consciousness is not a conceptual abstraction but a lived condition, an ongoing process of adjustment within a legal order that governs through uncertainty, compelling individuals to inhabit the shifting ground of legality as both a site of constraint and of fragile endurance.

4.5.1 Shifting Orientations toward Law

Participants' narratives revealed that legality was not experienced through a single, stable stance but through continual movement between recognition, engagement, and resistance. At times, law appeared distant and immutable, echoing what Ewick and Silbey (1998) term the before the law orientation. Homa explained:

It feels like there is always something above you, deciding everything, and you have no way to speak back. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Vida was 27 and had been in the asylum process for around ten months when I spoke with her. Reflecting on how little control she felt she had over the process, she described law through the image of a closed door:

It is like standing in front of a locked door; you know it controls your life, but you can't open it. (Participant 2, Iranian woman)

In these moments, law was imagined as transcendent and unreachable, an external authority that diminished agency and invited submission. Yet, unlike the before the law stance described by Ewick and Silbey (1998), such perceptions did not rest on faith in law's legitimacy or stability. They emerged instead from exhaustion and powerlessness within an unpredictable system: an acknowledgment of control without conviction in justice.

Alongside these feelings of distance, participants also sought to work with the law, treating procedure as a potential route to recognition or protection. Reyhan was 29 and had been in the asylum process for around 17 months. When speaking about his meetings with his lawyer, he described how he would prepare beforehand, writing down each question he wanted to ask:

I write down every question before I meet a lawyer, because if I forget to ask, maybe I lose my chance. (Participant 25, Afghan man)

His careful preparation reflected both diligence and fear, an awareness that each omission or inconsistency might later be read as deception. Ramin was 57 and had been in the asylum process for around 15 months. He was living in the UK with his daughter, while his wife and two other children remained in Iran. When speaking about preparing for his asylum interviews, he described practising beforehand with friends:

Sometimes I practise with friends what to say, because if you make a mistake, they think you are lying. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

Such strategies captured what it means to engage with the law, understood as to interpret and perform compliance to appear credible within an unstable bureaucracy. Participants tried to decipher ‘what they want to hear’, drawing on rumours, advice from lawyers, and stories of refusals for ‘inconsistent’ accounts. These informal knowledges, shaped by circulating tales of rejection, reveal a culture of hyper-vigilance where self-presentation became a defensive art.

Yet the boundaries of compliance were never fixed. What counted as credible evidence or cooperative behaviour shifted with policy revisions, changes in legal aid provision, or inconsistent advice from intermediaries such as Migrant Help or housing contractors. Participants recalled being told to apply for support one month and then informed the next that doing so was an error. These reversals often stemmed from alterations to Section 95 and Section 4 support criteria or from varying interpretations of Home Office guidance. Whether these changes were due to new policy or altered advice, the result was the same. Compliance one week could be reframed as failure the next.

In this context, working with the law became an impossible task, an act of endurance within a system whose rules continually shifted. Hope in procedural fairness was eroded by the volatility of the regime itself, transforming persistence into a repetitive labour of recalibration.

Encounters with refusal or enforcement produced yet another mode of engagement, one resonant with against the law. Amir was 32 and had been in the asylum process for around three months when I spoke with him. Reflecting on his experience of detention, he recalled:

When they detained me, it felt like everything was finished. You are treated like a criminal, not someone asking for help. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

Ramin reflected similarly:

After the refusal, it was like being told you don't belong anywhere, not here, not back home. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

Here, legality was experienced not as protection but as negation, the withdrawal of recognition that rendered personhood uncertain.

What is distinctive in the asylum context is not that these orientations exist, but that they blur and shift under conditions of instability. Rather than stable dispositions, they appear as enforced oscillations, moments in a cycle of adaptation to shifting rules and meanings. For Monir, this instability extended across a much longer period of uncertainty. She was 45 and had been in the UK asylum process for around 20 months, where she was living with her son. Before arriving in the UK, she had spent around two years in Turkey and Germany. Reflecting on these experiences, she described how a sense of safety could quickly give way to renewed uncertainty:

One day you think you are safe; the next day you feel everything is lost again. It is always shifting. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Such testimonies encapsulate the essence of transitional legal consciousness. The orientations mapped by Ewick and Silbey (1998) no longer operate as discrete cultural positions but as compelled adjustments within a volatile regime. Asylum seekers do not choose to stand before, with, or against the law; they are moved between these positions by the oscillations of policy, procedure, and bureaucratic interpretation that define everyday legality.

4.5.2 Bureaucracy and the Reach of Law

Bureaucracy represents the most immediate face of legality within the asylum regime. Through documents, letters, and administrative procedures, the authority of law is translated into the material organisation of everyday life. This bureaucratic apparatus mediates power in dispersed and impersonal ways, producing what can be understood, following Mountz (2010), as an everyday border where legality is enacted through routine documentation rather than direct encounters with the state. The following accounts show how this dispersed authority structures existence through classification, dispersal, and delay, rendering legality at once omnipresent and elusive.

Law was experienced by participants not as a distant abstraction but as a pervasive and faceless presence. It was encountered through the bureaucratic instruments that ordered their lives, letters, dispersal notices, eligibility decisions, and forms, rather than through direct interaction with decision-makers.

The classificatory logic of bureaucracy produced sharp consequences. To be named asylum seeker, refused claimant, or refugee was not simply to hold a descriptive label but to inhabit a shifting regime of rights and restrictions. In Bourdieu's (1994) terms, the bureaucratic field determines access to recognition and resources through acts of classification that define what can be claimed and what must be forfeited. Ali was 28 and had been in the asylum process for more than two years when I spoke with him. Reflecting on how a change in asylum process could alter the conditions of everyday life, he explained:

With just one decision, they can say you are not allowed to work, not allowed support, nothing. Everything depends on the category they give you. (Participant 6, Iranian man)

These designations governed daily survival, determining income, housing, mobility, and access to healthcare. Classification thus functioned as a form of legal power in itself, a mechanism through which inclusion and exclusion were continually remade (Darling, 2016a).

Amir described the disembodied nature of this power:

You never meet the person who decides, but their letter changes everything in your life. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

The statement captures how legality is both omnipresent and elusive. Decisions that determine where one lives, whether one receives support, or how long one must wait are delivered impersonally, often without explanation. Bureaucratic distance becomes a defining feature of legal consciousness, shaping how participants understand power itself, as something everywhere and nowhere at once.

The classificatory logic of bureaucracy had material and existential consequences. Categories such as asylum seeker, refused claimant, or refugee did not simply label legal status; they structured the very conditions of daily life. Vida reflected:

Just one letter can change everything, the money, the housing, the card, all finished with one word: refused. (Participant 2, Iranian woman)

The reclassification from asylum seeker to refused triggered an immediate loss of entitlements and an intensified sense of precarity. These shifts illuminate how legal categories actively produce social and material realities, such that recognition and exclusion are not symbolic but lived through changes in income, shelter, and mobility. What appears bureaucratic on paper is experienced as rupture in life itself.

This bureaucratic reorganisation extended beyond paperwork to spatial displacement. Vida's account also showed how these administrative changes entered other parts of her asylum experience. Reflecting on being moved to another city, she recalled:

When they moved me to another city, I lost my lawyer. I had to explain everything again from the beginning. (Participant 2, Iranian woman)

Dispersal was not merely administrative relocation; it reorganised social ties and erased fragile continuity in legal processes. Bureaucratic space thus becomes an instrument of regulation, separating people from the networks through which legality could be understood or contested (Hynes, 2011; Mountz, 2010). Spatial policy here becomes a legal technology, reorganising the very conditions under which law can be navigated and understood. This spatialised governance produces what scholars have termed 'legal deserts', zones where access to legal advice, representation, and advocacy is structurally limited by geography (McKeever et al., 2018; Smith & Paterson, 2014). In such dispersed landscapes, legality itself becomes unevenly distributed, shaped not only by legal status but by postcode, transport links, and the presence, or absence, of specialist support.

Time, too, operated as a bureaucratic mechanism of control. Participants spoke of waiting as indefinite, opaque, and corrosive. Saman was 47 and had been in the asylum process for around 29 months when I spoke with him. He had initially expected a decision within three months, but this expectation had given way to more than two years of waiting. Reflecting on how prolonged uncertainty had altered his experience of time, he explained:

They [the Home Office] told me to wait three months, then it became one year, then two. You don't know if life is moving or not. (Participant 7, Iranian man)

Waiting here is not passive but disciplinary, in that it structures the rhythm of existence, producing uncertainty as an everyday condition (Griffiths, 2014). Bureaucracy governs not only through classification and dispersal but through temporal manipulation, delays, deferrals, and sudden demands that render the future perpetually contingent.

Communication within this bureaucratic order was mediated through intermediaries such as Migrant Help or legal advisors, whose role was often experienced as gatekeeping rather than advocacy. Marjan was 37 and had been in the asylum process for around eight months when I spoke with her. Recalling her attempts to obtain information about her case, she described how communication with the Home Office remained dependent on Migrant Help:

When you call Migrant Help, they just tell you to wait. You cannot talk to the Home Office directly. (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

Such arrangements deepen dependency by placing asylum seekers in a chain of mediation where no one appears responsible, echoing Darling's (2016b) observation that outsourced asylum provision diffuses accountability while maintaining control. Bureaucracy thus extends law's reach while obscuring its source; it embeds legality into the routines of life while effacing the agents who enact it.

Taken together, these accounts show that legality under the asylum regime is not encountered in courtrooms or hearings but in the mundane mechanisms of governance, letters, relocations, delays, and mediations. Through these dispersed practices, law becomes an ambient condition, understood as a power that shapes where one lives, how one waits, and what one hopes for, yet remains largely faceless and unaccountable. Bureaucracy, in this sense, is not peripheral to law but its most immediate manifestation in the everyday life of asylum seekers.

4.5.3 Volatility and Uncertainty

If bureaucracy constituted the visible infrastructure of legality, its underlying texture was defined by uncertainty. Participants repeatedly described their status as unstable, provisional, and liable to change without warning. Law was not experienced as a settled order but as a moving target, rules, entitlements, and procedures continually redefined with little explanation. Uncertainty, rather than error or inefficiency, appeared as the organising principle of the asylum regime.

Vida expressed this sense of shifting ground:

Every time I think I understand the rules, they change. I don't know any more what is allowed or what will cause problems. (Participant 2, Iranian woman)

Her experience exemplified how recognition and exclusion alternated as part of a continuous cycle rather than as distinct legal outcomes. After her initial claim was refused, the support payments that sustained her daily life were terminated, and she was instructed to leave her accommodation within two weeks. Months later, after submitting fresh evidence, she was again placed in Home Office housing and permitted a small allowance under Section 4 support. Yet the reinstatement of assistance did not restore stability, in that she was relocated to a different city, assigned to new solicitors, and required to repeat information already provided in earlier applications. Each procedural turn meant beginning again, rebuilding fragments of legality that had been temporarily erased.

This circular movement captured what I describe as transitional legal consciousness, understood as a form of governance in which law advances through repetition rather than resolution. Participants such as Vida learned that progress was provisional and that every

decision carried the potential for reversal. What appeared bureaucratically as progression toward determination was, in lived experience, a return to uncertainty. As Reyhan later reflected:

You feel you are always temporary. Even when they [the Home Office] say yes, you don't believe it, because maybe they change their mind.
(Participant 25, Afghan man)

These oscillations between recognition and withdrawal reflect not isolated case outcomes but the broader design of the UK asylum regime, where support entitlements and dispersal arrangements are repeatedly reconfigured, and uncertainty is sustained as a mode of governance (Darling, 2016b; Griffiths, 2014). The asylum process thus produces legality as movement rather than stability, compelling claimants to live within a temporality of renewal and erasure in which each stage of recognition already anticipates its undoing.

The volatility of decision-making also eroded temporal orientation. Participants spoke of waiting not as delay but as a mode of existence in which time lost sequence and meaning. Monir described this suspension:

You never know if tomorrow you are allowed to stay or they will tell you to leave. You live with that question every day. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Here, uncertainty is not confined to the outcome of a case; it structures the perception of time itself. Life becomes an unending present, punctuated by the possibility of abrupt disruption. Griffiths' (2014) notion of temporal suspension finds vivid expression in such accounts, with waiting operating as a temporal mechanism of governance that holds people in readiness for decisions that may never arrive.

Uncertainty also corroded personhood. Several participants described how the absence of clear recognition produced feelings of invisibility or non-existence. Amir explained:

Without papers, you are not really here. You wait for someone else to decide if you exist. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

The statement condenses Coutin's (2003) account of illegality as a social condition marked by visibility to control alongside exclusion from rights and recognition. For asylum seekers, uncertainty performs this dual function; it governs through indeterminacy, producing dependency while erasing certainty of self.

These narratives reveal that volatility and uncertainty are not anomalies of administration but instruments of governance. They compel continual adjustment, positioning asylum seekers in a state of permanent readiness where each change requires fresh orientation to law. Within transitional legal consciousness, uncertainty thus becomes both the mechanism and the medium of rule, a system that sustains itself not through stability but through the perpetual destabilisation of those it governs.

4.5.4 Knowledge, Mediation, and Dependency

Encounters with law in the asylum system were rarely direct. Participants did not meet the decision-makers who shaped their lives; instead, they engaged with law through layers of mediation, letters, translators, solicitors, caseworkers, and advice services. Knowledge of the law was never complete or secure; it travelled through uncertain channels, filtered by others whose interpretations could not always be trusted or verified. Legal literacy, in this context, emerged not as an individual skill but as a fragile social resource, unevenly distributed and deeply contingent on access to reliable intermediaries.

Monir explained the opacity of this process:

When the Home Office letter arrives, I cannot understand the words. I have to wait for someone else to tell me what it means. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

In her case, that ‘someone else’ was rarely a trained interpreter or caseworker, but whoever happened to be available, another resident, a volunteer at reception, or a fellow asylum seeker with stronger English. The meaning of legality thus travelled through improvised and uncertain networks rather than formal institutional channels. Here, law was not apprehended as a set of knowable rules but as an unfamiliar language that required translation before it could be acted upon. This dependency introduced both vulnerability and delay, as the significance of official decisions arrived second-hand, filtered through partial understandings and fragments of advice. As Merry (1990) observes, law travels through mediation; yet in this context, mediation is never neutral, it determines what can be known, believed, or feared.

Others described the anxiety produced by reliance on intermediaries whose authority could not be fully verified. Reza was 40 and had been in the asylum process for around 13 months when I spoke with him. When discussing his experiences of communicating through interpreters, he described the uncertainty this could create:

If the interpreter makes a mistake, it changes everything. But you cannot argue, because you don’t know the law yourself. (Participant 9, Iranian man)

The statement encapsulates how asymmetry of knowledge becomes structural, in that authority resides not in comprehension but in translation. As Sarat and Kearns (1993) note, legality depends on cultural forms of transmission; for asylum seekers, that transmission is precarious, transforming every act of interpretation into a potential site of risk.

Even professional expertise offered little assurance. Several participants recounted moments when solicitors themselves expressed confusion about new rules or procedures. Amir remembered:

The lawyer said, ‘We are still trying to understand the new rules ourselves’. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

Such testimony underscores that volatility corrodes legal literacy at every level. The instability of policy undermines not only claimants’ capacity to understand the system but also the confidence of those tasked with guiding them. Law’s authority thus circulates through a chain of partial knowing, each dependent on the last, none entirely secure.

Even the presence of legal representation did not guarantee stability or trust. Participants described the fragility of their relationships with solicitors, who could withdraw at any point due to funding restrictions or changes in eligibility. Monir explained:

Even with lawyers, you feel they can drop you any time. Nothing is stable. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Her words encapsulate the precarity that defines access to legal assistance under the current regime. Representation itself becomes contingent, undermined by the same bureaucratic volatility that shapes every other aspect of the asylum process. Legal advice is not a fixed right but a temporary resource, one that can be lost with relocation, administrative turnover, or the closure of legal aid contracts. The resulting instability erodes confidence in the system and deepens the sense that legality is provisional, dependent on shifting institutional priorities rather than entitlement.

These testimonies highlight how legality is mediated through relationships marked by dependency, suspicion, and asymmetry, relationships that both enable access to law and

intensify vulnerability. For some, like Marjan, these interactions occurred through Migrant Help, the charity contracted to liaise with the Home Office. She described how even the most routine exchanges felt risky, in that what one said, or failed to say, might later ‘go in the file’. While such fears were not always grounded in formal procedure, they reflected a broader climate of anxiety sustained by opaque communication and high rejection rates. Rumours circulated among asylum seekers about calls being monitored or advice being relayed to decision-makers, embedding mistrust within the very infrastructures meant to provide support. In this way, dependency on intermediaries becomes entangled with fear, producing a condition in which legality is accessible only through channels that simultaneously reproduce insecurity. Access to explanation also reflected broader inequalities of language and education. Those with stronger English or prior experience with bureaucracy described slightly greater autonomy, while others relied completely on interpreters or community members. Vida recounted:

I waited days until someone at the centre could read the letter for me.
All that time, I didn’t know if it was good or bad. (Participant 2, Iranian woman)

Legal literacy here functions as a form of capital, one not equally shared but stratified by linguistic and social resources. The ability to act, appeal, or even respond depends on the capacity to interpret words whose meaning determines material survival.

Taken together, these narratives reveal that knowledge within the asylum system is relational, unstable, and asymmetrically distributed. Law is encountered not through direct comprehension but through fragile chains of mediation that both enable and constrain agency. Within transitional legal consciousness, this dependence on others becomes a defining feature, such that legality is not only volatile but opaque, apprehended through others’ voices and

perpetually vulnerable to misinterpretation. Knowing the law, in this sense, is less about understanding than about enduring the uncertainty of translation itself.

These dynamics were not experienced evenly. Access to legality depended on intersecting inequalities of language, geography, and economic means. Participants who spoke English or lived near support organisations could navigate letters and appointments with relative confidence, while those dispersed to isolated towns or reliant on community translation faced prolonged uncertainty and delay. The uneven circulation of legal knowledge and resources thus produced differentiated capacities to act, reinforcing broader hierarchies of exclusion. Legal consciousness, in this sense, was stratified. The ability to interpret, respond to, or even receive law was shaped by social position as much as by formal status.

4.5.5 Compliance, Resistance, and Constrained Agency

Legal consciousness under the asylum regime is not only interpretive but enacted through practice. Participants' accounts show how engagement with law unfolds in the small, everyday acts of compliance, resistance, and tactical adaptation that define survival within a volatile system. These practices were rarely straightforward or singular. They overlapped, shifted, and coexisted, at once pragmatic, coerced, and expressive of agency within constraint.

Compliance appeared as a dominant mode of navigation, motivated not by faith in law's legitimacy but by the need to avoid devastating repercussions. Participants spoke of adhering to procedures they did not fully understand, recognising that non-compliance could destroy a claim or trigger removal. Marjan recalled:

Two weeks before my period date, I had severe pain. I still took a four-hour bus to London because I was scared to miss the lawyer's appointment. (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

Her words expose the coercive force of compliance, law as something that must be obeyed to preserve even the faintest possibility of recognition. Following the rules was not an act of trust but of fear, a calculated response to a system in which every misstep could be fatal to one's case.

Yet within this coercive terrain, participants also described acts of resistance. Some pursued appeals, while others engaged in subtle refusals or everyday evasions that pushed back against restrictive conditions. Minoo was 28 and had been in the asylum process for around 20 months when I spoke with her. During our conversation, she held her young son in her arms while her older daughter played nearby. When reflecting on their time in hotel accommodation, she recalled how the restrictions on cooking had shaped an ordinary part of family life:

At the hotel, they told us not to cook, but we tried anyway, because the food was making us sick. We knew it was against the rules, but we could not accept it quietly. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

Her account exemplifies how defiance can emerge through material practice rather than formal protest. Such gestures reclaim minimal control over one's environment and dignity, even under threat of sanction. They reflect what Scott (1990) calls the 'arts of resistance', small, tactical acts that reassert agency within domination, sustaining moral autonomy in conditions of constraint.

Taha similarly described strategic restraint as a form of quiet defiance:

Sometimes you just don't answer their questions, because you know it will be used against you. (Participant 24, Afghan man)

This form of resistance mirrors what Scott (1990) describes as everyday resistance, namely small acts that do not dismantle the system but assert limited autonomy within it. For asylum

seekers, resistance was less rebellion than preservation, a means of maintaining dignity in conditions that rendered them continually accountable to opaque authority.

Agency, in this context, was deeply ambivalent. Participants described how any attempt to assert themselves risked being reframed as defiance or non-cooperation. Vida reflected:

If you ask too many questions, they think you are difficult. You feel you must stay silent, otherwise it goes in your file. (Participant 2, Iranian woman)

Here, silence becomes both submission and strategy, a self-protective act in a system where agency is permitted only within narrow limits. Asylum seekers learned to modulate their voices, gestures, and emotions, to act compliant enough to be seen as cooperative, but not so assertive as to invite suspicion.

These practices illuminate a central feature of transitional legal consciousness, specifically the negotiation of power through constrained motion rather than open defiance. Asylum seekers move within law's framework, not outside it, navigating its contradictions through a repertoire of pragmatic tactics. What appears as compliance can also function as resistance, and silence can operate as a form of speech. Their agency is not free, but neither is it absent. It takes shape in the micro-adjustments that make endurance possible under unpredictable governance.

Taken together, these accounts reveal that legal consciousness within the asylum regime is not a stable orientation but a choreography of risk. Every action, signing, attending, waiting, refusing, carries consequences that must be anticipated but cannot be fully known. Within this terrain, agency takes on a paradoxical form, a careful performance of submission that

simultaneously enables survival. It is here, in these fragile negotiations between fear and resolve, that the lived substance of legality comes into view.

4.5.6 Surveillance and Everyday Governance

For asylum seekers, law was not confined to hearings, tribunals, or formal judgments; it permeated daily life through a dispersed web of surveillance practices. Participants described a regime of constant observation in which compliance was verified, movement monitored, and belonging continually tested. Law's authority was not experienced through direct confrontation but through its quiet persistence in routine encounters, the letters to sign, the documents to carry, the rooms to report to at fixed intervals. Surveillance was not peripheral to legality but its everyday form, the mundane mechanism through which governance was sustained (Darling, 2016b; Foucault, 1991; Griffiths, 2014).

Among the participants in this study, only a small number were subject to regular reporting conditions. Yet their accounts illuminate how reporting operates as a particularly concentrated site of surveillance within the asylum regime. Ali, who had been required to report to the Home Office every month, described the fear that accompanied this routine obligation:

If you miss signing once, they can say you disappeared. That fear never leaves you. (Participant 6, Iranian man)

The fear articulated here does not arise from a single procedural risk but from the indeterminacy of how absence is interpreted within the reporting regime. Non-attendance is experienced not as contingency but as rupture, a moment at which routine absence may be reclassified as disappearance. Although illness, transport disruption, or other contingencies are formally recognised as potential reasons for missing a reporting appointment, their acceptance depends on timely communication and evidence assessed by the Home Office (Praxis, 2025; Right to Remain, 2024). As a result, even hypothetical absence becomes a site of anticipatory

governance, shaping conduct in advance of any actual breach. Reporting thus operates as a technology of surveillance rather than a neutral administrative requirement, transforming routine attendance into a ritual of verification through which continued presence must be repeatedly demonstrated.

Amir described the same experience as an encounter with uncertainty itself:

Sometimes when I go to report, I think maybe they will not let me leave. That thought is always in my head. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

Here, surveillance collapses the distinction between monitoring and punishment. Each visit becomes a moment of heightened legal risk, blurring the boundary between routine and rupture (Griffiths, 2014). Law's authority operates not only through its rules but through the anticipation of what might happen when those rules are applied, consistent with socio-legal accounts of legal consciousness (Ewick & Silbey, 1998).

At the same time, surveillance was experienced through the bureaucratic outsourcing of authority to private contractors, housing providers, and voluntary organisations. Although the Home Office remained the ultimate decision-making authority, its power was diffused across a network of intermediaries who implemented its rules at the local level. Contracted agencies such as Migrant Help, housing management companies, and hotel providers were responsible for enforcing reporting schedules, curfews, and behavioural expectations within accommodation sites. Participants frequently described these actors as extensions of state control, even when their decisions were presented as 'local' or 'procedural'.

Monir reflected on this dispersed authority:

Even when it is not the Home Office, it feels like the Home Office is behind them. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Her words capture how governance became ambient and impersonal, exercised through multiple layers of oversight rather than a single visible source. Residents in asylum accommodation spoke of property inspections, room checks, and monitoring by support staff as part of a continuous process of being watched. These interactions blurred the line between assistance and control, embedding surveillance within the provision of basic needs such as housing and welfare.

In this sense, legal consciousness was constituted not only through formal encounters with law but through its everyday saturation in bureaucratic practice. Law was apprehended as a presence that extended into the spaces of the home, the hostel, and the reporting centre, shaping conduct long before any tribunal or decision letter appeared. Surveillance thus operated less as a single event than as a routine condition of life, a dispersed system of accountability that governed through visibility, repetition, and the anticipation of oversight.

Participants also spoke of the documents they were required to carry as both symbols and instruments of control. Identity cards, reporting slips, and Home Office letters functioned as portable proofs of existence, embedding legality into the material fabric of daily life. Their fragility, the ease with which they could be lost, expire, or be disbelieved, meant that legality itself was experienced as provisional and revocable (Coutin, 2003).

In this sense, surveillance was not limited to institutional oversight but diffused through the very artefacts that mediated legal status. It turned legality into a daily rehearsal of compliance, where the act of being seen replaced the assurance of being recognised. For asylum seekers, the omnipresence of documentation and reporting produced a form of anticipatory obedience,

a vigilance sustained in the absence of certainty (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Griffiths, 2014). Under such conditions, surveillance becomes the rhythm through which volatility is governed, serving as an enduring reminder that legality must always be performed but can never be secured (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Foucault, 1995).

4.5.7 Legal Consciousness, Volatility, and Everyday Life

The preceding analysis has shown that asylum seekers encounter law not as a fixed authority but as a shifting terrain. Through bureaucracy, volatility, mediation, constrained agency, and surveillance, legal consciousness emerges as an embodied negotiation of instability. The empirical material brings into view the collapse of the boundary between law and legality that Ewick and Silbey (1998) treated as conceptually distinct. Under the asylum regime, law does not operate as an external structure while legality circulates autonomously in cultural practice; the two intertwine, converging in the daily routines of letters, reporting centres, and documentation. Law's authority is not encountered occasionally but continuously, imprinted in paper, gestures, and expectations. It is at once distant and intimate, diffuse yet decisive.

Collapsing Boundaries: Law and Legality Entwined

Participants' accounts revealed that legality is inseparable from the administrative apparatus that sustains it. Every notice, signature, and card becomes a vessel of legal meaning. The formal and the everyday are no longer parallel spheres but a single, overlapping field in which power is enacted through procedure. This collapse destabilises the assumption, central to classical socio-legal theory, that individuals possess interpretive freedom in their engagements with law (Ewick & Silbey, 1998). Instead, asylum seekers experience legality as something done to them prior to any possibility of interpretation or action. The result is a legal consciousness that is both pervasive and hollowed out, one in which law governs every aspect of existence while its rationale remains opaque.

From Vulnerability to Volatility

This analysis extends existing socio-legal accounts of migrant legality. Menjívar's (2006) concept of liminal legality illuminated suspension between inclusion and exclusion, yet within the asylum regime suspension gives way to continual motion, as rights are granted and withdrawn in rapid sequence. Abrego and Lakhani's (2015) account of legal precarity captured vulnerability as structurally produced, but transitional legal consciousness reframes this condition as volatility operating as governance, a system that institutionalises instability itself. Coutin's (2003) insight that illegality constitutes a social condition remains equally salient, yet here that condition is not characterised by static invisibility but by rhythmic exposure, sustained through the repeated requirement to prove existence via documents, appointments, and signatures. Transitional legal consciousness thus draws these strands together, making visible the mechanisms through which uncertainty is rendered durable and self-perpetuating.

Living Law as Everyday Terrain

The empirical accounts reveal that legality is not merely interpreted but embodied and inhabited. It enters the body as vigilance, exhaustion, and fear; it organises relationships through dependency and mistrust; and it structures time through waiting, suspension, and abrupt demand. Legal consciousness, in this sense, is not an abstract interpretive lens but a lived terrain shaped by compliance and resistance enacted under coercive conditions (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Silbey, 2005). What appears as routine behaviour, such as signing, keeping letters, and contacting agencies, constitutes the daily labour of sustaining legality within an environment that continually threatens to withdraw it. Law's authority endures not through stability but through repetition, through the ongoing performance of conformity in the face of uncertainty and the enactment of order within a system that persistently destabilises it.

Surveillance as the Infrastructure of Volatility

Surveillance extended beyond formal encounters with the Home Office to the material infrastructures through which legal presence was continually verified and monitored. Participants spoke of letters, ID cards, and proof-of-address documents as objects that materialised legal identity and had to be defended constantly. Vida explained:

Without the card, you cannot do anything, not even register with the GP. You feel invisible² (Participant 2, Iranian woman)

These artefacts do not merely record legality; they perform it. Recognition depends on their possession, their legibility, and their timely presentation. Legality thus becomes embodied in paper, fragile, transferable, and easily lost, so that everyday interactions require asylum seekers to demonstrate and verify their legal presence through documents and other routine encounters with authorities (Griffiths, 2014; Mountz, 2010).

Other participants described how surveillance was diffused through localised authorities such as housing managers or welfare providers, whose decisions carried the same weight as formal orders. Under the asylum support framework established by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and administered by the Home Office, people seeking asylum who receive accommodation through Home Office support are required to live at the address allocated to them, unless they can provide evidence, for example from a GP or another relevant organisation, demonstrating a need to reside in a particular location (UK Parliament, 1999; Home Office, 2024b; Gower, 2024). In practice, securing such evidence is often time-consuming and difficult, particularly in the context of limited legal knowledge and language barriers. Absence from this address is regulated through formal conditions. Residents must seek

² NHS England guidance allows GP registration without ID; the quote reflects the participant's experience of de facto barriers.

permission if they intend to be away for more than seven consecutive days and they cannot be absent for more than fourteen days within any six-month period. Within initial accommodation, breach of these conditions may lead to a notice to quit which normally gives no less than seven calendar days to vacate the accommodation. Because residence at an allocated address forms part of the asylum support system, accommodation operates not simply as provision but also as a mechanism through which the presence, conduct, and availability to the authorities can be continually monitored. In this way, accommodation becomes an infrastructure through which private contractors and accommodation staff mediate the practical enforcement of asylum support conditions on behalf of the state (Gower, 2024). Minoo reflected on this ambiguity of power:

The hotel manager says it is the Home Office rules, even when it is just their own decision. But you cannot argue. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

Under the UK asylum accommodation system, most housing is operated by private contractors such as Serco, Mears, or Clearsprings Ready Homes, who manage dispersal properties and contingency hotels on behalf of the Home Office (Darling, 2016b; Hynes, 2011). Within these settings, residents are subject to locally enforced ‘house rules’, for example, restrictions on visitors, curfews, room inspections, or bans on cooking, which are often presented as government policy but devised and applied at the discretion of staff. Breach of these rules can lead to written warnings, loss of accommodation, or reports to the Home Office.

Minoo’s experience illustrates how this privatised model of governance blurs accountability, as authority is dispersed across multiple institutions while each appears to speak with the voice of the state. The line between administration and law collapses, with private decisions acquiring the force and legitimacy of official orders. This diffusion of control reinforces a pervasive

atmosphere of surveillance, in which the boundaries of legality are continually redrawn by those tasked with managing compliance on the ground.

In these narratives, surveillance is not an external imposition but a condition of life. It governs through presence and anticipation, producing what participants described as constant vigilance, a need to be ready, to prove, to explain, to show. Legality operates as a state of continuous exposure, where recognition must be reaffirmed in every interaction and where error, delay, or misunderstanding may carry severe consequences.

Within transitional legal consciousness, surveillance represents the material infrastructure of volatility. It transforms legality into a daily rehearsal of obedience, where the act of being seen substitutes for stability or protection. The asylum system's power lies not in overt coercion but in its ability to make uncertainty visible and continuous. Surveillance, in this sense, is the rhythm through which volatility becomes governance, a dispersed and enduring reminder that legality must always be performed but never secured.

From Volatility toward Wellbeing

Foregrounding these dynamics allows transitional legal consciousness to extend socio-legal theory beyond Ewick and Silbey's (1998) original typology. In contexts of displacement and precarious status, legal consciousness cannot be understood solely as belief, interpretation, or strategy. It is instead a temporally patterned experience in which governance operates through flux and adaptation becomes a mode of endurance. This framework resonates more broadly across other regimes structured by conditional recognition and administrative volatility, such as welfare conditionality or temporary migration schemes (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Menjívar, 2006).

Within the context of this thesis, however, its significance lies more immediately in establishing the foundation for wellbeing. The analysis demonstrates that asylum seekers' capacity for material, subjective, and relational stability is inseparable from the legal conditions that frame their existence (Sumner & Mallett, 2013). Legal consciousness, in its transitional form, constitutes the ground from which all other dimensions of wellbeing are negotiated. It is the substrate through which uncertainty is absorbed, translated, and occasionally resisted.

The following chapters trace these interconnections in detail, examining how the volatility of law reverberates across economic life, emotional health, and social relations. In doing so, they continue the analytical movement from governance through instability to the everyday pursuit of equilibrium, belonging, and recognition.

4.6 Conclusion: Legal Consciousness as the Groundwork of Wellbeing

This chapter has examined how law is encountered, interpreted, and endured in the everyday lives of asylum seekers. It has shown that legal consciousness, far from being a stable orientation or a matter of interpretive freedom, is lived as continual recalibration in the face of volatility. Law, legality, and daily existence are not separable domains but interwoven dimensions of governance. Through bureaucratic routines, procedural opacity, and the perpetual possibility of reversal, asylum seekers experience law as both omnipresent and unstable, a force that structures life while refusing to offer security.

At the conceptual level, the chapter extended socio-legal theories of legal consciousness by developing the notion of transitional legal consciousness. Building on but departing from Ewick and Silbey's (1998) framework, it argued that the interpretive freedom they attribute to legality collapses under the volatility of the asylum regime. Asylum seekers do not stand

before, with, or against the law as discrete positions; they are compelled to move continually among them, as the terrain itself shifts beneath their feet. In contrast to Menjívar's (2006) liminal legality, where migrants are suspended between inclusion and exclusion, and Abrego and Lakhani's (2015) legal precarity, where vulnerability is structurally embedded, transitional legal consciousness foregrounds volatility as governance. The uncertainty that defines asylum is not an aberration or failure of administration but the very mechanism through which compliance, dependency, and endurance are sustained.

The testimonies discussed throughout the chapter make visible the everyday textures of this instability. Law is felt through letters, reporting obligations, dispersal orders, and documentation, artefacts through which legality is both materialised and mediated. It is experienced as bureaucracy and surveillance, as waiting and interruption, and as the fragile interpretation of rules filtered through intermediaries and institutions. The bureaucratic field of asylum governance transforms legality into a form of daily labour, where maintaining one's legal existence requires constant attention, repetition, and procedural compliance. This is not a mere administrative burden but a lived practice through which legality is both endured and reproduced. Legal consciousness thus emerges as an embodied condition, marked by vigilance, mistrust, and constrained adaptation.

What this chapter reveals, then, is not only how asylum seekers understand law but how law inhabits them. It resides in their routines, their temporal rhythms, and their affective states. It structures when and where they can move, whom they can trust, and how they can imagine the future. Legal consciousness, in its transitional form, transforms instability into the organising principle of life. Its significance lies not in the interpretive meanings individuals ascribe to law, but in the adaptive practices through which they negotiate its volatility, keeping letters,

attending appointments, complying with demands they may not understand, and recalibrating strategies with every new policy change. These practices demonstrate that law's authority is maintained not only through coercion but through the repetition of uncertainty, through the need to act as if stability were possible.

The argument advanced here contributes to socio-legal theory by reimagining legal consciousness as a dynamic process rather than a patterned orientation. It proposes that in contexts of displacement and precarious status, legality cannot circulate autonomously as cultural meaning but collapses into the formal machinery of governance. The resulting condition, transitional legal consciousness, captures the lived experience of navigating law in motion. It exposes the ways in which governance operates not through clarity or closure but through the perpetual deferral of both. Instability becomes the condition of endurance, uncertainty, the architecture of control.

Within the structure of this thesis, these insights provide the foundation for the chapters that follow. Legal consciousness constitutes the terrain upon which asylum seekers' wellbeing is built, constrained, and continually negotiated. Material security, emotional stability, and social connectedness are shaped through the fragile scaffolding of legality that this chapter has traced. The volatility of legal recognition, its sudden grants and withdrawals, its procedural opacity and bureaucratic reach, reverberates across every other dimension of life. To understand wellbeing under the asylum regime, one must begin here: with legality as the unstable ground on which all else rests.

The next chapters therefore move from the analytical conditions of legality established here to their experiential articulation, tracing how instability shapes material, subjective, and relational

wellbeing. They examine how the continual recalibration demanded by law inflects daily survival, emotional endurance, and social belonging. In doing so, they extend the argument that legality is not only a structure of governance but a structure of life, constituting the very possibilities through which security, hope, and recognition are pursued.

Chapter 5

Material Wellbeing

5.1 Introduction

Human wellbeing refers to the conditions through which individuals are able to sustain life, maintain dignity, and exercise agency within their social worlds. As established earlier in the thesis, wellbeing is increasingly understood as relational, processual, and shaped by structural contexts that enable or constrain people's capacity to live well (McGregor, 2007; White, 2010). In the context of forced migration, wellbeing is not simply an outcome of individual resilience or adaptation but is profoundly shaped by legal status, institutional arrangements, and the material conditions imposed by host states (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hynie, 2018).

This chapter examines wellbeing through its material dimension, as it is experienced by asylum seekers navigating the UK asylum system. Drawing on the multidimensional framework introduced in the Key Concepts section (Sumner & Mallett, 2013), the chapter focuses on material wellbeing as one analytically distinct dimension within a wider, interrelated process. Rather than restating the full framework, the analysis centres on how access to basic resources is organised and constrained under asylum governance.

While these dimensions are analytically separated across the thesis for clarity, they are not experienced as discrete in everyday life. Following McGregor's (2007) relational approach, this study understands wellbeing as emerging through the interaction between material conditions, subjective experience, and social relations. This chapter therefore treats material wellbeing as foundational, recognising that access to resources simultaneously shapes

emotional life, social participation, and future orientation. This perspective is particularly relevant in asylum contexts, where institutional arrangements regulate subsistence while conditioning how individuals understand themselves and their prospects under legal uncertainty.

Material wellbeing is understood here in relation to three core domains, financial support, accommodation, and food, through which the state organises subsistence during the asylum process. Together, these domains shape the material conditions under which everyday life is sustained, regulated, and rendered precarious. Rather than functioning as neutral or technical forms of support, financial allowances, housing arrangements, and food provision are delivered through bureaucratic systems that frequently operate at or below subsistence thresholds, with significant consequences for autonomy, dignity, and material security.

Attending to material wellbeing is particularly important in the asylum context because it constitutes the infrastructural foundation upon which other dimensions of wellbeing are formed. Inadequate material conditions do not simply produce discrete hardships; they structure how asylum seekers move through space, manage time and waiting, relate to institutions and others, and experience their own agency within conditions of legal uncertainty. By examining financial support, accommodation, and food in detail, this chapter foregrounds the concrete mechanisms through which the asylum system governs everyday life. In doing so, it establishes the material terrain that underpins the subsequent analysis of subjective and relational wellbeing, while remaining analytically anchored in the conditions of subsistence through which power is exercised and lived.

5.2 Financial support

Financial support constitutes a core component of material wellbeing for asylum seekers, structuring access to basic resources through tightly regulated policy frameworks. The UK asylum system operates on the assumption that people seeking protection should have their essential needs met by a minimal, state-controlled allowance rather than through labour or mainstream welfare. This structure emerged from a series of reforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s, most notably the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which removed asylum seekers from general social security systems and introduced a separate, lower-rate support regime (Hynes, 2011; UK Parliament, 1999). Prior to these reforms, asylum seekers accessed mainstream benefits, but concerns about so-called ‘pull factors’, combined with intensifying political narratives around welfare restriction and border control, led to the creation of a parallel support system designed to provide only the most basic subsistence (Mayblin, 2017; Morris, 2010). Scholars argue that these changes were central to establishing a deterrent architecture in which poverty becomes institutionalised as part of the asylum process (Bloch & Schuster, 2002; Campbell, 2011; Mayblin, 2017).

This system is closely linked to the UK’s longstanding prohibition on asylum seekers working during their claim, except in narrow, highly restricted circumstances. By removing access to the labour market while simultaneously providing extremely limited financial support, the policy framework generates a condition of enforced dependency that prevents individuals from meeting their own needs and positions them instead as recipients of state-controlled subsistence (Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). This configuration of limited income, prohibition on work, and continual monitoring forms part of what Darling (2016b) describes as a broader governance logic aimed at regulating mobility through material constraint rather than overt coercion. In

this context, poverty is not incidental but structurally produced, shaping asylum seekers' daily lives, options, and capacities for autonomy.

According to the Home Office, the financial support provided to asylum seekers is as follows:

You'll usually get £49.18 [every week] for each person in your household. This will help you pay for things you need like food, clothing, and toiletries. Your allowance will be loaded onto a debit card (ASPEN card) each week. You'll be able to use the card to get cash from a cash machine. If your accommodation provides your meals, you'll get £8.86 for each person in your household instead. (Government Digital Service, 2024)

In practice, asylum seekers accommodated in full-board hotels, where meals are provided, receive a significantly reduced weekly allowance (£8.86 per person per week), compared to £49.18 per person per week for those living in dispersal accommodation with cooking facilities (Home Office, 2024b; Gower, 2024). This distinction rests on the assumption that individuals in hotel accommodation have reduced food-related costs. However, research consistently shows that the lower allowance is insufficient to cover other essential expenses, including clothing, toiletries, transport, communication, and children's needs, resulting in persistent material hardship despite the provision of meals (Lessard-Phillips et al., 2021; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008).

It is also important to note that access to financial support is not automatic. Asylum seekers must apply for Section 95 support through Migrant Help, the Home Office–contracted organisation responsible for providing advice and assistance with asylum support applications. Only once an application is approved are individuals issued an ASPEN card, a restricted prepaid payment card onto which the weekly allowance is loaded.

While the ASPEN card functions as a basic means of subsistence, it also operates as an administrative mechanism through which financial support is regulated and monitored. Spending is subject to restrictions, and transaction data may be reviewed by the Home Office and its contractors, linking welfare provision to systems of oversight and control. In this sense, financial support is not merely an economic resource but part of a broader governance infrastructure that shapes how asylum seekers navigate everyday life. As Darling (2016b) argues, such arrangements exemplify the fusion of welfare and border control, where material support is delivered through mechanisms that simultaneously constrain autonomy and regulate mobility.

Minoo's account illustrates the procedural opacity surrounding access to financial support within the asylum system. Despite having been in the UK for over a year, she only applied for Section 95 support shortly before the interview, following direct assistance from Migrant Help. During this period, she was living in full-board hotel accommodation where meals were provided, but she had not applied for Section 95 subsistence support and therefore had no access to the weekly cash allowance available to asylum seekers. She was unaware that she needed to apply separately in order to receive financial support. Reflecting on this delay, she explained:

I was pregnant, and after being here for two months, I didn't know I should apply for Section 95 and would receive financial support. I was told to do so when I arrived, but I couldn't do it as I didn't know what I should do. It wasn't until last week that I called Migrant Help, and they helped me to fill out a form as I need money for my baby to buy nappies. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

When asked whether she had received, or applied for, any additional pregnancy-related support, including the maternity payment or supplementary allowances available under Section 95 for expectant mothers, she appeared uncertain about what these provisions referred to. She

responded that she had only applied for Section 95 the previous week and did not know of any other forms of assistance. Her lack of awareness extended not only to the application process itself but also to the differentiated entitlements embedded within the asylum support regime.

Minoo's story illustrates the confusion and lack of guidance that many asylum seekers face when navigating the bureaucratic processes required to access essential financial support. The delay in receiving Section 95 support left her in a vulnerable position, especially as a pregnant woman with a newborn on the way. Such confusion is not incidental but reflects a wider pattern in the asylum support system, where individuals are often provided with limited, unclear, or inconsistent information about their entitlements and the procedures required to access them. Research shows that asylum support is administered through a complex system of contracted and case-processed routes that can be difficult to navigate in practice, with accountability and guidance often mediated through commissioned advice and issue-reporting structures rather than a single clear point of responsibility (Doctors of the World UK, 2025; National Audit Office, 2025). This administrative complexity and lack of navigable clarity can operate as a post-migration stressor, compounding uncertainty and undermining people's capacity to secure basic subsistence, pressures that become especially acute where care needs are heightened, including during pregnancy and early parenthood (Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). In this sense, Minoo's experience is emblematic of a broader structural problem. Rather than enabling access to subsistence, the system often requires individuals to navigate complex administrative demands with minimal support, thereby intensifying material insecurity at the very moment they are most dependent on it.

Ramin's experience further underscores the difficulties asylum seekers face while waiting for their financial support to be processed. During the interview he described the months following

his arrival in the UK, when repeated relocations between hotels meant that he and his family had no access to regular financial support. At the time of the interview, he explained that during this period they relied partly on local charities and community organisations. For example, during the winter they received warm clothing and occasional cash-based assistance to purchase basic items such as hygiene products. However, this support remained limited and irregular. Ramin also expressed uncertainty about whether any official correspondence regarding his Section 95 support application had reached the hotels where he had previously been accommodated, as several relocations had taken place during the same period. He explained:

Until we got the ASPEN card, we didn't receive any money. When we were in London for about a month and then transferred to another hotel, we didn't have any money. So, for almost the first five months until we came to Milton Keynes, where we got the ASPEN card, we didn't receive any money. Now, they deposit some amount on the ASPEN card every week. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

Ramin's account highlights the extended periods during which asylum seekers may be left without any financial resources, exacerbating their sense of instability and insecurity. The reliance on the ASPEN card, while essential for accessing the weekly allowance, also becomes a source of stress when the card is delayed or not issued promptly. In the context of financial support, instability does not only arise from sudden relocations or changes in accommodation but also from administrative gaps in income provision, where long waits for ASPEN activation leave individuals without the means to meet even the most basic daily needs. Empirical evidence indicates that such financial discontinuities are produced through administrative delays and fragmented systems of support (National Audit Office, 2025), while their effects are experienced as acute forms of material precarity, leaving individuals unable to meet basic needs and, in some cases, forcing reliance on charitable provision, informal support networks, or periods of going without essentials (Doctors of the World UK, 2025; Refugee Action, 2023;

Refugee Survival Trust & British Red Cross, 2021). This form of insecurity is structurally produced, as asylum seekers are prohibited from working and excluded from mainstream welfare, meaning that interruptions in state-issued financial support can translate into immediate material hardship (Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). Ramin's experience therefore illustrates how financial support systems, when characterised by delays, gaps, or administrative failures, reinforce a broader landscape of uncertainty, not through dramatic upheavals but through the quiet, everyday absence of reliable resources.

Amir, another asylum seeker, faced similar challenges with delays in receiving his first payment. When asked how long it took him to receive financial support, he replied:

Two weeks ago. I didn't have it for almost two and a half months. I had about fifty pounds with me when I came, and that was it. I didn't leave the hotel because I had no money. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

Amir's situation sheds light on the isolation and helplessness that many asylum seekers experience while waiting for their financial support to begin. With only fifty pounds to his name, he was effectively confined to his hotel, unable to afford transportation or even basic necessities. The long wait for his ASPEN card and the associated financial support left him in what he described as a suspended state, 'I didn't leave the hotel because I had no money', illustrating how financial deprivation produces a form of enforced immobility. Rather than enabling minimal participation in daily life, the absence of income produces a form of administratively induced limbo, in which the capacity to meet basic needs and exercise everyday autonomy is constrained through prolonged waiting, uncertainty, and material deprivation (Darling, 2016b; Griffiths, 2014; Hynes, 2011; Mayblin, 2017). Delays in financial support therefore consolidate a condition of dependency that restricts movement, social participation, and autonomy (Griffiths, 2014; Mayblin, 2017; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021).

These delays in payments are often tied not only to the complexities of the Section 95 application process but also to issues surrounding the delivery of the ASPEN card, which is essential for asylum seekers to access their financial support. The bureaucratic hurdles involved in processing Section 95 applications can be daunting, leading to significant delays that leave asylum seekers without financial resources for extended periods. Additionally, when asylum seekers are moved to new accommodations, the ASPEN card may be sent to their previous address, causing further delays and compounding their frustration and anxiety.

Ramin later described how these delays unfolded in practice. He explained that his Section 95 application took four long months to be processed, a period during which he was left without the financial means to cover even his most basic needs. After finally receiving the approval letter, he expected to get his ASPEN card shortly thereafter. However, the card did not arrive. When he contacted Migrant Help, he was informed that the card had been sent to his address and that it should arrive within 10 days. Despite this assurance, the card never arrived. After making several follow-up calls to Migrant Help, Ramin discovered that the card had been mistakenly sent to his previous accommodation. This error meant that he would have to wait an additional 10 days to receive a new card, further prolonging his period without financial support. Ramin's experience highlights the inefficiencies and lack of coordination that can leave asylum seekers in an incredibly vulnerable position, struggling to meet their daily needs while navigating an already complex and stressful situation.

Asghar was 55 and had been in the asylum process for around ten months when I spoke with him. At the time, he was living in hotel accommodation and had experienced difficulties accessing financial support. Reflecting on how this constrained his capacity to meet everyday personal needs, he explained:

You are a woman, I can't mention everything to you... but I need to buy some necessary stuff, and I couldn't have bought them with no money. Not everything is food; I have food in this hotel, but I need other stuff too for personal hygiene. (Participant 29, Afghan man)

Asghar's experience underscores a critical issue that often goes overlooked, the financial support provided to asylum seekers is not solely for food but also for other essential items, such as personal hygiene products, clothing, and other necessities. Without timely access to their ASPEN cards, asylum seekers like Asghar are left in a difficult position where they must go without these basic necessities, further eroding their dignity and wellbeing.

The delays in both the Section 95 application process and the delivery of the ASPEN card create a cascade of problems for asylum seekers, leaving them financially stranded and unable to access the resources they need to live with basic comfort and dignity. These challenges are exacerbated by the frequent moves between accommodations, which disrupt the delivery of vital documents and support. The resulting delays can stretch on for weeks and months, leaving asylum seekers 'in a state of limbo', where they are unable to fully integrate into society or manage their daily lives effectively.

The financial support provided to asylum seekers is widely recognised as insufficient, a concern that is consistently echoed in their responses when questioned about their weekly allowance. Often, when asked if they believed the allowance was adequate, the immediate and almost unanimous response was a firm 'not enough'. This sentiment reflects broader public debates in which charities and advocacy organisations have repeatedly argued that asylum support rates fall far below the minimum required to meet essential living needs. Organisations such as the Refugee Council, British Red Cross have criticised the government for setting rates that do not reflect the real cost of food, transport, children's essentials, or inflation, noting that asylum seekers are expected to survive on an income significantly lower than mainstream welfare

benefits (British Red Cross, 2025a; Refugee Action, 2023; RST & British Red Cross, 2021). These groups have called for an evidence-based uplift aligned with the Minimum Income Standard, arguing that the current rates ‘entrench poverty by design’ and prevent people from meeting basic nutritional and hygiene needs. By contrast, the government maintains that the current allowance is ‘sufficient to meet essential living needs’ and emphasises that accommodation and utilities are provided (Home Office, 2024b), revealing a persistent gap between lived experience and policy rationale.

Reza voiced the frustration and struggle that many in his position experience:

You are living in this country; you see how expensive everything is...
What can I do with 46 pounds a week? Buy food? Buy winter clothes?
Buy hygiene items? (Participant 9, Iranian man)

His words highlight a critical issue, the disconnect between the actual cost of living in the UK and the amount provided to asylum seekers. The weekly allowance, intended to cover essential needs, often leaves individuals like Reza in a constant state of financial strain. With the rising cost of living, particularly in urban areas, the limited funds are quickly exhausted, forcing asylum seekers to make impossible choices between basic necessities. This dynamic reflects what Morris (2010) identifies as the production of destitution within the UK asylum system, where welfare arrangements are calibrated at levels so low that hardship becomes structurally embedded rather than incidental. In this context, Reza’s calculation of what can be afforded each week is not merely an individual budgeting dilemma but an outcome of a system that normalises scarcity as part of the asylum process.

The meagre allowance is expected to cover not only food but also clothing, hygiene products, and transportation. In practice, however, it scarcely extends beyond the cost of food alone,

leaving little capacity to meet other essential needs. As seasons change, the need for appropriate clothing, particularly warm winter clothing, quickly becomes urgent, yet remains largely unaffordable on £46 a week. The same applies to hygiene products, which are essential for maintaining health and dignity but become discretionary expenditures under such constrained budgets. These pressures reveal how insufficient financial support structures daily life around deprivation, narrowing the possibilities for stability and wellbeing.

Another significant issue that emerged from the interviews, alongside concerns about clothing and food, was transportation. For many asylum seekers, the financial support they receive is insufficient to cover the costs of travel, which poses a serious challenge for attending essential appointments, such as GP visits, school runs, and grocery shopping. This issue is particularly acute for those housed in accommodations located far from these essential services, leaving them in a difficult position where they must choose between spending their limited funds on travel or walking long distances to meet their needs.

Many asylum seekers reported having to walk for about an hour just to buy groceries because their weekly allowance does not account for travel expenses. This walk, often undertaken in harsh weather conditions, is not just a physical burden but also an emotional one, adding to the stress and exhaustion already felt by those trying to navigate life in an unfamiliar country. The time and energy spent on these long walks could be better used for other important activities, such as learning the language, attending educational courses, or engaging with the local community. However, the lack of financial means for transportation leaves them with little choice.

As a result, many asylum seekers live in a state of constant financial stress, struggling to stretch their limited funds to meet even the most basic requirements. This financial strain takes a significant toll on their mental and physical wellbeing, exacerbating the challenges they already face as they navigate the asylum process. The stress of not knowing whether they can afford their next meal, purchase necessary hygiene products, or keep themselves warm during winter creates a pervasive sense of insecurity and instability.

Monir, sharing her heartbreaking story, revealed the harsh realities she faces:

My child missed four years of school and now has one set of clothes. If it rains, I have to wash and dry them for the next day. He doesn't have a spare set for winter. They gave us second-hand, torn clothes. They see every refugee as someone who wants free money, not understanding our actual problems. I had a good life in Iran, but circumstances forced us to leave. Life in Iran and here is very different. In Iran, I had a job, and my child went to school. Here, I have to start from scratch. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Her words capture how financial insufficiency intersects with stigma and institutional neglect. The statement 'they gave us second-hand, torn clothes. They see every refugee as someone who wants free money, not understanding our actual problems' reveals more than frustration; it reflects a wider moral narrative embedded in asylum support. UK scholarship shows that asylum seekers are frequently positioned within a 'culture of disbelief', in which their needs are treated with suspicion and their claims morally scrutinised (Jubany, 2017; Souter, 2011). Such framing enables welfare provision calibrated at deliberately minimal levels, as Morris (2010) argues in her analysis of the production of destitution within the asylum system. Monir's experience aligns with this literature; inadequate clothing is not simply an outcome of poverty but emerges from a system that normalises scarcity and interprets need through a lens of mistrust.

Her account also shows how material deprivation directly affects her son's educational access and sense of dignity. The absence of spare clothing means school attendance becomes contingent on weather conditions and the ability to wash and dry a single outfit overnight. This makes the most routine elements of childhood, attending school, socialising, travelling safely, dependent on precarious material circumstances. Monir elaborated on the daily stress this produces:

I stress every night, hoping it won't rain the next day so my child can go to school. A charity arranged for a second-hand bike from the city, but it's old and unsafe and he doesn't have a head guard. My child fell and got injured... now I'm worrying what will happen when it snows? I have no car to take him to school, and the government doesn't provide transportation. I contact Migrant Help, but they only send links and emails with no real assistance. I am very worried about his wellbeing and education both. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

The worry about weather conditions and the lack of proper clothing or transportation adds an additional layer of hardship to the already difficult lives of asylum seekers. The inadequate financial support means that parents are unable to purchase new or appropriate clothing for their children, leaving them to rely on second-hand, often unsuitable items. This situation not only affects their physical wellbeing but also their mental health, as they constantly worry about how they will manage from day to day. The government's minimal financial assistance does not account for these additional challenges, leaving families to struggle with inadequate resources.

Monir's account illustrates how financial insufficiency does not operate in isolation but intersects with wider structures of dispersal, immobility, and welfare restriction to shape children's everyday opportunities. The inability to afford basic items such as weather-appropriate clothing or safe transport transforms education, ordinarily a stabilising institution, into an uncertain and contingent experience. Research on post-migration living difficulties

similarly notes that material deprivation among asylum-seeking families frequently results in disrupted schooling, social withdrawal, and heightened parental anxiety, as routine participation in public life becomes dependent on fragile material conditions (Hynie, 2018; Lessard-Phillips et al., 2021). In this way, limited financial support functions not merely as economic constraint but as a mechanism that curtails children's social inclusion and undermines parents' capacity to provide care with dignity.

Furthermore, this insufficient financial support perpetuates a cycle of poverty and dependency, making it nearly impossible for asylum seekers to gain any sense of autonomy or stability. When income is calibrated at subsistence level and access to work is simultaneously restricted, people are locked into a state of enforced dependency on a system that does not meet their basic needs. This has implications not only for the present but also for the future, studies suggest that prolonged periods of destitution, enforced idleness, and marginalisation during the asylum process can have lasting effects on educational trajectories, employability, and mental health even after refugee status is granted or leave to remain is secured (Hynie, 2018; Morris, 2010). The daily struggle to meet immediate needs crowds out the time, energy, and resources required for language learning, training, or community participation, activities that are later expected as markers of 'successful integration' (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hynie, 2018).

The difficulty in affording transportation extends beyond just accessing basic services. For many asylum seekers, attending religious services, such as church on Sundays, is a vital part of their routine. It provides not only spiritual solace but also a sense of community and connection, which is particularly important given the isolation many feel in their new environment. However, the cost of transportation can be prohibitive, making regular attendance a struggle. Homa emphasised this challenge:

We need to go to church, not only for praying, but also because of our case with the Home Office. We need to provide a letter proving that we have been attending church to support our cases... Going to church by bus costs 2 pounds each way, so 4 pounds a week, and I'm receiving 8 pounds a week. How can I live on 4 pounds? (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Homa's situation underscores a critical point, the financial support provided to asylum seekers is so minimal that even small expenses, like a bus fare, can have significant consequences. The need to attend church regularly, not only for religious reasons but also to gather evidence to support their asylum claims, is a matter of survival. Yet, with only £8 a week, Homa is forced to choose between attending church or being able to afford basic necessities for the rest of the week. This kind of choice exemplifies how structural insufficiency in support transforms ordinary acts of participation into luxury goods.

Moreover, the inability to afford transportation isolates asylum seekers from crucial services and opportunities that could aid in their integration. Access to healthcare is one such area where transportation is vital. Health is recognised in international human rights law as a fundamental right, and successive UN Special Rapporteurs on the human rights of migrants and on the right to health have highlighted that states must ensure effective, non-discriminatory access for migrants and asylum seekers, including practical accessibility such as transport and information (International Organization for Migration et al., 2013; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2000). In practice, however, participants described missing GP appointments, counselling sessions, or hospital follow-ups because they could not afford bus fares, particularly when living in dispersed accommodation far from services. For families with children, the cost of transport to school or extracurricular activities becomes an additional burden, with implications for attendance, social participation, and educational continuity.

The impact of these transportation barriers goes beyond inconvenience; it shapes the overall quality of everyday life. The constant need to calculate whether a journey is ‘worth’ the cost reinforces feelings of entrapment and marginalisation. Asylum seekers find themselves confined to their immediate surroundings, cut off from religious communities, friends, legal advice, health services, and educational opportunities. The isolation produced by this enforced immobility intensifies existing psychological strain, adding another layer to the material and emotional constraints already documented in participants’ accounts.

Many participants owned a mobile phone when they arrived in the UK, which often remained their primary means of navigating unfamiliar systems and maintaining contact with family abroad. However, some interviewees did not initially have access to a smartphone and relied on charities or local support organisations to obtain one. Even where individuals possessed a phone, this did not guarantee connectivity. Access to a SIM card and affordable mobile data was frequently difficult to secure, particularly during the first weeks after arrival. Despite the central role that mobile communication plays in contacting Migrant Help, legal representatives, and healthcare providers, there is no consistent national provision through which newly arrived asylum seekers are supplied with phones, SIM cards, or mobile connectivity. Within the UK asylum support framework, the Home Office provides accommodation and a limited financial allowance, while support structures primarily focus on housing, subsistence, and access to advice services such as Migrant Help rather than communication infrastructure. In practice, access to mobile connectivity often depends on individual’s limited financial resources or on temporary assistance from charities and local support organisations.

In this context, the ability to obtain a SIM card becomes a critical condition for navigating everyday life within the asylum system. For asylum seekers, the absence of a SIM card can

generate significant stress and isolation. In a world where communication is increasingly reliant on mobile technology, the lack of access to a SIM card can severely hinder an asylum seeker's ability to navigate daily life and access critical services.

Homa described her frustration with this situation:

Another issue was not having a SIM card when I arrived. They kept saying to call, but I had no SIM card or money to buy one. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

This simple yet profound statement highlights the predicament that many asylum seekers face upon their arrival. Without a SIM card, they are unable to make necessary phone calls to Migrant Help, their solicitors, or healthcare providers. This lack of communication capability exacerbates their sense of isolation and helplessness, as they are unable to reach out for the support they desperately need.

Shahin was 27 and had been in the asylum process for around four months when I spoke with him. Having initially spent time in a camp near Dover, he was living in hotel accommodation at the time of the interview. His account extended the difficulties associated with limited access to a SIM card beyond communication, showing how restricted mobile connectivity entered his everyday navigation of an unfamiliar environment:

We don't have enough money to use buses, so we walk to the city. We need internet outside to use the map; we got lost for 2 hours the first day we went to the city... we didn't have internet to even use Google Translate to ask people for help. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

Shahin's experience illustrates the critical role that mobile internet access plays in the daily lives of asylum seekers. In unfamiliar surroundings, the ability to access maps, translation tools, and communication apps is not just convenient but essential. The lack of a SIM card and mobile

data left Shahin and others in a vulnerable position, unable to navigate the city or communicate with locals for assistance, further deepening their sense of disorientation and alienation.

For asylum seekers, obtaining a SIM card is not as straightforward as it might be for others. Opening a bank account, which is typically required to access cheaper SIM cards and data plans, is a significant challenge. To open a bank account, asylum seekers need proof of address, a document that they can only obtain from their GPs. However, several interviewees reported that GPs often charge a fee ranging from £50 to £120 for this document, an amount that is prohibitively expensive for most asylum seekers. This financial barrier forces many to rely on pay-as-you-go SIM cards, which are often more costly and less convenient, especially for those with limited financial resources.

The inability to regularly top up these pay-as-you-go SIM cards only adds to the stress and difficulty of managing daily life. For asylum seekers, maintaining regular contact with Migrant Help, their solicitors, and their GPs is essential. These calls are not just about staying informed; they are crucial for progressing their asylum claims, receiving medical advice, and accessing support services. Without a reliable SIM card, even these basic necessities become difficult, if not impossible, to manage.

The lack of a SIM card also affects their ability to connect with their families back home, further intensifying feelings of isolation. For many asylum seekers, their mobile phone is the only link they have to loved ones in their home countries. The inability to maintain regular contact with family abroad adds a further layer of emotional strain that is distinct from, yet intertwined with, the vulnerabilities produced within the UK. Transnational communication ordinarily provides continuity, belonging, and psychological support during displacement

(Baldassar, 2016; Wilding, 2006). Yet for asylum seekers, material precarity makes even this basic relational practice fragile. The cost of topping up pay-as-you-go SIM cards, combined with restricted mobility and unstable income, means that communication is often irregular or interrupted. This precarity is compounded by constrained autonomy, as asylum seekers have limited control over when or how they can remain connected; digital access becomes contingent on weekly allowances, charging facilities, and the unpredictable rhythms of the asylum estate. At the same time, poor-quality digital infrastructures, limited data, unreliable connectivity, and barriers to obtaining affordable contracts constrain their ability to sustain relations that would otherwise buffer the emotional impact of displacement (Gillespie et al., 2016). As communication falters, the emotional labour of separation intensifies, deepening feelings of isolation and disorientation already produced by the asylum process.

Moreover, the inability to access affordable data plans limits asylum seekers' opportunities to engage with educational resources, learn the local language, or stay informed about their rights and the asylum process. In a world where so much information is accessed online, being cut off from the internet puts asylum seekers at a significant disadvantage, hindering their ability to integrate into society and advocate for themselves. While it might seem like a minor inconvenience, the difficulty in obtaining a SIM card is a significant issue that impacts multiple aspects of an asylum seeker's life. From basic communication and navigation to maintaining family connections and accessing essential services, the lack of a SIM card exacerbates the challenges they already face.

This challenging situation is further compounded by the fact that asylum seekers are often restricted from seeking employment, making them wholly dependent on the insufficient financial aid they receive. Under current policy, asylum seekers may apply for permission to

work only after waiting twelve months for an initial decision on their claim, and even then, any permission granted is restricted to roles listed on the Home Office's designated occupation lists (Home Office, 2024c). In practice, these lists encompass a narrow and specialist range of occupations that typically require formal qualifications, professional accreditation, or sector-specific experience that asylum seekers are unlikely to possess or be able to evidence while in the asylum system. As a result, access to paid employment remains largely symbolic rather than substantive, offering little realistic pathway out of enforced dependency (Calo et al., 2024; Right to Remain, 2025a).

While such restrictions are often justified by the state as necessary to prevent exploitation or labour market distortion, a substantial body of scholarship demonstrates that their primary effect is to institutionalise poverty and dependency within the asylum system. Morris (2010) shows how the prohibition on work operates in tandem with minimal welfare provision to produce conditions of enforced destitution, where survival becomes contingent on state discretion, charitable support, or informal coping strategies rather than meaningful autonomy. This is reinforced by more recent analyses of UK labour market policy, which highlight the contradiction between policy discourses that emphasise employability and self-reliance, and an asylum regime that structurally excludes people from work while simultaneously holding them responsible for their own 'integration' (Calo et al., 2024). Taken together, employment prohibition and inadequate financial support function not merely as income constraints but as mechanisms that erode agency and entrench dependency throughout the asylum process.

Reza expressed his frustration:

The only solution for us to resolve our financial difficulties is working illegally. Those who do that are doing better... My personality doesn't allow me to do something illegal; I am that kind of person... I feel a

sense of responsibility to respect the laws and culture of this society as a guest. As an individual, I need to try to align myself with the rules and regulations. This society may find it difficult to accept me, but I must also do my part to make this acceptance easier. (Participant 9, Iranian man)

Reza's quote sheds light on the deep internal conflict faced by many asylum seekers who are caught between their principles and the harsh realities of survival. His words, “The only solution for us to resolve our financial difficulties is working illegally. Those who do that are doing better...”, point to the existence of materially effective coping strategies that lie outside the formal support regime. That some people are ‘doing better’ is not presented as a moral judgement or behavioural norm, but as a recognition of uneven material outcomes generated by differential access to income. In practice, remaining within Home Office accommodation and Section 95 support can place asylum seekers at a material disadvantage, such that withdrawing from these arrangements becomes a means of securing basic subsistence where official provision proves insufficient. Within this configuration, informal work appears as a means of meeting basic needs where official provision proves insufficient (Asylum Matters, 2023; Holtom & Iqbal, 2020; Morris, 2010).

Crucially, Reza positions himself as unable to pursue this option. His insistence that ‘my personality doesn’t allow me to do something illegal’ signals a self-conception grounded in legality, compliance, and respect for the host society’s rules. This is not a passive disposition but an ethical orientation that carries material consequences. By refusing an avenue that could potentially alleviate deprivation, Reza remains fully exposed to the limits of asylum support and the prohibition on lawful employment. His continued compliance with the asylum regime therefore intensifies, rather than mitigates, material hardship, a dynamic Morris (2010) identifies as characteristic of systems in which welfare conditionality and labour market exclusion operate in tandem.

What emerges here is not a narrative of choice but of constraint. Reza's hardship is produced precisely through adherence to the system's expectations, remaining within Home Office accommodation, relying on a fixed allowance, and abstaining from informal labour. In contrast, access to additional material resources appears contingent on partial disengagement from official provision. As Darling (2016b) and Mayblin (2017) argue, such arrangements do not merely accompany the asylum system but are structurally generated by it, creating conditions in which deprivation is unevenly distributed. Those who remain fully compliant bear the brunt of welfare insufficiency, while informal coping strategies, though legally precarious and risky, may offer possibilities for meeting basic needs that the formal system withholds.

Reza's account foregrounds how compliance with the asylum system intensifies material deprivation when welfare support is insufficient and lawful employment is prohibited. Shahin's experience, by contrast, illustrates a different material response to the same structural constraints. Rather than reflecting divergent values or strategies, these accounts reveal how the asylum system itself generates uneven material outcomes, contingent on how individuals are positioned within, and constrained by, its limits. Where Reza absorbs the full consequences of compliance, Shahin's occasional resort to informal work reflects an attempt to mitigate the immediate material shortfalls produced by inadequate support.

Shahin elaborated on how he managed everyday expenses under these constraints. Although formally prohibited from working, he explained that he had found weekend work at a car wash located close to the hotel through another asylum seeker residing there. He described the owner as supportive, noting that he had been given warm clothing and was paid in cash. The income, he emphasised, was modest, but it enabled him to purchase basic necessities such as toiletries

and additional clothing that could not be covered by his weekly allowance. He also mentioned that several other asylum seekers from the hotel were working there informally.

Unlike Reza, Shahin did not frame this arrangement in explicitly moral terms. Rather, it appeared as a practical response to the material limitations of asylum support. Informal work operated as a means of supplementing insufficient provision, mitigating some of the immediate pressures associated with restricted income. In this sense, the prohibition on lawful employment does not eliminate economic activity; instead, it redirects it into informal and unregulated spaces, where subsistence depends on discretion and local tolerance. Financial insufficiency and labour market exclusion thus interact to produce uneven material outcomes within the asylum system. If Shahin's account illustrates how informal work mitigates immediate material shortfalls, Reza's reflections illuminate what is at stake when access to work is denied altogether.

Reza expressed the profound impact of this financial inadequacy:

Having a job really helps you to distance yourself from the destructive thoughts that occupy your mind. It helps you escape that feeling of uselessness and worthlessness that arises during a time when you feel like, well, I have nothing, I don't have many opportunities. Even my English isn't good enough to communicate effectively... But if the asylum system allows us to work, it will greatly benefit our wellbeing, language skills, and our dignity. We don't want them to give us money... just let us work. (Participant 9, Iranian man)

Reza's reflection on work extends the material analysis beyond income alone, revealing how employment functions as a stabilising infrastructure within everyday life. His statement, 'Having a job really helps you to distance yourself from the destructive thoughts that occupy your mind', should not be read primarily as a comment on individual motivation or self-esteem, but as an account of how access to work structures time, purpose, and material predictability

under conditions of prolonged uncertainty. In the absence of employment, asylum seekers are left with few mechanisms to organise daily life, regulate stress, or project themselves into the near future, conditions repeatedly identified as central features of post-migration precarity (Hynie, 2018; Laban et al., 2005). These consequences arise from a policy context in which access to work is systematically restricted, while responsibility for self-sufficiency is simultaneously imposed, embedding prolonged financial insecurity into the asylum process itself (Bloch, 2008).

Crucially, Reza links work not to aspiration or advancement, but to containment, a means of mitigating the psychological effects of enforced inactivity produced by the asylum regime. His description of ‘uselessness and worthlessness’ emerges not from unemployment per se, but from a system that combines prohibition on work with minimal welfare provision and prolonged waiting. As Morris (2010) demonstrates, this configuration reproduces dependency through everyday material arrangements, rendering individuals economically inactive while simultaneously holding them responsible for their own resilience and adjustment. In this sense, the affective consequences Reza describes are materially generated, they arise from a political economy that withholds both income and agency.

Importantly, Reza’s assertion, “we don’t want them to give us money... just let us work”, can be read as a refusal of the dependency relation imposed by asylum welfare. Sociologically, this statement articulates a demand not for increased provision, but for autonomy over the means of subsistence. Rather than positioning asylum seekers as passive recipients of aid, Reza frames work as a route out of enforced reliance on an allowance that is both insufficient and conditional. This resonates with scholarship showing that restrictions on employment are

experienced not simply as economic barriers but as mechanisms that undermine self-determination and reproduce material marginality (Bloch, 2008; Calo et al., 2024).

At the same time, Reza's account exposes a further contradiction. Even if permission to work were granted, the material conditions of asylum, including precarious accommodation, dispersal, limited transport, restricted digital access, and weak language support, would continue to constrain meaningful labour market participation. As Phillimore and Cheung (2021) note, no-choice accommodation and enforced mobility actively undermine the stability required to secure and sustain employment. In this way, precarity operates cumulatively. The denial of work is compounded by spatial instability and material insecurity, rendering employment both prohibited and practically unattainable.

Taken together, these accounts show that financial support within the UK asylum system is calibrated at a level that fails to sustain basic material security in everyday life. Low weekly allowances, delays in accessing Section 95 support, and reliance on restricted delivery mechanisms such as the ASPEN card produce conditions of ongoing scarcity rather than temporary assistance. These conditions are compounded by the prohibition on paid employment, which prevents asylum seekers from supplementing inadequate provision through lawful work. Financial precarity thus emerges not as episodic or accidental, but as structurally produced through the alignment of welfare insufficiency, administrative delay, and labour market exclusion.

In this context, financial hardship cannot be understood solely as a matter of income level. It shapes asylum seekers' capacity to meet everyday needs, maintain communication, move through space, and manage the practical demands of life while awaiting legal resolution.

Financial support therefore constitutes a central dimension of material wellbeing within the asylum process, structuring not only what resources are available, but how insecurity, dependency, and constraint are lived on a daily basis.

5.3 Accommodation Support

Accommodation represents a central mechanism through which the UK asylum system organises the everyday life of people seeking protection. While policy formally presents accommodation as a humanitarian provision, its structure reflects a broader rationality of dispersal, deterrence, and outsourced governance. Under the long-standing dispersal policy, asylum seekers are allocated housing on a ‘no-choice basis’ and are moved between initial and dispersal accommodation in line with the progression of their case (Gower, 2024). Initial accommodation is typically full-board, hostel-style, and formally designed for short stays; however, independent monitoring shows that in practice many individuals remain there for extended periods (Migration Observatory, 2025; National Audit Office, 2020).

Recent policy changes further illuminate the state’s underlying approach. The Home Office explicitly aims to reduce reliance on hotels by expanding ‘cheaper and more manageable’ forms of non-detained accommodation, including enforced room-sharing and the repurposing of former Ministry of Defence sites and vessels (Gower & Rankl, 2023). Although framed as pragmatic responses to system ‘pressure’, these measures operate within the wider logic of the hostile environment, where accommodation becomes an apparatus of migration control rather than a site of care. The government’s public guidance, emphasising that individuals ‘cannot choose where [they] live’ and are ‘unlikely to be housed in London or the South-East’, reinforces this asymmetrical power relation and the spatial disciplining embedded in asylum support (Home Office, 2024b).

Critical scholarship and monitoring bodies have long argued that asylum accommodation operates as a form of hostile accommodation, producing conditions that are materially inadequate and institutionally disempowering. Evidence of chronic disrepair, overcrowding, infestations, and weak contractor accountability is well documented within the UK's privatised asylum housing regime, where outsourcing and profit logics routinely outweigh welfare considerations (Darling, 2016b; National Audit Office, 2020; Refugee Council, 2023). The use of former military barracks has attracted sustained critique for replicating carceral environments and exacerbating trauma, prompting protests from residents, NGOs, and local communities (Amnesty International UK, 2023; Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 2024). Such analyses emphasise that asylum accommodation is not simply a sheltering infrastructure but a spatial technology of border governance that operates through segregation, instability, and symbolic degradation rather than care or protection (Darling, 2022; Davies et al., 2017).

These structural arrangements do not simply organise space; they shape the psychosocial conditions of everyday life, generating environments in which harm emerges through uncertainty, instability, and institutional neglect (Spira et al., 2025; Van Eggermont Arwidson et al., 2025). Research on asylum seekers' housing experiences shows that limited control over living conditions, insecure tenure, and repeated mobility intensify existing vulnerabilities and introduce new stressors, particularly anxiety, depression, and chronic distress (Spira et al., 2025; Ziersch et al., 2017). The mental health consequences of institutional and precarious accommodation are therefore not incidental but structurally produced. Poor housing conditions, overcrowding, insecurity of tenure, and the absence of privacy undermine recovery and stability, sustaining states of anxiety and insecurity rather than providing environments conducive to wellbeing (Spira et al., 2025; Ziersch et al., 2017).

Monir's account illustrates how the accommodation system organises individuals through administrative categories that take little account of mental health, relational needs, or the stabilising function of family. Upon arriving in the UK after a dangerous boat journey with her son, mother, sister, niece, and husband, she was placed in a reception centre. Despite being in visibly poor mental and physical condition, she was immediately separated from her wider family group. She explained:

We arrived by boat and spent one night in a reception centre due to my poor mental and physical condition. I was with my mother and sister, but they separated me and my son from them. I only spent one night there. From the group we were with on the boat, only my son and I were taken out. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Her narrative raises a central structural question. Is there any mechanism to assess mental or physical health needs, or relational vulnerability, before deciding where and with whom asylum seekers are accommodated? The evidence consistently suggests that such assessments are minimal or absent. Allocation processes are driven largely by availability, dispersal rules, and estate management rather than individual wellbeing (Darling, 2016b; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). Family separations often occur due to factors such as enforced room-sharing policies (which typically require same-sex adult groupings), limited multi-room units, or shortages in specific regions. Yet these logistical constraints operate without a parallel system to evaluate whether separation poses psychological risk or exacerbates existing distress.

Monir's experience exemplifies this dynamic. An administrative need to move people through the system superseded her need for proximity to her family, which was the primary emotional anchor available to her. The separation was not explained to her, nor was it contextualised or mitigated. The lack of relational assessment is consistent with research identifying dispersal as

a practice that routinely fragments support networks and intensifies vulnerability (Darling, 2022).

Her subsequent movements through the accommodation estate further reveal the absence of responsiveness to her deteriorating mental health. After being separated from her mother, sister, and niece, she and her son were transferred to a hotel near Heathrow. The stress of this transition quickly escalated her condition:

Three days after arriving at the Heathrow hotel, I had a nervous shock, and with heart palpitations, I was taken to the hospital. I spent one night in the hospital. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Despite this acute episode, an event that would normally warrant stabilisation and continuity of care, she was soon moved again:

Then they sent a letter saying I had to be quickly transferred, and I was sent to another hotel. I stayed at the Bridgewater hotel for almost four months. During this time, I was completely separated from my family. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

These repeated relocations exemplify what the literature terms bureaucratic non-responsiveness (Darling, 2011), a system that acknowledges movement but not meaning. Her health crisis did not interrupt dispersal logic; instead, dispersal proceeded unmodified, intensifying her isolation. Monir's description of being moved from site to site, each time further from her family, maps onto analyses showing how accommodation systems produce institutional disorientation, where asylum seekers' sense of place and relational grounding is repeatedly unsettled (Darling, 2022).

Over the following months, she was relocated again, this time to Milton Keynes, where she had no established ties. The cumulative effect of these moves, and the sustained absence of

family support, severely affected her mental health. When asked whether she had any choice in where she was sent, she replied:

No, there is no choice at all. They transfer you wherever they decide. I asked if they could place me somewhere without separating me from my family from the start. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Her plea for relational continuity was disregarded. Instead, accommodation was allocated according to availability across the national estate. Her sister and brother-in-law were placed in a London hotel, while her elderly mother, who Monir explained had undergone a kidney transplant, was sent to Glasgow. These placements reveal the structural logic of dispersal, families are routinely split across the country because large family units cannot always be accommodated together, and because the system prioritises occupancy rates over relational needs.

From a psychosocial perspective, the consequences of accommodation instability are profound. Research on post-migration stressors consistently demonstrates that uncertainty, forced mobility, and family separation are strongly associated with deteriorating mental health among asylum seekers (Gerritsen et al., 2004; Silove, 2000; Spira et al., 2025). Within the UK asylum system, accommodation operates not only as material provision but as an affective environment in which unpredictability, lack of control, and institutional opacity structure everyday experience. Monir's narrative reflects this dynamic. Separation was not a singular event but a repeated institutional practice, compounding distress over time.

Accommodation allocation within the asylum system rarely incorporates systematic screening for mental health vulnerability, chronic illness, or relational dependency. Decisions are shaped primarily by estate availability, room-sharing rules, and dispersal geography rather than

psychosocial need (Darling, 2016b; Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 2024). Yet research shows that privacy, stability, and proximity to trusted kin are central psychosocial determinants of wellbeing among displaced populations (Ager & Strang, 2008; Crepet et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2022; Ziersch et al., 2017). The tension between logistical allocation and relational care provides the structural context for Minoo's experience.

Minoo arrived in the UK with her mother and child. Shortly after being placed in a hotel, she discovered she was pregnant. Rather than providing stability, this period unfolded within conditions of uncertainty and emotional deterioration. As she recalled:

We went to the first hotel, where I found out I was pregnant. I was in a terrible mental state. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

Recognising her declining wellbeing, she contacted Migrant Help and requested to be placed with her mother or sister. She explained that pregnancy, childcare responsibilities, and worsening mental health required proximity to trusted kin. Her request was not acted upon. She described:

I asked Migrant Help to bring my mother or sister to be with me because I was pregnant and not feeling well. I had another child to care for. They did nothing. The management and staff were inhumane. They sent my mum to my hotel very late. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

Over the following months, her isolation intensified. She reported withdrawing from daily routines, remaining in her room, and losing her appetite. She stated:

I didn't eat for four days, didn't leave the room. My husband tried to take me out, but I told him not to talk to me. I needed someone to talk to, like a sister. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

In a moment of acute distress, she went downstairs and asked hotel staff to arrange a taxi to her sister's home, explaining that she was unwell and unable to cope alone. The staff refused,

stating that taxis were provided only for hospital visits. Shortly afterwards, she attempted suicide.

I was under so much pressure that after eight months in the hotel, I attempted suicide. The mental pressure was unbearable...I felt like hurting myself to relieve it. I attempted suicide. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

She was taken to hospital. There, she encountered further institutional disbelief. She recounted:

The doctor told me I was doing this to get a house. I told him that wasn't true. Even if I got a house, it wouldn't solve my problems. What good is a house when you're mentally unstable? (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

She later reported that she was eventually moved to a house, but described the relocation as coming "too late," by which point her mental health had significantly deteriorated.

Minoo's experience illustrates how accommodation systems structured around capacity and logistical management can override relational and health-based considerations. Brake et al. (2023) identify loss of control as a key psychosocial housing attribute associated with anxiety and depression among asylum seekers. In contexts of pregnancy and early motherhood, this loss of control is particularly consequential. A systematic review of housing and mental health among asylum seekers shows that minimal ability to influence living arrangements, lack of privacy, and enforced separation from relational supports intensify psychosocial distress during pregnancy and the postnatal period (Spira et al., 2025). Her suicide attempt should therefore be understood not solely as individual vulnerability, but as emerging within a configuration of prolonged uncertainty, enforced separation, and institutional non-responsiveness.

Monir's experience is not exceptional. Similar patterns of abrupt relocation were evident in other accounts, illustrating how instability operates as a routine feature of asylum

accommodation. Scholarship on displacement emphasises that accommodation is central to psychosocial safety, predictability, and the formation of a sense of home (Papadopoulos, 2002).

Homa's experience reflects these dynamics. She recalled:

When I first came, I was at a hotel in Bedford. Sharon Brook, I think it was about four months. After four months, they said they were changing the usage of the hotel to single men only, and we had to leave. They gave us ten minutes to decide if we were staying or leaving. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Brake et al. (2023) identify lack of control as a key psychosocial housing attribute associated with adverse mental health outcomes among asylum seekers, particularly in relation to forced or frequent moves and limited privacy. Being given ten minutes to decide whether to relocate exemplifies the erosion of agency within the accommodation system. Agency, control, and the ability to plan are recognised social determinants of health; when individuals cannot anticipate where they will live or for how long, they remain in a state of prolonged liminality that restricts their capacity to establish routines, organise childcare, or cultivate support networks.

Shahin described similar anxieties about the regulated and confined nature of camp life. He explained:

The conditions in the camp were really bad. We had an area, the camp was closed, but there were some buses or minibuses that, for example, at 10 AM or 2:30 PM, would take whoever wanted to go into the city. At 2 PM, they had to return to the camp again. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

His account illustrates how spatial restriction and institutional scheduling regulate mobility and autonomy within accommodation settings. Together, these narratives show that asylum housing operates not only as shelter but as a governing environment in which instability, limited control, and enforced separation shape psychosocial wellbeing.

The environment Shahin describes was far from conducive to any sense of security or wellbeing. The mixture of people from diverse backgrounds, some of whom openly disrespected the religious beliefs of others, created a tense and hostile atmosphere. He continued:

For example, there were people who insulted Christianity, and there were people who insulted Islam. Everyone was mixed together. The situation was really tough. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

After three difficult months, Shahin was transferred on his birthday, which brought some relief, but not without leaving lasting scars of anxiety. He reflected:

We came here, and it's better here. But people began to leave one by one. Now my main source of stress is constantly thinking about where I might be sent next. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

Despite the improvement in his living conditions, Shahin remained haunted by the uncertainty of when he might be moved again. His connection with his roommate, Amir, became a crucial source of support and stability in a life otherwise characterised by instability. He mentioned:

Amir, my roommate, is a really good person. We've become attached to each other, and we support one another in everyday things. Now that this place is supposed to close, we're trying to make sure that, wherever we're sent, we can stay together. As long as Amir and I are not separated, I feel there will be no problems. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

The fear of being separated from the only person he had formed a bond within the UK compounds Shahin's anxiety. He even reached out to the Home Office, hoping for some assurance, but received no response.

We even sent an email to the Home Office once, but they didn't respond. Every night I slept with stress that tomorrow they will move us, and we don't know if we will be sent to the same place. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

This constant state of apprehension, fearing not just relocation but also separation from the one person who provides him with comfort, illustrates the severe emotional toll that the system takes on asylum seekers.

Homa's experience differs in its specifics but similarly underscores the challenges posed by the system's disregard for the personal and cultural needs of asylum seekers. While Shahin fears losing a supportive connection, Homa's story is one of struggling with incompatible roommates, which added to her stress and made her living conditions unbearable. Her first roommate created an environment of constant noise and disruption, she recalled:

My first roommate was African, from Nigeria, I think. Their culture is different from ours. She was awake all night, talked loudly, and all her calls were on speaker. I had to listen to two people's voices in a small room. Music was loud all night. She would go out and come back at 5 am, knocking because she didn't take her key. She didn't clean. I couldn't study, do online classes, or attend church classes. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

This description highlights one of the key psychosocial attributes of housing identified by Brake et al. (2023), the ability to maintain routine, privacy, and a predictable environment, all of which are central to health and wellbeing. The absence of these elements undermines what Papadopoulos (2002) describes as the process of recreating home in displacement, where home is not a physical structure but the emotional, sensory, and relational stability that enables a person to orient themselves in the world. Without quiet, privacy, or a controllable space, Homa could not establish the rhythms that anchor everyday life. Her statement 'I couldn't study, do online classes, or attend church classes' signals a disruption of routines that normally support identity, self-direction, and wellbeing.

Despite her attempts at tolerance, the disruption escalated, she continued:

I even experienced her having loud sexually explicit phone conversations on speaker. On one occasion, she had another woman staying over who was also noisy. Despite my tolerance, it became unbearable. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Her experience illustrates how room-sharing arrangements, though administratively efficient, can erode autonomy and compromise emotional safety. Brake et al. (2023) emphasise that overcrowding and lack of privacy are not mere inconveniences, but psychosocial stressors associated with poorer mental health outcomes among refugee and asylum-seeking populations.

After repeated complaints, Homa was moved to another room. Yet the new placement brought its own challenges, revealing that even shared linguistic or national backgrounds do not guarantee compatibility when deeper cultural or religious tensions emerge. She recalled:

I was moved, and things were better until the new roommate found out I went to church and started questioning my faith. She criticised my conversion to Christianity. I told her she had no right to question my religion, and from then on, things got worse. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

The situation deteriorated to the point where her roommate began to use religious practices as a means of psychological harassment. She continued:

She played the call to prayer, Azan, loudly at dawn, which triggered my panic attacks. I felt unsafe rooming with someone who might harm me due to my change in religion. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Homa's account highlights an additional layer of anxiety generated when cultural and religious differences are not accommodated within shared housing arrangements. Research shows that overcrowding, lack of privacy, and cultural incompatibility can undermine emotional safety and intensify existing vulnerabilities (Brake et al., 2023; Refugee Council, 2022a). Such conditions may produce environments in which residents experience heightened insecurity.

Taken together, these accounts deepen the earlier pattern of relocation, showing how instability becomes embedded within everyday relational and cultural dynamics. In this sense, relocation operates not as temporary disruption but as a structuring condition of everyday life (Brake et al., 2023; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021).

The uncertainty faced by asylum seekers not only exacerbates their mental health issues but also leaves these issues largely unaddressed due to the restrictive, non-choice-basis agreements with the Home Office. Studies of post-migration living difficulties consistently show that chronic uncertainty around status, housing, and support is itself a core stressor associated with anxiety, depression, and other common mental disorders (Hynie, 2018; Laban et al., 2005; Li et al., 2016). This lack of autonomy and control over their living situations forces many to endure conditions that further deteriorate their mental and physical wellbeing, echoing wider analyses of dispersal and outsourced accommodation, where no-choice allocation and repeated relocations erode stability and agency (Darling, 2016b; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021; Refugee Action, 2023). In many cases, the poor quality of accommodations contributes significantly to their distress, as the environments they are placed in are often unsuitable for their needs and can become a source of anxiety and fear, damp, overcrowding, lack of privacy, and limited control over basic infrastructures such as heating or kitchen access are all documented as housing-related attributes that undermine health and a sense of home among asylum seekers (Brake et al., 2023; Hajak et al., 2021).

Together, these conditions, uncertainty, lack of autonomy, and poor-quality accommodation, shape the material environments within which asylum seekers must carry out even the most basic tasks of daily life. Sara was 25 and had been in the asylum process for around 19 months when I spoke with her. She had given birth to her son while living in hotel accommodation and

remained there with her baby during the early months of his life. Her experience illustrates how these wider structural pressures entered the everyday practices of caring for a young child within shared accommodation. She explained:

At first, we were in a hotel room, the kitchen was shared with other people. I couldn't use it as often as I needed for my baby, as I needed to sterilise the bottle, but it was always crowded and very dirty.
(Participant 23, Iranian woman)

The shared kitchen, which was not only unhygienic but also frequently overcrowded, made it nearly impossible for Sara to properly care for her newborn. The stress of navigating such an environment, particularly when it came to sterilising bottles, an essential task for her baby's health, added an immense burden to her already challenging circumstances.

The situation escalated when another occupant in the hotel threatened Sara for using the tap too frequently, she recalled:

Once, one of the other occupants threatened us that we used the tap a lot. I was so scared that I didn't use the kitchen for a day; it affected how I fed my baby. (Participant 23, Iranian woman)

This incident highlights the constant fear and intimidation that asylum seekers can face in communal living situations, where tensions often run high due to overcrowding and a lack of privacy. For Sara, the threat was not just a verbal altercation; it had real consequences on her ability to care for her child, leading her to avoid the kitchen altogether and disrupt her baby's feeding routine. The psychological toll of such an environment, where even the most basic activities become sources of fear and anxiety, is profound. These dynamics point to a broader structural feature of asylum accommodation, poor-quality housing does not simply reflect material inadequacy but produces conditions in which safety, privacy and dignity are routinely

compromised. Research shows that environments characterised by overcrowding, lack of privacy, and strained shared living conditions constrain individuals' capacity to undertake daily routines and to foster a sense of home (Brake et al., 2023; Spira et al., 2025; Ziersch et al., 2017).

These conditions invite consideration of whether such harms operate as unintended by-products of system pressure or as features of a governance logic in which discomfort becomes normalised within the asylum process. While official policy does not explicitly mandate hardship, scholars of asylum governance argue that dispersal, no-choice accommodation, and minimal oversight form part of a deterrent environment in practice, one in which substandard living conditions become a routine, predictable outcome rather than an administrative accident (Darling, 2016b; Darling, 2011). The fear and intimidation experienced by individuals like Sara therefore cannot be understood solely as interpersonal conflicts; they emerge from a structural configuration that limits privacy, undermines control, and exposes residents to daily forms of vulnerability that materially shape their wellbeing.

Despite multiple calls to Migrant Help, it took three months before Sara and her baby were moved to a new accommodation where she could finally have a kitchen of her own. This move, while an improvement, brought with it a new set of challenges. She explained:

After three months, they moved us to this accommodation where I can cook for my baby and keep everything clean. However, I have another problem here; my access to the ground floor is through stairs and I can't move the buggy easily there. (Participant 23, Iranian woman)

The new accommodation, while providing better facilities for her baby's care, was not entirely suited to her needs. The stairs presented a significant obstacle, making it difficult for her to

navigate the space with a baby buggy. This physical barrier added to her sense of isolation and fear, particularly when it came to leaving the house.

Sara's fear of going outside is compounded by the location of her accommodation. She described:

My only access to the outside is a very busy street, and it's very scary to move with a buggy. I'm so scared to go outside because of this and try not to go out a lot. (Participant 23, Iranian woman)

The placement of her accommodation on a busy and potentially hazardous street adds a further layer of anxiety to her everyday life. Navigating this environment with a buggy becomes a source of stress rather than mobility, often keeping her indoors and limiting her access to services, support, and social interaction. These constraints demonstrate how even accommodation that is formally classified as an improvement can reproduce new forms of material hardship, where accessibility barriers and unsafe surroundings restrict mobility, autonomy, and engagement with the outside world. Research on housing and wellbeing among asylum seekers shows that housing quality is not confined to interior conditions alone; the wider built environment, including access routes, neighbourhood safety, and surrounding infrastructure, plays a significant role in shaping daily routines, caregiving practices, and perceptions of safety (Brake et al., 2023; Spira et al., 2025).

Across these accounts, accommodation emerges not as a stable material base but as a shifting set of constraints that continually reorganise how everyday life can be lived. Changes intended to resolve one aspect of material deprivation often introduce new forms of insecurity, leaving residents to adapt to environments that remain poorly aligned with their needs. The cumulative effect is a pattern in which safety, privacy, mobility, and relational continuity are persistently

undermined, shaping the conditions under which asylum seekers attempt to meet even the most basic demands of daily life.

Within institutional settings such as hotels, barracks, and other forms of catered accommodation, these material constraints extend directly into how food is accessed and experienced. Where residents are prohibited from cooking and reliant on centrally provided meals, food becomes inseparable from housing arrangements and subject to the same logics of control, outsourcing, and cost containment. The following section turns to food provision within the asylum system, examining how its organisation further structures material deprivation, dependency, and everyday harm.

5.4 Food Support

Food constitutes a central component of material wellbeing within the asylum system, shaping not only physical health but also daily routines, dignity, and the capacity to endure prolonged uncertainty. According to Home Office guidance, asylum seekers accommodated in initial or contingency accommodation are provided with three meals per day, including at least one hot meal, with provision nominally designed to meet basic nutritional standards and to account for dietary, cultural, and religious requirements (UK Parliament, 2023a). Government responses to parliamentary questions further maintain that menus in catered accommodation are validated by qualified nutritionists or health professionals, and that feedback mechanisms exist to address residents' concerns about food quality or suitability (UK Parliament, 2024a). Where meals are provided, this provision is used to justify a substantially reduced weekly allowance, on the assumption that food needs are adequately met within accommodation (Gower, 2024). Within this policy framework, food is constructed as a resolved and administratively contained aspect of asylum support. As the accounts that follow demonstrate, however, food provision

frequently diverges from these official claims, emerging instead as a persistent site of deprivation, contestation, and material insecurity.

Across participants' accounts, food provision in asylum accommodation consistently failed at the level of basic material adequacy. Crucially, this failure was not articulated in terms of dissatisfaction or preference, but as an inability to eat enough, or at all, to sustain the body. Participants repeatedly emphasised that they could not eat the food provided, rather than that they did not like it.

Several described portions that were both minimal and progressively reduced. Marjan stated:

When we arrived, they gave us breaded chicken fillets, two small pieces with some potatoes on a small plate. Later, they started giving one fillet per person. The portions were small, and they switched to using plastic plates, which smelled of old food. Initially, they used disposable plates, then switched to plastic ones. In the mornings, they didn't give us milk, and in the evenings, they gave fruit for two floors from 5 to 6 PM and for the other floors from 6 to 7 PM. When we went to get food, they said the charity had brought fruit, but people were fighting over it. Once, one of the staff members was filming us and laughing. Our friend, who later had issues with his wife, confronted them and asked why they were filming and laughing at people's misery. They apologised and deleted the video. But then they created a case against him when he had an argument with his wife, saying his behaviour in the hotel was problematic... (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

Marjan's account illustrates how food inadequacy is produced not only through portion size but through a cumulative degradation of material provision over time. The reduction from 'two small pieces' of chicken to 'one fillet per person' signals a downward recalibration of subsistence rather than an episodic lapse, suggesting that food provision is managed at the margins of acceptability rather than oriented toward sustaining health. Recent inspections of asylum accommodation have similarly raised concerns about the adequacy and nutritional

value of food provision, especially in hotel-based settings where residents remain dependent on centrally provided meals (Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 2024; Jones et al., 2022).

Importantly, Marjan's description situates food inadequacy within a broader material environment of decline. The shift from disposable plates to reused plastic plates that 'smelled of old food' is not a trivial detail but an indicator of degraded standards of care. Material wellbeing is shaped not only by caloric intake but by the conditions under which food is prepared, served, and consumed. Research on asylum and other institutional accommodation contexts shows that the sensory and material conditions under which food is served, including smell, presentation, and cleanliness, shape whether food can be eaten at all, particularly in environments marked by stress, confinement, and lack of control (Jones et al., 2022; Power & Baxter, 2026).

Marjan's account also reveals how scarcity is administratively organised through rationing practices that produce competition rather than adequacy. The timed distribution of fruit by floor, coupled with the explanation that 'the charity had brought fruit', reframes food not as an entitlement but as a discretionary or charitable resource. This blurring of responsibility, between state provision and charitable supplementation, has been identified as a defining feature of asylum food governance, where basic needs are informally offloaded onto third-sector actors without structural accountability (Power & Baxter, 2026). The resulting competition over food is not incidental; it is a predictable outcome of provision calibrated below need.

Crucially, Marjan's narrative also shows how attempts to endure or respond to food scarcity expose residents to humiliation and discipline. The filming and mocking of residents collecting food, followed by the creation of a 'case' against an individual who challenged this behaviour, illustrates how food spaces become sites of surveillance rather than care. As Darling (2016b) shows, asylum governance operates through everyday administrative practices that regulate conduct indirectly, shaping compliance through routine monitoring and discretionary decision-making rather than overt forms of punishment. In this context, food provision is inseparable from behavioural control, hunger is tolerated, but resistance to the conditions under which it is managed is not.

Ramin's account further underscores how food provision fails at the level of basic material adequacy, not preference. He describes meals characterised by monotony, poor preparation, and limited nutritional value, pointing not to dissatisfaction with taste but to food that does not function as sustenance. The issue here is not cultural mismatch or individual expectation, but the routine provision of meals that are materially thin and difficult to consume over time. Ramin stated:

There were also mashed potatoes, boiled potatoes, and sometimes fried potatoes, but they were not good. For lunch, they gave us a cold sandwich with unknown contents. Even these were among the better foods they served. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

What is salient in this account is the normalisation of low-quality, repetitive meals as adequate support. For several participants, this inadequacy rendered the food effectively inedible. This was particularly acute for those with heightened nutritional needs. Minoo, who was pregnant at the time, described a visceral response to the food provided:

When the food was brought to my room on a tray, I felt sick. I couldn't even stand the smell, let alone eat it. I was very hungry during my pregnancy. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

Her account highlights how food provision fails not only through quantity or content but through its sensory and embodied effects. The smell, texture, and presentation of the food actively prevented consumption, leaving her hungry despite nominal provision. In material terms, food that cannot be eaten does not function as food, regardless of how it is accounted for administratively. Evidence from inspections of initial and contingency accommodation similarly reports appetite loss and reduced intake linked to poor-quality, poorly prepared meals, particularly among pregnant women and those with health conditions (Jones et al., 2022).

The consequences of this failure intensified when Minoo developed gestational diabetes. Despite medical recognition of her condition, no meaningful dietary adjustment followed. She explained that when she provided documentation from her GP indicating the need for appropriate diabetic food, the response remained purely nominal, she explained:

They just gave me the same food in a worse state and called it diabetic food. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

This account exposes a critical gap between medical need and institutional response. The designation of 'diabetic food' functioned as an administrative label rather than a substantive nutritional adjustment, reproducing the same material inadequacies under a different category. Rather than enabling dietary management of a high-risk pregnancy, the system delivered a degraded version of an already inedible meal. This mirrors broader findings that special diets within asylum accommodation are frequently symbolic rather than effective, failing to meet clinical standards for conditions such as diabetes or pregnancy (Jones et al., 2022; Power & Baxter, 2026).

Food inadequacy was also shaped by cultural mismatch, though participants were clear that this was not just a matter of taste or preference. Several participants were careful to emphasise that they were not complaining about food because it differed from their cultural expectations, but because they could not eat it in practice. This careful framing also reflects the broader conditions of the asylum system, where residents often feel compelled to demonstrate gratitude and avoid appearing demanding or unentitled when describing inadequate support. Under these conditions, cultural inappropriateness operated as a material constraint on consumption, narrowing diets to a limited number of tolerable items. Reza explained:

It doesn't suit my Iranian taste. Most of the food is Indian and Pakistani, which is often too spicy for us. I mostly eat bread and yogurt or cheese.
(Participant 9, Iranian man)

Here, cultural mismatch translated directly into restricted intake rather than choice. Food that was unfamiliar, overly spiced, or monotonous became impossible to eat in practice. Ali mentioned:

No one was satisfied with the taste, not just Iranians or Afghans but even the Albanians. We couldn't eat the food because of its taste.
(Participant 6, Iranian man)

Participants described modifying meals to render them edible, including purchasing sauces to mask flavour. Majid was 60 and had been in the asylum process for around two years when I spoke with him. His account showed how this adaptation became embedded within the everyday consumption of food provided in accommodation. He explained:

We bought spicy pepper sauces to add to the food so we could eat it.
(Participant 27, Afghan man)

These coping practices reflect active attempts to convert inadequate provision into sustenance, yet they also obscure the underlying problem when interpreted by accommodation providers

or inspectors as evidence of acceptability. Research on asylum accommodation similarly shows that culturally inappropriate food provision reduces consumption, limits dietary diversity, and contributes to nutritional compromise, even where meals meet nominal caloric thresholds on paper (Jones et al., 2022; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021; Power & Baxter, 2026).

Children emerged across accounts as the point at which food inadequacy became most visible and most harmful. While adults often described enduring hunger through adaptation or resignation, participants consistently emphasised that children could not do so without tangible harm. Monir stated:

How can someone survive for months without proper food? Adults might manage, but children can't. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Several accounts documented clear indicators of nutritional deterioration. Ramin stated:

When we arrived, my daughter's weight was normal. Then she lost a lot of weight, about six kilos. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

He continued, as food remained unchanged, weakness progressed to collapse. He explained:

She became very weak. One day she fainted. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

These experiences resonate with public health evidence showing that sustained food insecurity in childhood is associated with weight loss, fatigue, micronutrient deficiency, and compromised immune function (United Nations Children's Fund, 2024; World Health Organization, 2024). Parents described being forced into coercive feeding practices, pressuring children to eat food they found intolerable in order to prevent physical decline.

Attempts to compensate for children's nutritional needs were frequently criminalised rather than supported, even where such actions arose from the practical impossibility of ensuring adequate intake through institutional provision. Monir described an incident involving her sister:

My sister was disciplined because her child said, 'My mom made me an omelette'. Security raided her room. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

From a regulatory perspective, restrictions on cooking within hotel accommodation are typically justified on fire safety grounds. However, this account exposes the material dilemma such rules produce when food provided is inedible or nutritionally insufficient, particularly for children. Cooking a single egg for a child who could not eat the provided meals was not an act of defiance but a constrained caregiving response in a context where no viable alternatives existed. With insufficient financial support to regularly purchase suitable food and no access to cooking facilities, parents are left with a narrow and punitive choice set, allow children to go hungry, or risk sanction by attempting to prepare minimal food.

This reframing of care as misconduct illustrates how food provision operates as a site of surveillance and discipline within asylum accommodation. Rather than prompting flexibility or accommodation in response to unmet nutritional needs, parental attempts to mitigate harm are reinterpreted as rule breaking. As Jones et al. (2022) document, such practices are widespread within hotel-based accommodation, where safeguarding logics coexist uneasily with food regimes that fail to meet basic needs. In these settings, safety regulations function not as protective measures but as mechanisms that foreclose coping strategies, effectively transferring the burden of institutional inadequacy onto parents while constraining their capacity to provide care.

Crucially, the issue here is not the legitimacy of safety concerns in the abstract, but the absence of meaningful alternatives within the support system. When institutional food is inedible, special diets are unmet, and financial support is insufficient to supplement provision, prohibitions on cooking transform from precautionary rules into sources of material harm. In this configuration, responsibility for children's nutrition is simultaneously demanded of parents and rendered practically impossible to fulfil, revealing a structural contradiction at the heart of food governance in asylum accommodation.

Surveillance was not limited to reactive enforcement but was materially embedded within the infrastructure of accommodation itself, reshaping the physical environment in ways that preemptively curtailed residents' capacity to secure food. Sara described how this operated in practice:

They blocked these plug sockets in my room, and in every room, so we can't use any cooking facilities. When they realised some people were warming canned food from charities, they blocked all the plugs.
(Participant 23, Iranian woman)

This intervention illustrates how accommodation spaces are actively reconfigured to eliminate coping strategies rather than address the conditions that make such strategies necessary. The blocking of electrical sockets was not a response to individual risk but a blanket infrastructural measure, designed to prevent residents from warming donated food in the absence of edible meals. While framed through safety rationales, this form of anticipatory control effectively removed the material capacity to prepare food altogether. Hunger, in this configuration, is managed not through improved provision or flexibility, but through the physical foreclosure of alternatives.

The regulation of food extended beyond internal space to encompass external sources of support. Marjan described how access to a nearby food bank was withdrawn following an allegation by accommodation management:

They said we couldn't get anything from the food bank because the hotel manager said we were cooking, as the food bank items were mainly canned food and some vegetables that needed to be heated or cooked. (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

Here, accusation rather than verification was sufficient to sever a vital subsistence resource. The withdrawal of food bank access did not hinge on evidence of unsafe practices, but on the presumption of rule-breaking, reinforcing what scholars identify as a broader culture of suspicion within asylum governance (Darling, 2016b; Jones et al., 2022). Charitable provision, rather than functioning as a buffer against institutional failure, becomes conditional on compliance with accommodation rules, leaving residents exposed when official food provision proves inadequate.

Participants consistently reported that raising concerns about food quality or adequacy did not lead to improvement but to reputational consequences. As Marjan noted:

We complained several times, but they labelled us as troublemakers. (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

Here, complaint operates not as a mechanism for redress but as a trigger for negative classification. Rather than prompting institutional correction, expressions of need are translated into behavioural concerns, reinforcing a governance logic in which dissent is neutralised through reputational marking. This dynamic aligns with analyses of asylum support systems in which material grievances are routinely reinterpreted as conduct issues, discouraging further reporting and normalising acceptance of inadequate conditions (Campbell, 2011; Darling, 2016b; Jones et al., 2022).

Oversight mechanisms were similarly described as performative rather than corrective. Participants observed that inspections temporarily altered conditions without producing sustained change. Marjan explained:

When the inspector came, everything was fine, more food, more respect. As soon as she left, it went back to the same. (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

Such accounts suggest that monitoring functions to manage appearances rather than outcomes. Short-term improvements during inspections serve to demonstrate compliance without addressing the structural inadequacies of food provision. As a result, oversight becomes episodic and symbolic, offering brief relief while leaving underlying conditions unchanged. In this way, food governance operates through cycles of visibility and concealment, where deprivation is momentarily masked but persistently reproduced in everyday life.

Across participants' accounts, food provision within asylum accommodation emerges as routinely failing to operate as a reliable material support. Despite being administratively framed as adequate, food is frequently insufficient in quantity, poor in quality, culturally inedible, and unresponsive to health needs, resulting in reduced intake rather than nourishment. Where individuals attempt to mitigate these failures, by cooking, accessing charity food, or modifying meals, such practices are often met with surveillance, restriction, or sanction rather than support. Food thus emerges not as a stabilising foundation of material wellbeing but as a site where deprivation is normalised and managed through control rather than care.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined material wellbeing as it is lived and structured within the UK asylum system, focusing on financial support, accommodation, and food as core conditions shaping

everyday life. Across these domains, material provision is characterised not by stability or sufficiency but by managed scarcity, administrative delay, and limited responsiveness to need. Rather than operating as neutral forms of support, welfare arrangements, housing allocation, and food provision function as governing mechanisms that regulate autonomy, mobility, and dependence. The cumulative effect is a material environment in which basic needs are formally recognised yet persistently unmet, and where survival is organised through endurance, adaptation, and constrained choice. Subsistence with material security would, by contrast, require not only that basic needs are met, but that access to the resources through which they are sustained is adequate, predictable, and sufficiently stable to enable continuity, autonomy, and control over everyday life.

Importantly, these material conditions do not simply produce discrete hardships; they structure the temporal and emotional terrain of the asylum process itself. Insecurity around income, repeated displacement, inadequate nutrition, and restricted access to everyday infrastructures shape how asylum seekers inhabit time, relate to uncertainty, and understand their own position within the host society. Material wellbeing thus emerges not as a foundational guarantee but as a fragile and uneven achievement, contingent on bureaucratic processes that operate largely beyond individual control.

By foregrounding the material organisation of life under asylum, this chapter establishes the structural conditions within which subjective wellbeing is formed and constrained. Chapter Six turns to how these material arrangements are internalised and emotionally lived, examining how prolonged insecurity, enforced dependency, and restricted agency shape asylum seekers' feelings, self-perceptions, and psychological worlds over time.

Chapter 6

Subjective wellbeing

6.1 Introduction

Building on the preceding analysis of material wellbeing, this chapter turns to the affective and experiential dimensions through which asylum seekers live and make sense of prolonged insecurity. As Chapter Five demonstrated, material provision under asylum is characterised by managed scarcity, constrained choice, and institutional delay, conditions that structure everyday life while remaining largely beyond individual control. This chapter develops that analysis by examining how material arrangements are internalised and emotionally lived, shaping feelings, self-perception, and psychological worlds over time.

Following Sumner and Mallett's (2013) multidimensional understanding of wellbeing, subjective wellbeing is approached here as one dimension within a wider, interrelated process, rather than as an individual psychological outcome. As established in the Key Concepts section, subjective wellbeing refers to the affective interior through which insecurity, dependency, and exclusion are felt, interpreted, and endured. The focus here is not on defining this domain anew, but on examining how it is produced through the interaction of material conditions, institutional structures, and lived experience under asylum governance.

The chapter is organised into three interconnected parts. Part I examines how displacement disrupts the self at the level of everyday affect, tracing fractures in recognition, social connection, autonomy, and emotional continuity that operate beneath the threshold of overt violence. Part II shifts attention to the legal, economic, and temporal structures of asylum

governance, analysing how uncertainty, waiting, and bureaucratic opacity actively organise emotional life and produce conditions of affective precarity. Part III turns toward the affective labour of survival, exploring how asylum seekers negotiate identity, memory, and selfhood under conditions that offer limited recognition or repair.

Taken together, these parts do not present subjective wellbeing as a linear movement from harm to recovery. Instead, the chapter foregrounds subjective wellbeing as a fragile and contested process, shaped by erosion as much as by endurance. In doing so, it situates emotional life firmly within the structures of asylum, showing how feelings, identities, and psychic stability are continuously formed under conditions of prolonged uncertainty, enforced dependency, and constrained agency.

Part I: Disrupted Selves and the Affective Life of Displacement

This part examines how asylum seekers' subjective wellbeing is unsettled through everyday forms of affective disruption that operate below the threshold of formal violence or overt exclusion. Rather than focusing on discrete traumatic events or material deprivation, it traces how displacement is lived through gradual erosions of recognition, relational anchoring, autonomy, and emotional continuity. These disruptions do not simply register as distress or discomfort; they rework the conditions under which the self becomes intelligible to itself and to others.

Across language, social connection, everyday autonomy, and experiences of care, asylum seekers encounter a world in which recognition is partial, contingent, or withdrawn altogether. What emerges is not a singular crisis but a cumulative process of affective unravelling, in which shame, isolation, passivity, and emotional exhaustion take hold over time. The sections that

follow analyse these processes as structurally produced yet intimately felt, showing how subjective wellbeing is corroded not through spectacular harm, but through the slow destabilisation of selfhood in conditions of prolonged uncertainty and constrained life.

6.2 Language Difficulties as Disruption of Recognition and Selfhood

Language, for Bourdieu (1991), is not simply an instrument of communication but a site of symbolic power, where linguistic exchanges actualise relations of domination and recognition within a linguistic market governed by sanctions and censorship. Linguistic competence, unevenly distributed, can function as linguistic capital, securing material and symbolic profit under institutionally authorised conditions. For asylum seekers, this inequality is not just experienced in bureaucratic encounters or service provision but materialises as an intimate form of dispossession, undermining both recognition and the continuity of selfhood. When language fails, it is not simply a gap in vocabulary, but a rupture in the scaffolding of the self.

Mahin was 67 and had been in the asylum process for around three and a half years when I spoke with her. Despite the prolonged duration of the process, language remained a significant source of isolation in her everyday life. She explained:

The language barrier leaves me feeling deaf and mute, intensifying my emotional isolation and anxiety. Despite others' apparent kindness, genuine connections feel impossible. (Participant 18, Iranian woman)

Such statements gesture towards what Judith Butler (2004b) identifies as the ontological stakes of recognisability, the claim that social subjecthood becomes livable only through normative frames of intelligibility of which language is a central component. To be deprived of linguistic capacity is, in effect, to be denied the conditions through which one becomes socially legible. Without the capacity for articulation, asylum seekers often find themselves suspended in a state

of liminal subjectivity, visible yet incomprehensible, physically present yet symbolically erased.

This muting is not accidental; it functions as symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991), a slow, daily undoing of the self-enacted through structural exclusions. For many, the inability to participate in the linguistic field of the host society results in a withdrawal from the social world. As Shahin put it:

I stopped going outside... I was afraid someone would speak to me, and I wouldn't know how to answer. I felt ashamed, like a child trapped in an adult's body. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

Here, shame emerges not as a personal failing, but as an affective economy (Ahmed, 2014). This shame is often compounded by hyper-awareness, what Fanon (2002) describes as a racial epidermal schema, through which difference is inscribed onto the body and experienced as exposure to the gaze of others, where every mispronounced word becomes a site of surveillance, judgment, and internalised otherness (p.112).

Moreover, language loss disorients the temporality of self. Payam, who was 28 and had spent around two years in the asylum process when I spoke with him, described feeling ‘stuck in time’, unable to narrate his past or imagine a future, reflecting the disruption of narrative continuity through which the self ordinarily becomes temporally intelligible (Ricoeur, 1979). Under such conditions, the present ceases to function as a passage between past and future and instead becomes a loop of repetition, a temporal condition widely documented in asylum contexts characterised by prolonged uncertainty and enforced waiting (Griffiths, 2014). Within this suspended present, even mundane social interactions are experienced as risky, as linguistic insecurity renders everyday encounters unpredictable and potentially exposing (Bourdieu et

al., 1991). Reza likened the experience to being ‘lost in a jungle’, a metaphor that captures the profound spatial and temporal dislocation brought on by linguistic deprivation, where the inability to communicate erodes both orientation and agency.

Tajfel and Turner’s (2001) theory of social identity underscores this point in that linguistic competence can function as a marker of in-group belonging, distinguishing those recognised as legitimate members from those positioned as outsiders. To lack such competence is to inhabit a persistent condition of exclusion, where one’s voice is rendered unintelligible not only to others but, over time, to the self. The erosion of this sense of belonging can lead to what Laing (1959) describes as ontological insecurity, a condition in which the individual no longer experiences themselves as real, continuous, and coherent, as the basic certainties through which a sense of self is sustained are no longer assured (pp.35–36).

Importantly, this experience is not only emotional but also infrastructural. As Maslow (1943) argued, the need for safety and belonging is foundational to human wellbeing. Language, in this context, operates both as a means of survival, essential for navigating asylum systems, housing, and healthcare, and as a condition of social affirmation. When asylum seekers are unable to perform these functions, they are effectively excluded from social participation and community life.

Efforts to reclaim voice, through language apps, community classes, or obsessive memorisation, speak to more than a desire to integrate. They reflect what Butler (2004b) describes as the desire for recognition through which the subject becomes intelligible to others and to herself. As Homa noted:

I talk to myself in English in the mirror, not just to practise, but to feel like someone. To feel real. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Such practices are not simply pedagogical but existential, signalling the labour of becoming intelligible in a world that renders one's voice disposable.

In policy discourse, these affective dimensions are often occluded. Language support is framed in terms of employability or service access, abstracted from the emotional and ontological toll that muteness entails. But in asylum seekers' narratives, the stakes are clearer in that speaking is tied to being, whereas the inability to speak produces a gradual erosion of selfhood.

6.3 Social Isolation as Emotional Estrangement and Ontological Insecurity

While language difficulties constitute a visible rupture in asylum seekers' social integration, social isolation functions as the affective infrastructure of marginalisation. It is not a byproduct of migration, but an entrenched modality of displacement, deeply affective, socially patterned, and structurally reproduced. Even where formal support mechanisms exist, asylum seekers often report a persistent state of emotional estrangement, where the absence of meaningful connection corrodes the self's coherence. Amir remarked:

Honestly, it's very difficult here when you're alone... Without knowing the language, it's very hard to communicate with others... I mostly try to watch TV or read books in my room... to pass the time. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

This account speaks not of solitude in a neutral sense, but of a profound relational deprivation, in which the subject is surrounded by people yet starved of reciprocity. The experience resonates with Durkheim's (2005) conception of anomie (developed through his analysis of anomic suicide and the breakdown of moral regulation), wherein the loss of social integration severs the individual's attachment to collective meanings and symbolic anchoring (p.201).

Similarly, Laing (1959) describes how ontological insecurity emerges when one is deprived of emotionally validating interactions, leading to a destabilised sense of self. Such estrangement is not merely emotional but ontological; it disorients the subject's sense of being-in-the-world. What emerges from Amir's account is not the absence of social contact, but the absence of affective mutuality. Encounters with others, whether in shared accommodation, public transport, or bureaucratic settings, often remain transactional, instrumental, or underpinned by mistrust. This emotional flatness indexes the deeper violence of being rendered unintelligible and emotionally disposable in the host society.

In this context, social isolation becomes an injury to subjective wellbeing, not just as emotional discomfort but as a threat to the self's durability. Isolation is both the continuation of exile and its intensification in the present. It interacts with pre-existing trauma, amplifies feelings of loss, and forestalls the conditions necessary for recovery or self-redefinition. As Li et al. (2016) highlight, the chronic absence of supportive social ties is strongly associated with psychological distress, including anxiety and depression among refugees and asylum seekers.

Crucially, social isolation also obstructs identity work. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2001), it becomes clear that self-esteem and self-understanding are not formed in isolation but through embeddedness in meaningful group affiliations. When these affiliations are missing or inaccessible, due to language barriers, cultural distance, or institutional neglect, the self becomes fractured, vulnerable to feelings of worthlessness and invisibility. Mahin puts it starkly:

Even when I go outside, I feel like no one sees me, like I don't exist in this place. No one talks to me, and I don't have anyone to talk to.
(Participant 18, Iranian woman)

Such narratives point toward a more existential reading of isolation, as a form of ontological insecurity (Laing, 1959). This is not simply about not being spoken to; it is about not being held within the field of recognition. Butler (2004a) argues that subjecthood depends on the normative conditions of recognisability through which lives become intelligible and livable. When one is unrecognised, one is unformed.

Temporally, social isolation mutates into affective suspension. Participants often describe days that blur into one another, void of rhythm, interruption, or futurity. They speak of time as something endured rather than lived. This sense of stagnant temporality resonates with Agamben's (1998) notion of bare life, in which existence is stripped of political belonging and reduced to biological persistence. In this mode, doing nothing is not a symptom of apathy, but a manifestation of systemic exclusion from relational, productive, and meaningful time.

If social isolation constitutes a form of emotional estrangement, where the asylum seeker is unheld, unseen, and unrecognised, then constrained living represents its material correlate in the form of the institutional scripting of passivity. Both operate along the same continuum of marginalisation, wherein subjective wellbeing is not assaulted in a singular, spectacular moment, but corroded gradually through administrative indifference and symbolic devaluation. What begins as disconnection from others often becomes disconnection from the self, as the capacity to act, decide, and shape one's existence is quietly withdrawn.

6.4 Constrained Living: Autonomy, Disillusionment, and the Affective Costs of Powerlessness

Autonomy, the capacity to choose, to act, and to affect one's surroundings, is central to the architecture of subjective wellbeing. Within asylum regimes, however, autonomy is

systematically eroded. While protection may be offered at the level of legal status or shelter, asylum seekers are often subjected to a regime of managed containment, a lived condition marked not by overt discipline but by passive incapacitation. Amir illustrated this quiet erosion of agency:

Very different. In Iran, I went to work every day, then I cooked at home because I love cooking. I also helped my child with their studies. I always read a book and exercised daily at the gym. I used to go out for fun drives, but now I hardly do any of those things except reading... there's no facility to cook here, which I would have liked at least for ourselves or for other Iranians with different dietary preferences, but it's not possible. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

What this testimony reveals is not only a loss of routine, but a loss of self through the disintegration of everyday meaning-making practices. The asylum context disrupts not just mobility or employment but the deeply embodied rituals that produce continuity, identity, and emotional regulation. These are the 'small freedoms' that make up the lifeworld, cooking familiar food, choosing one's diet, nurturing a child, moving one's body in spaces of one's choosing.

The erosion of autonomy is experienced as a loss of authorship over everyday life. Asylum seekers describe their days as unstructured, monotonous, and deprived of purposeful activity. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory positions autonomy as a basic psychological need; when it is thwarted, individuals tend toward diminished motivation and reduced wellbeing. Over time, this can consolidate into states of passivity, emotional blunting, and depressive withdrawal.

Even when daily survival is ensured, through state accommodation, basic subsistence, and legal processing, what remains is a condition of suspended life, structured through prolonged waiting

and temporal uncertainty (Brun, 2015). Agency becomes circumscribed within the narrowest of registers. The state determines where one lives, what one eats, whether one can work or study, and how long one must wait. The £49 per person per week offered by the Home Office (2024b) barely allows for transportation, socialisation, or self-care, reinforcing the condition of affective enclosure. These constraints are not only material but existential, signifying a life lived under conditions of institutional interruption in which nothing is built, sustained, or imagined.

Moreover, the erosion of agency is not just circumstantial; it is structurally encoded into asylum infrastructures. As Phillimore (2011) notes, the disruption of familiar cultural practices creates forms of disorientation that extend beyond preference, affecting identity, routine, and wellbeing. Food is not only nourishment; it is identity, memory, and a form of sensory self-possession. The enforced passivity that comes from being fed rather than feeding, housed rather than homing, renders the asylum seeker a managed body, not an active subject.

This sense of disempowerment extends beyond frustration into a broader recognition of the limits of individual agency. Payam explained:

If I say I'm not happy, what difference does it make? It won't change anything. We are stuck in this situation. Other migrants feel the same way. Yes, we appreciate what we have, but we don't have what we truly need. (Participant 28, Afghan man)

This articulation moves beyond disappointment; it speaks to a more enduring psychic posture of resignation and emotional depletion. Gratitude and frustration often coexist, but the absence of meaningful change or response to needs can give rise to patterns of learned helplessness, in which even the capacity to desire transformation is dulled (Seligman, 1975).

The Women and Equalities Committee (2023) highlights the inadequacy of asylum accommodation, raising concerns about the lack of privacy, safety, and control over basic daily routines. Similarly, Refugee Action (2023) reports that many facilities lack cooking provisions, forcing asylum seekers to rely on poor-quality food and stripping them of autonomy over one of the most fundamental aspects of daily life. These spatial arrangements do more than inconvenience; they shape asylum seekers as administrative subjects, receivers of care rather than agents of their own lives. As Maslow (1943) argued, once safety is met, psychological wellbeing depends on the ability to exert control, build routines, and shape one's environment. Denied this, many asylum seekers experience a slow erosion of vitality, agency, and emotional resilience.

Taken together, constrained living and social isolation do not merely describe conditions of hardship; they reveal how asylum governance, in its bureaucratic neutrality, produces a condition of suspended subjectivity. This is not a failure of services, but a function of a system designed to manage life without enabling it. The cost is not only administrative inefficiency but the deterioration of the very thing that policy often fails to measure, but the felt experience of being human under conditions of exile.

6.5 The Illusion of Connection: Emotional Disconnection in the Shadow of Support

While institutional frameworks surrounding asylum seekers are often populated with professionals, volunteers, and service providers, this infrastructural presence does not necessarily translate into emotional support. Many describe a persistent sense of psychological abandonment, even in the midst of formalised care. Minoo reflected:

I don't know. Some people seem kind, but I feel like they just do it because they have to. I don't feel a real connection. Some say they care,

but at the end of the day, they really don't and I'm still alone.
(Participant 10, Iranian woman)

This statement reveals a rupture between performed care and felt care, between procedural contact and relational resonance. It illustrates what might be termed ambient care, the kind of minimal affective engagement where assistance is provided, but the subject remains emotionally untouched. Help arrives, but it does not land.

This points to an important distinction in the sociology of care; presence is not the same as attunement. Asylum seekers are often surrounded by professionals who are present in form but absent in feeling. This can be conceptualised as relational loneliness, a condition in which proximity to others coexists with emotional non-reception, such that one is seen but not recognised and addressed but not felt.

The impact on subjective wellbeing is profound. The absence of emotionally resonant encounters produces not only sadness, but a deeper affective resignation. Many describe a flattening of emotional life, characterised by low affect, distrust, and emotional withdrawal. As the Mental Health Foundation (2025) notes, chronic emotional disconnection, particularly when systemically patterned, contributes to heightened stress, diminished motivation, and a weakened capacity for resilience.

Importantly, this is not a random failure of care, but a structurally patterned phenomenon. Time scarcity, heavy caseloads, high staff turnover, and the bureaucratic nature of support provision render most interactions short, functional, and impersonal. What appears to be kindness may feel, to the recipient, like obligation. Asylum seekers often intuit this performativity, registering a lack of voluntariness, a key ingredient in the formation of genuine affective bonds. The

prevailing emotional interpretation becomes that they are here because they must be, not because they want to be.

Over time, this perceived impersonality leads to a crisis of relational trust. It is not always the system that is mistrusted, but the possibility of emotionally meaningful human exchange within it. Relationships begin to feel choreographed, transient, and surveilled. As a result, many adopt affective self-protection by sharing less, expecting little, and gradually withdrawing from even the possibility of emotional anchoring.

This erosion of relational trust intersects with the lack of community embeddedness. Asylum seekers in dispersed or institutional accommodation often report weeks or months without emotionally reciprocal contact. Even where services are available, interactions frequently lack continuity, intimacy, and informality, the elements through which recognition becomes felt rather than merely performed. Wellbeing in this context is not secured through availability alone but through the quality of connection and the everyday gestures that communicate uncoerced affective engagement.

What materialises in such conditions is a form of emotional austerity. Like economic austerity, it rations not only resources but emotional possibility. Asylum seekers learn to internalise their isolation in that they come to expect less, ask less, and gradually feel less. Their bodies remain within systems of care while their minds are left unaccompanied. Care is delivered procedurally but withdrawn relationally, a condition that corrodes subjective wellbeing in silent, accumulative ways.

The emotional disconnection described reflects more than institutional coldness, it often mirrors and amplifies the interior disarray caused by past trauma. For many asylum seekers, the absence of meaningful connection does not simply evoke loneliness but activates pre-existing psychic wounds. The quietness of dispersal housing, the impersonality of services, the uncertainty of waiting, these are not neutral conditions, but affective triggers that reactivate older forms of fear, helplessness, and grief. In this sense, trauma is not separate from the asylum experience but becomes entangled with it, continually drawn into the present through repetition, sensory cues, and emotional reactivity.

6.6 The Endurance of Trauma: Emotional Hauntings and the Fragility of Wellbeing

Trauma is not a completed event relegated to the past; it is a condition of ongoing presence, one that saturates thought, feeling, and embodiment (Caruth, 2016; Fuchs, 2012; Scarry, 1985; Van Der Kolk, 1994). Among asylum seekers, trauma is often chronic, layered, and persistently re-animated. It haunts the intimate textures of daily life, interrupting sleep, colonising memory, and casting shadows over even mundane acts of being. Asghar recalled:

I still wake up at night hearing the explosions. Back home, we ran from the war, my brother didn't make it. I see his face every time I close my eyes. Here, I thought I'd find peace, but the waiting, the silence, it's like another kind of explosion in my head. (Participant 29, Afghan man)

This reflection does not simply testify to past suffering; it reveals the emotional continuity of trauma. What was once immediate and catastrophic becomes enduring and ambient. The environment of the asylum, its silence, uncertainty, and isolation, mirrors earlier states of danger and unpredictability. As Ottisova et al. (2016) observe, trauma among asylum seekers often persists well beyond flight from violence, with PTSD symptoms remaining unresolved

or intensified by the re-traumatising conditions of prolonged asylum processes and post-migration stressors.

The migration journey, too, is frequently encoded with terror. Monir described:

The boat was so small, the waves so big. I thought we'd die there in the dark water. My son clung to me, crying, and I couldn't tell him it would be okay because I didn't believe it myself. Even now, when it rains here, I feel that fear again... (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Here, trauma is not symbolic, it is somatic, sedimented in the body. Rain becomes a trigger, darkness a portal. The past floods the present not through narrative, but through affective flashpoints that bypass language altogether. As Sherif et al. (2025) demonstrate, trauma among asylum seekers frequently resurfaces through environmental and sensory cues, underscoring that asylum and detention contexts are not neutral but constitute psychological landscapes capable of activating and sustaining emotional injury

This entanglement of past and present produces a fragile experience of safety. Even when danger is no longer imminent, it continues to feel imminent. Refuge becomes a misnomer; external protection does not guarantee internal peace. As Li et al. (2016) note, trauma and ongoing post-migration stressors compromise emotional regulation, making concentration, emotional stability, and engagement with the social world difficult to sustain. Withdrawal, dissociation, and apathy are often interpreted as maladaptive behaviours, yet they are better understood as defensive postures in response to an unlivable interior landscape.

Homa described this condition vividly:

I try to forget, the soldiers, the journey, the hunger, but then it all comes back. I can't sleep; I can't eat. My mind is a prison, and I don't know how to escape it. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

This metaphor of the mind as prison captures the inescapability of traumatic memory. As documented by Ottisova et al. (2016), many asylum seekers become caught in recurring cycles of intrusive recollection and emotional re-experiencing, sustained by ongoing uncertainty and post-migration stressors. The body absorbs this repetition, responding through insomnia, loss of appetite, and affective shutdown. These symptoms do not emerge in spite of safety, but because safety itself remains uncertain at the level of felt experience.

Yet even in this space of affective exhaustion, we observe fragments of emotional endurance. Minoo reflected:

The nightmares don't stop, but I talk to my friend here sometimes. She listens, and it helps a little. I don't want my daughter to see me broken, so I try to smile for her. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

This gesture of smiling, performed for the sake of a child, becomes an act of resistant subjectivity. It does not negate trauma but interrupts its totalisation. Drawing on Berlant's (2011) analysis of endurance under conditions of constraint, even minimal forms of social attunement, a friend's attentiveness, a child's gaze, can sustain the subject's capacity to persist, interrupting the totalising grip of despair without resolving its causes.

The Mental Health Foundation (2025) notes that trauma survivors often rely on what I term affective scaffolding, understood here as informal networks, small routines, or symbolic acts that help hold the self together. Preparing tea, caring for a child, or engaging in limited conversation all serve to re-anchor the self in the everyday. While these do not heal trauma,

they provide rhythm, coherence, and a measure of psychological containment in a context where chaos remains latent.

Thus, trauma must be understood not only as a pre-migration event but as a living condition, one that is shaped, prolonged, and sometimes deepened by the socio-affective environments of asylum. Its endurance is not a sign of individual weakness but a reflection of systemic insufficiency, where safety is granted administratively but denied affectively. The fragility of wellbeing, in this context, is not due to internal dysfunction but the unrelenting labour of surviving across multiple registers of emotional injury.

While trauma may originate in violence, war, or displacement, it does not end at the border. Rather, it is often sustained and reactivated within the bureaucratic and legal structures that shape the asylum process. Safety is not experienced as a definitive arrival, but as a conditional state, always deferred, always vulnerable to revocation. For many asylum seekers, it is not only past trauma that haunts the present but the legal uncertainty of the now, including the silence of the Home Office, the unpredictability of law, and the absence of orientation. These forces, though institutional in appearance, are deeply affective, producing psychic exhaustion, disorientation, and emotional fragmentation. The following sections explore how asylum law, far from being neutral, is lived as an intimate and destabilising presence.

Part II: Legal, Economic, and Temporal Structures of Affective Precarity

Relational absence does not occur in a vacuum. It is not only the product of individual exclusion or cultural dislocation, but also institutionally produced, sustained, and sedimented through legal and bureaucratic structures. In this section, the focus shifts from interpersonal dynamics to how asylum governance itself becomes an affective force, one that shapes how time is lived,

how decisions are anticipated, and how emotion is organised. The question of subjective wellbeing remains central, but now its contours are examined through the lens of institutional time, legal ambiguity, and the psychological weight of systemic indeterminacy.

Legal and procedural systems are not experienced as abstract or external. They are internalised and emotionally metabolised, producing what could be called affective precarity, a state in which asylum seekers are unable to regulate mood, anticipate futures, or stabilise emotional life. Bureaucratic silence, fluctuating asylum laws, and limited legal literacy become sources of anxiety, dread, and exhaustion. These experiences do not simply ‘accompany’ the asylum process; they are the asylum process as it is lived.

Waiting, not knowing, and administrative opacity function as technologies of affective governance that structure the asylum experience (Berlant, 2011; Griffiths, 2014; Ottisova et al., 2016). Legal uncertainty is not just a policy failure; it is a temporal and emotional regime that suspends lives in a state of unending deferral. From this perspective, asylum is not only a legal status but a psychosocial condition, a lived experience of ungroundedness, risk, and emotional depletion.

What follows are four interlinked dimensions of this condition. These include the psychological weight of waiting, the affective implications of inadequate legal support, the emotional toll of limited legal awareness, and the psychic instability produced by ever-shifting asylum laws. These are not parallel to subjective wellbeing; they are constitutive of it.

6.7 The Psychological Weight of Legal Uncertainty: Waiting as Emotional Suspension

Among the most corrosive and under-acknowledged aspects of the asylum process is the prolonged and indeterminate wait for legal resolution. For many asylum seekers, this period is not experienced as a bureaucratic inconvenience, but as a profound existential condition, what might be described as a form of affective limbo, where one's temporal, emotional, and relational worlds are held in suspension. Legal uncertainty is not only external; it is internalised, shaping the emotional contours of daily life through dread, paralysis, and the gradual erosion of hope.

Minoo captured the weight of this suspension:

My daughter and I have been waiting for over a year for our interview. This extended uncertainty, especially the prolonged separation from family members, has had severe mental health consequences, intensifying our feelings of isolation and helplessness. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

This narrative underscores that waiting is not merely the absence of action, it is an active, saturating presence. It produces emotional effects that are not incidental but structurally induced, including anxiety that accumulates in the body, fear that anticipates every knock at the door, and a felt disconnection from the temporal rhythms of ordinary life. Asylum seekers are often not just waiting for a decision but waiting to resume life itself. In this state, as Berlant (2011) argues, individuals are caught in a form of “crisis ordinariness” (p.81), where suffering becomes embedded in the repetitive and banal, rather than the exceptional. This condition of suspended ordinariness provides the emotional backdrop against which legal support, legal knowledge, and procedural clarity, or their absence, become psychologically decisive.

Research on asylum processes further shows that prolonged waiting and legal uncertainty sustain heightened anxiety and a persistent sense of being held in limbo, preventing individuals from planning, acting, or imagining a future (Haggar & Kienzler, 2025). Under these conditions, time itself becomes unstable, days blur into weeks, weeks into months. The present loses structure, and the future becomes difficult to project. Asylum seekers frequently describe themselves as emotionally ‘stuck’, unable to move forward, make decisions, or invest in any form of continuity. What emerges is not simply distress but a gradual thinning of the self, as prolonged suspension erodes the temporal and affective coordinates through which subjectivity is ordinarily sustained.

Importantly, this temporal instability has profound relational consequences. The lack of legal clarity often coincides with forced family separation, disrupting emotional regulation and deepening vulnerability. Asylum-seeking parents find themselves unable to provide stability or proximity to their children, producing a rupture in parental identity. Monir captured this devastation:

I heard that family reunification would take ten years, meaning those who arrived recently wouldn’t get an answer for ten years. Their cases are reviewed every two years, and they can’t apply for reunification during that time. I felt so devastated; I couldn’t bear the thought of my child not seeing his father for ten years. I hit the wall in frustration and felt terrible. I had some pills with me from my journey and started taking them all. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

The impossibility of reunification and the prolonged uncertainty it imposes lead not only to despair, but to a collapse of relational agency, a sense that one cannot protect, provide for, or emotionally contain loved ones. Parents report guilt, shame, and emotional fatigue as they struggle to maintain an appearance of control amid chronic unpredictability. This is not simply

the stress of waiting; it is the erosion of one's capacity to parent meaningfully under conditions that deny both time and proximity.

This affective distress is exacerbated by the silences of the system. Asylum seekers often describe feeling 'forgotten' or 'invisible' to the institutions that govern their lives. This silence, marked by the absence of updates, clarity, or explanation, produces what can be termed affective disorientation, a condition in which one cannot interpret events, evaluate danger, or emotionally calibrate to what lies ahead. Every letter becomes a potential catastrophe, every call a site of existential possibility. The emotional volatility this creates, hopeful one moment, devastated the next, is not a personal failure of coping, but a direct outcome of systemic opacity.

Psychologically, this volatile pattern often results in learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), the internalised belief that no action or affective investment will alter one's circumstances. The asylum seeker is not only immobilised legally, but emotionally paralysed, suspended between fear and futility. The sociological significance here is clear. Legal uncertainty does not simply delay resolution; it removes individuals from the social time of life. As Griffiths (2014) argues, asylum seekers are subjected to temporal exclusion, denied access to work, education, and social participation, they are suspended in a perpetual present that has no clear endpoint, no arc of progression.

This suspension is not neutral; it actively deteriorates wellbeing. The Mental Health Foundation (2025) reports that prolonged uncertainty surrounding immigration status and asylum decisions is linked to increased incidence of suicidal ideation, intrusive thoughts, emotional withdrawal, and psychosomatic symptoms such as disrupted sleep and appetite loss. These psychological consequences become even more acute when asylum seekers feel that their suffering is unseen

or illegible to others, when their waiting is not recognised as suffering, but merely tolerated as procedural.

To be placed in such a condition is to be governed through time, not just through status. Legal waiting becomes a mechanism of affective control, a system that regulates hope, narrows horizons, and renders futures unimaginable. It is not simply the absence of a decision; it is the slow, bureaucratic depletion of emotional vitality.

6.8 The Emotional Texture of Legal Support: Stability, Confusion, and Psychological Exposure

Legal support, within the asylum system, is often conceived in procedural terms, as a service that conveys information, facilitates applications, and delivers outcomes. Yet for asylum seekers, legal support is experienced not merely as a technical function but as a crucial affective infrastructure. It constitutes a domain in which recognition, stability, and containment are either affirmed or denied. From the perspective of subjective wellbeing, legal interactions are not ancillary, they are emotionally generative spaces, capable of soothing or destabilising, anchoring or unravelling.

Shahin captures the emotional fallout of minimal guidance:

Initially, I received very little legal guidance beyond a booklet. The absence of clear and continuous legal advice made me feel anxious, confused, and unsupported. Language barriers intensified these feelings, leaving me isolated and uncertain about the next steps in my journey. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

What this testimony highlights, is that uncertainty is not merely cognitive, it is embodied and affective. The lack of relational orientation within the legal process produces not just confusion,

but a deep sense of psychological exposure. Without adequate explanation or responsive engagement, asylum seekers are left to inhabit the system as unknowing subjects, those who must act without understanding, endure without clarity, and hope without assurance.

In this context, the role of legal practitioners extends far beyond information delivery. When communication is clear, consistent, and emotionally attuned, it performs a containing function, offering asylum seekers not just legal direction but a degree of emotional regulation. Research on post-migration stress demonstrates that ongoing uncertainty and administrative ambiguity function as ongoing stressors that can compound prior trauma and undermine wellbeing (Miller & Rasmussen, 2017; Silove, 2013). Within such conditions, the absence of reliable information intensifies distress, while moments of clarity and guidance can temporarily stabilise it. In this sense, lawyers and advisors come to function as points of orientation within an otherwise unstructured and unpredictable landscape.

Conversely, when legal support is fragmented, impersonal, or sporadic, as is often the case, the result is a form of affective drift. The individual becomes unmoored, unable to make sense of their situation or emotionally prepare for what lies ahead. This instability is exacerbated by the absence of sustained casework, frequent changes in legal representation following dispersal, and high caseloads that limit individual attention. While formal communication may take place, its relational quality is often absent. It does not soothe, contain, or affirm the subject. From a wellbeing perspective, this amounts to a subtle form of abandonment, support is present in name but absent in affect.

This disjunction, between legal formality and emotional experience, produces what might be described as a condition of emotional disembedding. The asylum seeker is forced to inhabit a

process that feels both intimate and opaque, one in which they are profoundly implicated in its outcomes yet structurally excluded from its logics. This results in heightened anxiety, mistrust, and emotional exhaustion, as individuals expend psychic energy trying to interpret signs, predict outcomes, or compensate for institutional silence.

Language barriers intensify these dynamics. When legal information is provided in inaccessible formats, or without space for clarification, the individual is further alienated, not only from legal knowledge but from the very capacity to ask, to understand, to participate. This produces a deeply felt relational asymmetry, in which one is perpetually dependent on others to narrate one's life. From the perspective of subjective wellbeing, this amounts to the erosion of emotional autonomy, the ability to orient oneself in the world with confidence and agency.

These conditions contribute to forms of emotional dysregulation, including difficulties with sleep, concentration, and affective coherence. When individuals are unable to understand what is happening, when the future remains unreadable, and when support appears absent or arbitrary, internal states become increasingly unstable. Attention narrows around anticipated risks, emotional resources are gradually depleted, and coping capacities begin to erode. What is observed here is not a manifestation of individual vulnerability but an effect of structural misattunement, in which the legal apparatus fails to register the affective consequences of its own practices.

Yet the potential for emotional support within legal practice is not negligible. When legal guidance is perceived as consistent, human, and responsive, it becomes a stabilising force. Even in the absence of resolution, clarity provides a form of containment. One knows where one stands. One knows who to ask. One can begin to imagine a future, even if it remains uncertain.

This kind of attuned legal support does not solve emotional distress, but it offers what Winnicott (1960) called a holding environment, a relational space in which the subject can feel withstood. It makes it possible to be suspended without becoming lost, to wait without disintegrating. In this sense, legal support becomes not just a procedural necessity, but a site of emotional possibility, capable of sustaining, or fracturing, the fragile architecture of wellbeing under conditions of displacement.

6.9 Emotional Consequences of Limited Legal Awareness: Anxiety, Disorientation, and Everyday Fear

Limited legal awareness is often treated as a technical gap, a failure of orientation or information delivery. But for asylum seekers, it is not merely a cognitive deficit; it is an embodied and emotional condition. The absence of clear, timely, and accessible information about rights, entitlements, and procedures generates a chronic sense of unpredictability that destabilises the most basic foundations of subjective wellbeing. This is not simply confusion; it is existential insecurity. The asylum seeker is not just uninformed; they are disoriented in a world where even basic safety is contingent on guesswork, translation, or chance.

Amir explains:

I have no information about who to call if something happens on the street. Nobody has told us. We haven't been given any contact information for emergency services. I don't even know the police number here or the emergency medical services. No information has been provided to us. (Participant 4, Iranian man)

This testimony reveals how informational deprivation becomes affective overload. Everyday environments become charged with uncertainty. The absence of procedural knowledge produces a diffuse, background anxiety that saturates perception and sharpens vulnerability.

Ordinary disruptions, like seeing a dog off a lead, become potential crises. Amir recalls:

Yes, I was out for a walk, and a lady with a big dog approached. The dog jumped on me, and its face was right in front of mine. I was so scared... but I kept thinking, what if something had happened? How would I communicate? (Participant 4, Iranian man)

Here, the absence of knowledge translates directly into fear. It is not the dog that is frightening, it is the imagined aftermath, the anticipated failure to respond, to explain, to act. Without clear frameworks for action, the world becomes unintelligible, not because it is unfamiliar, but because it remains inaccessible.

The problem begins early. Many asylum seekers describe their entry into the UK system as marked by informational voids. Homa recounted:

I was lost. I had no idea about the rules or the process. I just followed whatever I was told to do. Every time they explained something, I had to adjust myself accordingly. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

This dynamic reflects not only ignorance, but a state of affective submission. When one is continually adjusting without understanding, the capacity for emotional orientation begins to deteriorate. Individuals learn to obey without agency, to survive without knowing. This is not passivity, it is learned vulnerability, internalised through repeated encounters with opaque systems.

This condition is exacerbated in high-stakes moments. Taha recalled being shocked by an unexpected update:

I didn't know what had happened. They said I could call a specific number to arrange my return to Afghanistan. I was shocked, I had no idea what had happened. (Participant 24, Afghan man)

The distress here is not just about the message itself, but the emotional violence of non-explanation. Information arrives as rupture, not dialogue, as something done to the individual,

rather than shared with them. These moments induce a form of emotional whiplash, where one is expected to process life-altering information without context, translation, or relational holding.

The cumulative effect of these experiences is affective dislocation. The asylum seeker is displaced not only geographically, but epistemologically, unable to read, interpret, or make sense of the world around them. Rahmat had been in the asylum process for around six months when I spoke with him, during which access to legal advice and everyday services remained mediated by his limited knowledge of the systems through which they were organised. He explained:

Finding a lawyer was challenging, but essential. Also, understanding the need for language skills has been crucial... I needed to see a doctor but didn't know how to proceed. (Participant 30, Afghan man)

Here, even health-seeking becomes an act of emotional courage. The lack of clarity around everyday institutions, transport, law, medicine, renders life fragmented and improvisational. Individuals operate in a state of perpetual contingency, relying on informal networks, rumours, or second-hand experiences to navigate systems. Majid noted:

In each stage of the immigration process, either we were told by others or figured it out ourselves... I asked friends for lawyer contacts and found one willing to take my case. (Participant 27, Afghan man)

Such reliance on informal channels is not a sign of resilience, but often a last resort. While it may temporarily compensate for institutional silence, it rarely offers emotional security. When advice contradicts, or expectations go unmet, confusion deepens. This dynamic could be described as emotional outsourcing, a condition in which individuals must depend on others not only for guidance, but for the emotional scaffolding that the system fails to provide.

Over time, these micro-exposures to confusion, risk, and misrecognition contribute to cumulative emotional deterioration. Reza put it bluntly:

When I realised the harsh system, I was entering, I was severely depressed until about a month ago, lying in bed all day, doing nothing.
(Participant 9, Iranian man)

This withdrawal signifies more than low mood; it is an affective response to a world made unreadable. When no one explains, when nothing is predictable, when every decision requires guesswork, the only viable emotional strategy may be to shut down. What emerges is not only fear, but a form of psychic exhaustion, a depleted state in which the labour of staying informed becomes too heavy to carry.

In this light, limited legal awareness cannot be treated as a peripheral issue. It is central to the degradation of subjective wellbeing. It undermines emotional autonomy, corrodes trust, and produces a relational asymmetry that positions the asylum seeker as permanently dependent, perpetually confused, and affectively exposed. It is not simply that asylum seekers do not know, it is that they are not allowed to know. And in this not-knowing, their capacity to feel safe, grounded, and agentic steadily dissolves.

6.10 The Emotional and Psychological Toll of Ever-Changing Asylum Laws:

Instability, Crisis, and the Collapse of Hope

For asylum seekers, subjective wellbeing is already tethered to fragile conditions. Safety is provisional, belonging is deferred, and identity is suspended. Within this emotional ecology, the volatility of asylum law does more than confuse or delay, it produces an affective climate of instability. The constant flux of legal frameworks, criteria, and procedural requirements disorients not just planning but being. What begins as policy uncertainty becomes a form of

psychic erosion, where even minimal footholds of trust, orientation, or emotional regulation are steadily dismantled.

Monir captures this affective volatility in relation to ongoing legal instability:

The constant changes to asylum laws make me feel perpetually insecure and anxious, severely undermining my emotional wellbeing separate from economic issues. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

This statement makes clear that legal instability is not a secondary stressor. It is central to the affective architecture of displacement. When laws change without notice and eligibility shifts without explanation, asylum seekers are not only procedurally disoriented but also emotionally displaced, caught in a cycle of anticipatory dread in which outcomes remain unknowable, expectations cannot be regulated, and governing logics remain opaque. Hope becomes not simply difficult but dangerous, an emotional risk that many learn to suppress for fear of collapse.

This collapse is often most acute in situations of heightened vulnerability, particularly among parents, trauma survivors, and those separated from family. As discussed earlier, Monir described how learning that family reunification could be delayed for a decade precipitated an acute psychic breakdown, marked by overwhelming despair and suicidal action.

The legal change here did not simply shift a deadline. It shattered a fragile emotional scaffolding built around endurance, reunion, and imagined futurity. Her suicidality is not an isolated response but a rational affective reaction to institutional betrayal. Research on asylum processes shows that legal uncertainty and shifting policy frameworks disrupt temporal orientation and undermine the capacity to sustain future-directed meaning (Griffiths, 2014;

Rotter, 2016). Under such conditions, the minimal narrative coherence required for psychic survival becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

This sense of betrayal is exacerbated by informational unreliability. In the absence of consistent, verified communication, many turn to hearsay, rumours, or informal networks.

Marjan described how a piece of second-hand information produced overwhelming fear:

We went to an organisation... An Iranian man there told us that the asylum process had stopped for those who arrived after July 2022, and that it might take more than two years. My friend was devastated; her son is 16 and still in Turkey. She's terrified that by the time her case is processed, he'll have turned 18 and won't qualify under family reunification rules. She was so overwhelmed; her legs almost gave out from stress... (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

This moment encapsulates a broader pattern. Asylum seekers are expected to manage their lives amid contradictory, unverified, or partial information, and are simultaneously held responsible for their navigation of it. The result is affective exhaustion, a depletion of emotional and cognitive resources that inhibits even basic acts of self-advocacy. The will to ask, to clarify, to contest, becomes a casualty of constant psychic dislocation.

For some, this disintegration escalates to full-blown crisis. Minoos described:

My condition worsened, and I almost lost consciousness... You come here thinking you've reached a safe place where you'll get help, but there's no help... you reach a breaking point. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

This 'breaking point' is not only about unmet expectations, but also about the collapse of existential coherence. Safety, long deferred, proves illusory. Help, bureaucratically present, remains emotionally absent. The resulting psychic state is one of withdrawal and derealisation,

where even the basic rhythms of life, eating, socialising, going outside, cease to hold meaning, she continued:

I don't feel like talking to anyone. I didn't even go to get food sometimes... Sometimes I went weeks without going out. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

In such cases, the toll of legal uncertainty is not abstract, it is material, relational, and bodily. Appetite disappears. Social contact recedes. Mobility is surrendered. Subjective wellbeing is not gradually worn down, it is intensely, intimately shattered.

Even those who attempt to remain engaged with the process describe the emotional limits of procedural participation. Homa explained:

I prefer to fill out a questionnaire rather than go through another nerve-racking interview. I can't handle the stress... (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

This is not passivity; it is a form of emotional triage. Asylum seekers must ration their affective energy, choosing modes of engagement that inflict the least psychic damage. These preferences do not reflect apathy but emotional pragmatism under extreme constraint, a survival strategy at the edge of tolerance.

Marjan articulated the affective rupture with chilling clarity:

I knew seeking asylum would be a very tough process... but when you reach a point where you can't take it anymore. (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

That 'point' is a limit condition, a threshold where the self no longer has the emotional scaffolding to withstand further unpredictability. What collapses is not only a person's ability to hope or wait, but their very capacity to feel held in the world. When laws change without

warning, without explanation, and without care, it is not only procedural logic that breaks down, but also the asylum seeker's subjective coherence, their emotional capacity to continue.

Part III: Subjective Recovery and the Everyday Politics of Selfhood

While previous sections examined how institutional and structural conditions fragment wellbeing through legal uncertainty, economic deprivation, and social misrecognition, this final part turns toward the affective labour of survival, the ways asylum seekers negotiate, recompose, or resist the psychic consequences of displacement. Here, subjective wellbeing is not defined by the absence of distress, but by the struggle to retain a coherent sense of self under conditions of loss, stigma, and symbolic erasure. This part explores how identity is reconfigured through emotional memory, role disintegration, and cultural dislocation, and how asylum seekers continue to make sense of who they are, even when institutions fail to recognise them. What emerges is not recovery as resolution, but as everyday negotiation, partial and uneven, and always shaped by the politics of visibility and worth.

6.11 Identity and Self-Perception: Navigating Loss, Stigma, and Renewal

The subjective wellbeing of asylum seekers is shaped not only by material deprivation or institutional violence, but by the slow and often invisible disintegration of selfhood. Under conditions of forced migration, the self is not simply displaced geographically, it is destabilised symbolically, emotionally, and relationally, as previously meaningful social identities are disrupted and difficult to reconstitute (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Brance et al., 2024; Hack-Polay et al., 2021; Mijić, 2022). Identity becomes a site of rupture and confusion, who one was, who one is allowed to be, and who one might become remain unresolved and emotionally charged questions.

Asylum disrupts the social, cultural, and narrative infrastructures that once anchored personhood. It imposes conditions of symbolic suspension and misrecognition that profoundly affect how individuals relate to themselves. In this sense, identity is not a background variable, it is a central terrain in the struggle for psychic coherence and subjective recovery.

6.11.1 Loss of Roles and the Affective Collapse of Worth

Many asylum seekers arrive in the UK having already endured the trauma of loss, of home, safety, community. But once here, they face a different kind of erosion, the loss of socially meaningful roles. These include the identities that once conferred status, purpose, and recognition, parent, teacher, neighbour, contributor. Ramin described this rupture:

Our life back home was fulfilling... I was teaching, engaging with my community, and contributing meaningfully. Here, I feel worthless, held in a waiting room with no purpose. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

This reflection speaks to the emotional violence of role dispossession. As Goffman (1959) and Honneth (1996) each show in different registers, identity is not merely an inward possession but is socially mediated. It is formed and affirmed through social interaction and sustained through interaction and recognition. When asylum procedures render one inactive, dependent, and invisible, the self is no longer reflected back with value.

6.11.2 Cultural Displacement and Symbolic Homelessness

Beyond roles, many asylum seekers experience the loss of cultural rituals and symbolic practices as equally distressing. Religion, language, food, and shared rituals are not just traditions, they are technologies of self-maintenance, sources of rhythm, meaning, and coherence. When displaced from these practices, the self loses its coordinates. Reyhan reflected:

I used to pray with my community and share traditions. Here, I'm isolated, and the loss of familiar rituals leaves me feeling unanchored, emotionally disconnected from who I was. (Participant 25, Afghan man)

This affective disconnection from one's past self, coupled with the loss of familiar cultural practices, produces a form of symbolic homelessness. As Phillimore (2011) demonstrates, the disruption of cultural continuity and the constraints placed on cultural maintenance can generate forms of psychosocial stress that undermine wellbeing and complicate processes of settlement. The result is not only loneliness, but a fragmentation of the affective and symbolic structures through which memory, ritual, and belonging are ordinarily sustained.

6.11.3 Stigma and the Imposed Identity of the 'Asylum Seeker'

Adding to this dislocation is the experience of being categorised. Many asylum seekers describe the label 'asylum seeker' not as a form of recognition, but as a symbolic injury, that captures the emotional and relational consequences of being named from the outside. The label compresses complex lives into a singular bureaucratic identity, often infused with suspicion, pity, or avoidance. As Tyler (2013) argues, such state-imposed categories do not merely describe legal status but function as stigmatising technologies of governance through which belonging is regulated and social hierarchies are reproduced. Parvin was 55 and had been in the asylum process for around three months when I spoke with her. Reflecting on how her position as an asylum seeker displaced the social identities through which she had previously been recognised, she explained:

Being labelled an asylum seeker makes me feel as a burden. I was once recognised as a mother, a friend, a professional. Now, I'm just seen as a problem. (Participant 12, Iranian woman)

This testimony illustrates the affective consequences of imposed identity. The asylum system constructs subjects through categories that rarely reflect lived complexity, producing a

disjuncture between who one has been and how one is now recognised. Over time, this misrecognition does not remain external but becomes internalised, eroding dignity and narrowing the horizon of selfhood. As Goffman (1984) and Honneth (1996) suggest in different ways, processes of stigmatisation and misrecognition reshape the individual's relation to self, such that identity is no longer securely inhabited but becomes something managed, negotiated, and at times concealed. The self, in this sense, becomes less something one can inhabit with continuity, and more something one must hold back under conditions of exposure.

6.12 Resilience as Affective Endurance Under Structural Abandonment

In the discourse of displacement, resilience is often romanticised as personal strength or innate fortitude. Yet for asylum seekers, resilience is not an achievement, it is an affective necessity, forged in the absence of choice, support, or recognition. It is the psychic labour of holding oneself and one's loved ones together under conditions of structural abandonment. From the lens of subjective wellbeing, resilience is not a return to emotional balance but a tense endurance, a condition of surviving without resolution, where one's emotional life must be constantly reassembled under duress.

The narratives of Minoo and Ramin make visible the depth of this emotional labour. Minoo, describing a near-fatal boat journey with her child and while pregnant, reflects:

The boat had almost broken in the middle because of the pressure. It was dark, and we were all crying and scared. Some had life jackets, but most didn't. Me and my child didn't have one... It was a terrifying experience, but we survived. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

This is not simply a testimony of survival, but of fear metabolised into persistence. What is striking is not only the physical danger but the emotional intensity with which care, terror, and

survival intersect. Minoo's resilience was not a choice, it was an obligation to live for another, an affective tether to her child in the absence of institutional protection.

Yet resilience does not end with survival. As Ramin recounts:

Coming here has meant we have to start everything from scratch... It takes time to adjust and adapt to this new life. It's tough. It's really tough for us and our children. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

The resilience required after arrival is no less demanding. It is the slow work of rebuilding self and family under bureaucratic indifference, of adapting to unfamiliar social environments while grieving what was lost. Homa similarly reflects on this internal exhaustion:

You're in a situation with nothing... no job, no activities, no familiar food or clothes... You're forced to stay in the hotel room, doing nothing until your situation is resolved... It's tough. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

These reflections reveal the emotional cost of endurance, depression, frustration, and the psychic wear of stagnation. Resilience becomes a kind of affective scaffolding, erected in the absence of structured support. It is not heroic; it is compulsory.

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital clarifies this further. Asylum seekers are systematically stripped of economic, social, and cultural capital, yet are expected to recover, rebuild, and remain composed with almost none of the resources that make such processes possible. As Minoo described:

When we finally settled, I realised how alone we were, starting over with no one to turn to for help. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

This solitude is not incidental; it is structurally produced. Resilience, then, compensates for the state's refusal to provide what Giddens (1984) describes as the enabling conditions of agency.

Asylum seekers are compelled to generate psychic coherence and emotional stability through improvised, inward-facing practices, including the rationing of hope, the suppression of despair, the creation of private routines in the absence of public rhythm, and the mobilisation of fragile affective ties within the family or the self. Participants described structuring their days around small repetitive activities, caring for children, walking, or maintaining simple routines in order to impose some rhythm on otherwise stagnant time. Emotional regulation becomes a solitary labour, performed through endurance, distraction, repetition, and self-containment rather than support or recognition. In this hostile emotional economy, survival depends less on empowerment than on the capacity to hold oneself together in conditions that offer little external holding.

Crucially, even where resilience draws on others, it is experienced at the level of the self. It is not individual toughness, but emotional reciprocity within families and co-ethnic networks. As Minoo recounts:

I was very afraid, not for myself but for my child. I was also pregnant at that time. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

And Ramin echoes:

Seeing her condition [his daughter] and not being able to help has been very hard for me too. I became very worried and stressed. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

These are not isolated struggles. They are interpersonal burdens, where the wellbeing of others becomes both a source of strength and an added emotional weight. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital helps illuminate this duality. Here, familial bonds appear not as stable resources but as precarious supports, functioning simultaneously as buffer and bind, offering moments of meaning while intensifying the pain of unmet needs.

This duality defines asylum-seeking resilience. It is both a testament to care and a symptom of neglect. When Minoo, already traumatised and pregnant, is moved to a worse hotel, denied companionship, and left to fend for her mental health, her continued coping is not evidence of system success, it is a critique of its abdication. Her story reveals that resilience is often a survival mechanism necessitated by failure, rather than a supported capacity.

Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration illustrates that agency does not exist in a vacuum, it is always exercised within enabling or constraining structures. In the asylum context, the burden of endurance is placed disproportionately on the individual, while the structures that demand this endurance remain unaccountable.

What participants describe is not agency in the sense of choice or transformation, but the daily labour of emotional containment. Resilience is enacted through practices aimed at limiting psychic collapse rather than producing change. Several interviewees spoke of deliberately suppressing emotional expression, avoiding hope, or narrowing their emotional range as a way of protecting themselves from further disappointment. Others described maintaining rigid routines, staying physically inactive, or withdrawing socially in order to conserve emotional energy. These practices are not oriented toward recovery but toward endurance, they allow the individual to remain intact in environments that offer no external holding.

In this context, resilience operates as a form of affective self-management. Asylum seekers learn to ration feeling, to delay desire, and to contain distress within the private sphere of the self or family. Emotional regulation becomes a solitary task, performed through repetition, distraction, and emotional restraint rather than through recognition or support. Resilience appears less as strength than as sustained self-containment under conditions that deny repair.

6.13 Conclusion

This chapter has examined subjective wellbeing not as a stable psychological condition, but as a lived interior shaped by displacement, uncertainty, and prolonged exposure to constraint. Rather than treating emotions as secondary responses to external events, the analysis has foregrounded how feelings, self-perception, and psychic stability are reorganised through everyday encounters with misrecognition, waiting, and enforced dependency. Subjective wellbeing, in this context, emerges not as something that can be restored or secured, but as something continually negotiated under pressure.

Across the chapter, the self appears as a fragile assemblage. Language loss fractures recognition and interrupts narrative continuity, leaving individuals present yet unanchored in social interaction. Social isolation thins emotional life, producing estrangement not only from others but from the self's own sense of coherence. Constrained living erodes autonomy, narrowing the scope of action and imagination, while encounters with care that lack attunement generate an illusion of connection that fails to meet emotional need. Trauma, far from remaining in the past, circulates through the present, drawn forward by silence, repetition, and sensory triggers embedded in the asylum environment itself. Together, these processes do not culminate in a singular moment of breakdown, but in a gradual wearing down of emotional continuity.

Yet the chapter has also shown that subjective wellbeing does not simply collapse under these conditions. Asylum seekers engage in sustained affective labour to remain intact, by containing distress, rationing hope, narrowing emotional exposure, and constructing small routines in the absence of public rhythm or reliable support. Practices of affective scaffolding, whether through care for a child, limited social contact, or symbolic acts of continuity, do not resolve

suffering, but prevent its totalisation. Subjective wellbeing thus takes the form of endurance rather than equilibrium, a way of holding oneself together where repair is unavailable.

At the same time, this endurance exposes its own limits. Emotional life cannot be sustained indefinitely through interior containment alone. Where recognition is withheld, where care is procedural rather than mutual, and where connection remains fragile or conditional, subjective wellbeing is forced inward, becoming increasingly solitary and precarious. The interior, as this chapter has shown, is not sealed off from the social world; it is shaped, strained, and sometimes undone through it.

In this sense, subjective wellbeing under asylum is neither a purely internal matter nor a private struggle. It is produced in the space between persons and institutions, between care offered and care felt, between recognition given and recognition denied. The limits of interior endurance point outward, toward the relational conditions through which emotional life is sustained, strained, or rendered untenable.

Chapter 7

Relational Wellbeing

7.1 Introduction

Relational wellbeing concerns the conditions under which people are able to form, sustain, and inhabit relationships that are not only emotionally supportive, but morally recognitive, socially embedded, and structurally viable. As established in the Key Concepts section, relational wellbeing is concerned not simply with interpersonal ties, but with how social, institutional, and political forces shape the terms on which connection, care, and recognition become possible or are foreclosed. While material wellbeing addresses access to resources and subjective wellbeing attends to interior emotional life, relational wellbeing foregrounds how relationships are organised and constrained within wider structures of power.

Yet under conditions of displacement, these capacities are rarely guaranteed. Instead, they are structured by bureaucratic regimes, spatial exclusion, and moral hierarchies that determine who may relate, how, and at what cost. For asylum seekers, relational life unfolds within a landscape shaped by legal precarity, enforced dependency, and asymmetrical forms of care. Relationships with institutions, charities, co-residents, communities, and kin are marked by conditionality, surveillance, and uncertainty, requiring constant negotiation.

In this context, relational wellbeing is not simply given or withheld. It is actively negotiated, defended, and at times withdrawn as a strategy of protection. Distancing, silence, selective engagement, and informal forms of care emerge not as signs of disengagement, but as relational responses to environments in which recognition is fragile and exposure carries risk.

This chapter traces how relational wellbeing is strained, disrupted, and provisionally sustained across key domains of asylum life, including bureaucratic encounters, voluntary care networks, accommodation settings, community relations, family life, and transnational ties. Across these sites, relational wellbeing appears not as a stable condition, but as a fragile achievement shaped by institutional design, moral judgement, and unequal power.

And yet, relational life is not entirely undone. Asylum seekers continue to assert relational agency through everyday acts of care, informal solidarities, and quiet practices of connection that persist despite constraint. In this sense, relational wellbeing is a site of both vulnerability and resistance. While the asylum regime fragments, surveils, and moralises relational life, asylum seekers remain embedded in and committed to practices of connection. It is in these fractured but persistent social worlds that the struggle for relational wellbeing, and the right to be recognised as a social subject, takes place.

7.2 Bureaucratic Encounters and the Relational Neglect

While the previous chapter examined the affective consequences of institutional non-response and procedural opacity, this section centres the relational consequences of bureaucratic encounters in the lives of asylum seekers. What emerges is not simply administrative inefficiency, but a structural form of relational neglect: an institutional withdrawal that erodes trust, fractures recognition, and renders asylum seekers unable to inhabit the social roles through which relational wellbeing might be sustained (Borelli et al., 2023; Darling, 2022; Mayblin, 2021; Morrell, 2025).

For asylum seekers, relationships with institutions are often the primary routes through which everyday necessities are accessed, including housing, healthcare, education, and

communication. Yet participants' accounts consistently portrayed these relationships as marked by absence, evasion, and fragmentation. Agencies such as Migrant Help, housing providers, educational institutions, and other statutory bodies were frequently experienced not as sites of support, but as institutional figures of abandonment. As Monir stated:

Our only point of contact is Migrant Help. They send us links that don't work. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

These encounters reflect what I conceptualise as non-relational governance, as a bureaucratic mode of engagement in which institutions withdraw from the ethical and relational dimensions of care, replacing responsiveness with procedural deferral, digital mediation, and subcontracted responsibility (Darling, 2022; Mayblin, 2021; Morrell, 2025). Marjan explained:

We called Migrant Help many times... but we didn't get a response until we were already transferred to another hotel. (Participant 8, Iranian woman)

For Nooshin, institutional non-response became entangled with her attempts to access financial support. She was 35 and had been in the asylum process for around 17 months when I spoke with her. During this time, she applied for Section 95 support and waited three months for a response, only to be told that her documents had been lost and that she would need to begin the application again. Recalling this experience, she explained:

I applied for Section 95 support. They told me to wait three months. After three months, they said they had lost my documents and I needed to reapply. (Participant 13, Iranian woman)

These moments reflect not simply a breakdown in communication but a relational void. Institutional gestures toward care can mask a deeper withdrawal from relational responsibility, obscuring the moral obligations embedded in support (Ticktin, 2011). What is withdrawn here is not information, but relation itself. Trust is eroded not only in the immediacy of unmet need,

but across time, as asylum seekers' capacity to imagine future institutional support or relational stability becomes increasingly fragile.

Participants also described the inconsistency and arbitrariness of responses across individuals and family members. Reza noted:

I received my Section 95 letter after two months, but my wife hasn't received hers even after six months. (Participant 9, Iranian man)

Such discrepancies fracture the relational coherence of family units, rendering them administratively incoherent and undermining capacities to coordinate care, advocate collectively, or sustain shared relational roles. Delays and procedural rigidity do not affect individuals in isolation; they reorganise relational life by destabilising interdependence within families.

These dynamics are compounded by the discretionary practices of street-level bureaucracies (Lipsky, 1980), in which decision-making is shaped by institutional constraint, routinisation, and uneven application rather than responsiveness to asylum seekers lived realities. Rahmat explained:

They asked me to provide my bank statement, but I don't even have a bank account. (Participant 30, Afghan man)

In these moments, relational disempowerment is enacted through impossibility, the demand to perform bureaucratic compliance in a system that withholds the conditions of possibility. These encounters do not simply frustrate; they undermine asylum seekers' capacity to appear as legitimate claimants or moral subjects.

Crucially, this pattern of relational neglect extends beyond asylum-specific, subcontracted services into mainstream public institutions, particularly education. Educational access emerged as a significant site where bureaucratic non-relation undermined relational wellbeing. Participants described exclusion from schools, colleges, and language courses as processes that stripped them of relational autonomy, understood in Nedelsky's (1989) terms as autonomy constituted through social relations, and operationalised here as the capacity to inhabit roles of learner, advocate, or parent through relationships that enable voice, participation, and recognition. Ramin stated:

Another issue was my concern about my daughter's education... nothing was done about her schooling during the four months we were there. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

This reflects a mode of bureaucratic non-recognition, in which institutional actors fail to acknowledge not only educational need but the relational roles at stake. Through procedural delay, opaque eligibility criteria, and administrative deferral, parents are dislocated from their ethical and social positions as caregivers and advocates. A review of asylum-seeking and refugee children's educational experiences highlights how delayed or disrupted access to schooling, particularly in contexts of temporary accommodation, undermines parental involvement and family stability (Peterson et al., 2017), producing forms of relational harm that extend beyond educational deprivation.

Similar dynamics shaped asylum seekers' attempts to access education for themselves. Shahin recalled:

We registered for college... later they said I needed my asylum card. So, I couldn't start the classes. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

Drawing on Cwerner's (2001) analysis of asynchronous and heteronomous migration temporalities, in which migrants' time is governed by external institutional schedules rather than personal or social rhythms, this chapter conceptualises asylum as organised through what can be understood as timescapes of waiting. Here, temporal deferral functions not merely as administrative delay but as a reorganisation of time itself. Within such timescapes, asylum seekers' capacity to act as learners, contributors, or participants is suspended, as everyday life is rendered out of synchrony with institutional and social rhythms. The postponement of access thus interrupts relational life not only by delaying educational trajectories, but by foreclosing participation and recognition in the present.

The relational consequences of these exclusions were often familial. Parents unable to interpret emails, assist with schoolwork, or advocate on behalf of their children described a loss of relational competence produced not in personal failure, but in institutional design. Monir stated:

I can't even respond to his school emails because I don't understand them. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

As Ticktin (2011) shows, institutional regimes of care are often selective and conditional, such that forms of support may coexist with practices of exclusion and withdrawal. In this context, the denial of care operates as a form of relational disruption through which the roles that sustain relational life are progressively eroded. While some participants eventually navigated educational barriers through informal workarounds or personal networks, these instances did not resolve the underlying condition of exclusion but instead highlighted the precarity of access. Relational wellbeing, in this sense, becomes contingent on improvised and uneven forms of support rather than secured through institutional commitment (Krause, 2014).

Across both asylum-specific and mainstream institutions, bureaucratic contact points were thus structured in ways that prevent sustained relational engagement. Responsibility was fragmented, responsiveness deferred, and care displaced across actors. Relational wellbeing, under these conditions, is not guaranteed but made contingent by design, dependent on institutional discretion, temporal luck, and external mediation rather than recognised relational entitlement.

7.3 The Asymmetries of Care: Voluntary Support and Relational Disempowerment

In contrast to the procedural indifference characterising many bureaucratic encounters, this section examines the relational dynamics that unfold within voluntary and charitable care networks. While these spaces often provide essential material and emotional support, they are shaped by structural asymmetries and moralised expectations that constrain rather than enable relational agency. For asylum seekers, such dynamics produce a form of care that is precarious, conditional, and saturated with judgements about worthiness. Rather than offering a relational alternative to bureaucratic neglect, these moral economies frequently reproduce the very inequalities they seek to address, embedding asylum seekers in circuits of dependency and conditional belonging.

Voluntary and faith-based care systems often operate within what Waite et al. (2014) describe as a moralised gift economy. In this framework, care is not treated as an entitlement but as a discretionary offering, contingent upon the recipient's ability to demonstrate need, humility, and gratitude. These expectations shape not only what asylum seekers receive, but how they must act and appear in order to be seen as deserving. Ramin stated:

The charity was very good, even bringing my daughter supplements.
They also organised English classes for us... but it ended quickly.
(Participant 11, Iranian man)

This account reflects what Millar (2014) describes as precarious generosity in which care is project-bound, inconsistent, and shaped by funding cycles rather than sustained relational engagement. The discontinuity of support intensifies relational vulnerability, as asylum seekers must navigate not only insecurity of provision but also the emotional labour of moral performance.

Participants described being cautious not to appear ungrateful or critical, even when support was misaligned or inadequate. These dynamics echo broader patterns of moral surveillance identified by Canning (2017), in which silence and compliance become informal conditions of continued access to aid. Relational wellbeing, in this context, is not simply about receiving care but about sustaining relational legibility within moralised frameworks of deservingness.

These asymmetries are further reinforced by the wider privatisation of care, through which responsibilities previously held by the state are displaced onto underfunded and unevenly resourced voluntary organisations, including in health and welfare provision (Aspinall & Watters, 2010; Darling, 2016b). Graham (2025) shows how this displacement is not merely political but legal, with statutory frameworks requiring asylum seekers to exhaust charitable and informal support before public duties are triggered, thereby institutionalising dependency and rendering care discretionary rather than relationally accountable. Monir explained:

I called a friend who contacted a church, and they helped get a uniform
for my child. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

While such interventions were often welcomed, they underscored the dependence asylum seekers experience within systems of discretionary support. As Tronto (1993) argues, care

becomes ethically meaningful only when accompanied by responsibility and accountability. In the absence of such guarantees, relational wellbeing becomes contingent upon personal networks and organisational goodwill rather than secured through rights. Asylum seekers thus navigate care systems in which moral performance, rather than structural inclusion, determines access, reproducing cycles of dependency and relational marginality.

At the same time, participants' accounts reveal that voluntary and charitable spaces are not relationally uniform. While many organisations operate within moralised frameworks that reproduce dependency and conditionality, others actively seek to foster autonomy, reciprocity, and shared participation. What emerges is not a singular experience of voluntary care, but a continuum of relational positioning, shaped by organisational ethos, resources, and institutional constraint.

7.4 Dignity, Contribution, and the Politics of Recognition

Relational wellbeing is not reducible to the presence of social networks or moments of interaction; it is fundamentally rooted in the ability to appear as a valued participant in social life. For many asylum seekers, this capacity is systematically foreclosed by legal and institutional structures that deny the right to work, to contribute openly, or to participate in shared social spaces on recognised terms. As the preceding discussion of voluntary care and constrained volunteering has shown, relational agency under asylum is often partial and conditional; what is at stake here is a deeper struggle over dignity, contribution, and recognition. In this context, recognition is not merely symbolic; it is a relational condition, the ability to be seen not as a dependent or administrative burden, but as someone with something to offer.

The legal channelling of asylum seekers into charity-dependent survival, documented by Graham (2025), further entrenches their positioning as recipients rather than contributors, foreclosing recognised roles through which dignity and social participation might otherwise be secured. Participants repeatedly articulated a desire to give back, to escape the static position of the recipient. Reza explained:

I want to work, to do something useful. Not just take but give back. But we are not allowed. (Participant 9, Iranian man)

This desire was not only economic but fundamentally relational. To contribute is to be embedded within circuits of reciprocity; to be denied the opportunity to do so is to be positioned outside the moral architecture of participation. As Fraser (2000) argues, misrecognition operates as a form of institutionalised subordination, obstructing “parity of participation” (p.115), understood as a normative standard of justice in which individuals possess the institutional conditions required to interact as peers in social life. When asylum seekers are positioned as incapable of contributing, they are denied the grounds through which social subjectivity is ordinarily affirmed. This reshapes not only how they are seen, but the relational terms under which they exist.

UK asylum policy, as critically analysed by Mayblin (2021), enforces a condition of protracted non-participation, in which asylum seekers are legally barred from employment and structurally discouraged from meaningful contribution. This enforced idleness is not a neutral administrative condition but a relational technology of governance, one that inscribes passivity and moral dependency while erasing roles through which recognition might otherwise be secured. Ramin stated:

I used to be a teacher. Here, I am nothing. I can’t even volunteer because they say it’s complicated. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

The force of this statement lies not only in frustration but in the experience of nothingness it articulates. To say ‘I am nothing’ is to register an institutional stripping of identity, in which prior skills, histories, and social roles are rendered illegible. This condition is not incidental but produced through governance, specifically through the systematic withdrawal of recognised roles, permissions, and future possibilities. Sociological and critical analyses have long shown how identity erosion functions as a mode of social control, achieved not through overt punishment but through the withdrawal of recognised roles and purposes. As Arendt (1953) argued in her analysis of rightlessness, the loss of membership in a political community strips individuals of the very framework through which rights can be claimed and recognised. Butler (2004b) similarly conceptualises such moments as forms of social undoing, in which the conditions that allow a life to appear as recognisable and valuable are withdrawn.

The denial of contribution also generates a climate in which initiative itself becomes risky. Payam explained:

Even if you want to help, you’re always scared it could be seen as breaking the rules. So, you just stop. (Participant 28, Afghan man)

As Lewis et al. (2015) demonstrate, hyper-precarity is not confined to labour market insecurity but extends into the texture of everyday life. Under conditions of deportability, legal insecurity structures conduct and constrains initiative. What emerges is not simply economic vulnerability, but a relational form of self-regulation: action becomes anticipatory, calibrated against the risk of sanction. In this way, the asylum seeker remains legible primarily as a recipient of care rather than a contributor, as aspiration itself becomes potentially suspect.

Fanon’s (2002) critique of colonial exclusion remains powerfully relevant here. The refusal to allow contribution is not merely a denial of rights; it is a relational act of dehumanisation. To

be systematically excluded from the circuits of giving is to be denied the possibility of constructing oneself as a relational subject. In the asylum system, this exclusion is institutionalised not through overt hostility, but through the quiet erasure of the social roles through which dignity, reciprocity, and recognition are ordinarily secured.

Despite these constraints, participants described engaging in informal, often invisible forms of contribution including helping new arrivals, sharing food, translating letters, offering emotional or practical support to co-residents. These acts, while unrecognised by institutional frameworks, constitute a relational ethic of persistence under conditions of exclusion.

These practices unfold within what Kalir (2019) conceptualises as regimes of repressive compassion, in which institutions sustain an affective appearance of care while systematically withdrawing responsibility and limiting migrants' capacity for recognition and agency. In this context, informal acts of contribution take on particular significance. As recent scholarship on migrant agency and dignity demonstrates, such informal practices function as relational claims to recognition in contexts where formal participation is denied (Ataç et al., 2016; Kallio et al., 2025; Perrin, 2025; Tyler, 2020). They do not negate structural exclusion, but they reveal a sustained refusal to be reduced solely to the status of the dependent recipient.

What is at stake here is not simply activity, but dignity. The desire to contribute reflects a demand to appear before others as a moral equal, someone who gives as well as receives. Relational wellbeing, as the following sections show, hinges on this possibility, not merely of connection or support, but of being needed, recognised, and permitted to shape the shared social world. Where asylum policy forecloses this possibility, it does not only restrict economic

autonomy; it corrodes the relational foundations through which people come to matter to one another.

7.5 Gratitude, Deservingness, and Relational Labour

While participants consistently described the value of support received from charitable organisations, their narratives also revealed a more complex relational terrain shaped by expectations of performance and the implicit demand to appear grateful and worthy. Care, in this context, was not simply received but negotiated, and the receipt of aid entailed subtle yet potent expectations around how asylum seekers should present themselves, speak, and feel. This moral loading of care aligns with what Muehlebach (2012) describes as “moral neoliberalism” (p.25), a system in which ethical citizenship is expressed through unpaid care and affective performance, particularly within the context of welfare reform, where recipients are compelled to perform gratitude in order to be recognised as deserving. Similarly, Anderson and Shutes (2014) show how migrant care arrangements are embedded within unequal power relations that render support morally conditional and emotionally demanding. The emotional labour involved in navigating these expectations, under conditions where help is morally saturated and structurally fragile thus emerges as a critical axis of relational wellbeing.

Participants frequently described feeling unable to voice concerns about the adequacy or appropriateness of donations. Sara reflected:

One time, a lady from a charity, I don't know what it was called, she came to the hotel and gave me some warm clothes. They were really small, but I was too shy to say anything. I thought, she'll think I'm rude. So, I just took them and thanked her. (Participant 23, Iranian woman)

Parvin described a similar situation:

People from a charity came and gave me loads of carrots and loads of canned food. But like, what am I supposed to do with all those carrots? And I don't have anything in the hotel to heat up the canned food either. But I just thanked them and didn't say anything, I didn't want them to think we're ungrateful. (Participant 12, Iranian woman)

These accounts illustrate how relational wellbeing becomes entangled with the moral economy of aid. The asymmetry between giver and receiver is mediated not only through material dependency but through expectations of emotional alignment. Gratitude is not merely an expression of appreciation; it becomes a relational performance, shaped by fear of moral misrecognition. Within ethically saturated regimes of care, access to support is implicitly tethered to demonstrations of humility and acceptability, rendering gratitude a condition of continued inclusion rather than a spontaneous response. Participants spoke of routinely modulating their emotional expression to avoid seeming entitled or ungrateful, a dynamic that crystallises in the performance of gratitude. Kamal was 40 and had been in the asylum process for around 20 months when I spoke with him. Reflecting on the need to express appreciation when receiving food from volunteers, even when the support did not meet his needs, he explained:

I always thank the volunteers for the food, even if it's just bread and soup again. It's not about being unhappy, but I feel like I need to show I appreciate it. (Participant 26, Afghan man)

Here, the gesture of thanks operates as a socially mandated signal, an affective expression that affirms the moral legitimacy of the giver while safeguarding the recipient's access to future support. As Buxton and Gibney (2025) argue, asylum governance is embedded within moral narratives that frame refugees as deserving only insofar as they endure hardship with humility and restraint. Within such frames, critique becomes risky; refusal or dissatisfaction threatens the symbolic economy in which generosity is understood as benevolent and exceptional.

This dynamic echoes Bourdieu's (1977) account of the 'gift' as a relation that establishes symbolic debt and moral hierarchy rather than neutral exchange. In highly unequal contexts, as Sahlins (2011) observed, gift-giving often fails to enable reciprocity and instead consolidates asymmetry by positioning one party as benefactor and the other as dependent. Gratitude thus functions not only as a feeling but as a structured obligation that disciplines emotional expression and limits relational agency. Even when sincerely felt, expressions of thanks are embedded within an asymmetrical logic that requires recipients to perform acceptability in order to remain within the bounds of moral inclusion.

Participants who had previously held positions of social and economic stability described the destabilising effects of being recast as recipients of aid. Shahin remarked:

Back home, I was the one helping others. I didn't expect to be in this situation. It's hard to keep asking... very hard. (Participant 20, Iranian man)

This experience resonates with what Fothergill (2003) describes as the moral cost of receiving. Being positioned as dependent, particularly for those who once occupied roles as caregivers, professionals, or community contributors, undermines relational status and self-concept. The emotional toll of this shift is intensified within asylum conditions marked by enforced precarity and welfare restriction (Darling, 2016a; Mayblin, 2021). Within such conditions, critique becomes fraught, and silence, deference, and gratitude are tactically performed as ways of preserving access to basic resources. Majid noted:

I avoid asking too much. I don't want to seem like I'm expecting things. (Participant 27, Afghan man)

This form of self-monitoring reflects the relational labour required to remain morally acceptable within conditional care regimes. As Lewis et al. (2015) emphasise, asylum

governance extends beyond formal exclusions from rights and work into the everyday regulation of conduct, where legal insecurity encourages anticipatory compliance and self-disciplining behaviour. Within such conditions, recipients calibrate their actions to minimise risk, narrowing the space for reciprocal or authentic connection and limiting the possibility of disagreement or unmet need being voiced without fear of sanction.

At the same time, participants' accounts complicate any singular portrayal of voluntary and charitable spaces as uniformly constraining. While many organisations operate within moralised frameworks that reproduce dependency and conditionality, others actively seek to foster autonomy, reciprocity, and shared participation. What emerges is not a uniform experience but a continuum of relational positioning, shaped by organisational ethos, resources, and institutional constraint. Some organisations position asylum seekers primarily as recipients of care, reinforcing asymmetrical relations structured around gratitude and compliance. Others create limited but meaningful spaces for contribution, skill-sharing, or mutual support, offering moments of relational recognition even in the absence of formal rights. However, these efforts remain structurally fragile, often constrained by funding precarity, safeguarding regimes, and the wider legal prohibition on work.

Within these interactions, relational wellbeing in the context of asylum is shaped not only by whether support is available, but by the moral and emotional conditions under which that support is offered and navigated. The labour of gratitude and the fear of judgement are not idiosyncratic responses, but socially patterned adaptations to regimes of conditional care. The problem, then, is not voluntary care per se, but that moments of reciprocity and voice remain contingent on moral performance rather than secured through rights, rendering relational autonomy fragile and revocable.

7.6 Institutionalised Proximity and the Denial of Relational Agency

Relational wellbeing depends not only on the presence of others, but on the terms through which proximity is configured, relationships are negotiated, and subjectivities are recognised. For many asylum seekers, institutional accommodation does not enable connection but imposes a choreography of proximity without consent, requiring individuals to live with strangers under spatial, temporal, and cultural constraints that limit retreat, autonomy, and dialogue. What is enacted in these settings is not simply discomfort, but a denial of relational agency, understood here as the capacity to inhabit relationships on one's own terms and to refuse intimacy that is imposed rather than chosen (Gill, 2009; Ziersch et al., 2017).

Homa's earlier account of conflict within shared accommodation illustrates how institutional accommodation organises cohabitation while offering no meaningful structures through which shared living can be negotiated. As discussed in Chapter Five, differences in everyday routines, use of shared space, and expectations of privacy generated sustained tension within a room allocated through the accommodation system. Read relationally, the significance of this account lies in how these differences had to be negotiated within conditions in which neither proximity nor the terms of cohabitation were meaningfully chosen.

What emerges in this account is not a critique of cultural difference but a reflection on the absence of any framework for relational mediation. Asylum accommodation imposes proximity without providing the structures through which shared living can be negotiated, allocating cohabitation without providing mechanisms for boundary-setting, negotiation, or mutual adjustment. UK dispersal and accommodation arrangements function not only to house but to govern, shaping the conditions of privacy, negotiation, and retreat through which relational life becomes possible (Darling, 2022; Ziersch et al., 2017).

Participants frequently described environments in which privacy was unattainable, and withdrawal became the only viable strategy for preserving a sense of self. Majid echoed this dynamic:

They said, ‘Don’t use this space when I’m here’. I was scared to argue.
I didn’t want to cause a problem. (Participant 27, Afghan man)

Such moments are not simply experiences of interpersonal discomfort, but instances of relational rupture, in which the anticipation of judgement, policing, or moral misrecognition forecloses the possibility of inhabiting shared space as a coequal subject. Rather than enabling negotiation or mutual recognition, proximity becomes a site of constraint, governed by unequal power and the risk of sanction (Gill, 2016; Lewis et al., 2015; Ziersch et al., 2017).

Returning to Homa’s account, discussed earlier in relation to the anxiety and insecurity generated within shared accommodation, her experience demonstrates a distinct relational consequence of proximity imposed without consent. Conflict surrounding her religious conversion transformed shared domestic space into a site in which difference could not be negotiated through mutual recognition, while the absence of an immediate or accessible institutional framework left the relationship without meaningful mediation.

These dynamics are shaped by earlier institutional processes in which relational ties are disrupted through allocation and dispersal. Within shared accommodation, these processes further diminish asylum seekers’ relational agency, intensifying vulnerability within spaces where proximity is imposed without consent.

Religious difference therefore became organised relationally through asymmetries of power, vulnerability, and fear. Crucially, the institutional environment offers no mediating space

through which difference might be negotiated or conflict meaningfully addressed. There is no sustained relationship with professionals who might facilitate dialogue, no trusted relational infrastructure through which concerns can be raised, and no recognition that asylum seekers may experience fear or distrust toward one another (Vähä-Savo & Koivuluhta, 2025). Rather than merely failing to prevent conflict, the asylum system actively structures conditions of relational risk by imposing proximity without mediation and withdrawing the professional supports through which difference might otherwise be managed. Responsibility for managing conflict is thus displaced onto individuals already deprived of autonomy, voice, and institutional support.

This absence is reinforced by wider exclusions within the asylum system. The lack of stable professional relationships, the moralised nature of charitable care, the inability to engage in wider community life through work or volunteering, and the constant threat of relocation all converge within accommodation settings. Rather than fostering solidarity among residents, the system frequently produces distrust, as difference is managed through exposure rather than mediation, leaving individuals to navigate vulnerability and risk alone. As Ziersch et al. (2017) note, tensions around everyday practices such as noise, cooking, cleaning, and worship, are structurally intensified where there are no mechanisms for relational differentiation or retreat.

Even where solidarity emerged, in contrast to the conflicts described above, participants emphasised its fragility. Shahin's earlier account of his relationship with his roommate, Amir, is illustrative. As discussed in relation to the subjective effects of accommodation instability, their relationship provided continuity and support within conditions of repeated relocation, while the possibility of being separated became itself a source of anticipatory anxiety.

Relationally, however, the significance of this account lies in how institutional mobility rendered an otherwise supportive attachment structurally precarious.

Care therefore existed within a condition of anticipatory loss. Relationships are continually calibrated against the likelihood of sudden separation. As Gill (2009) argues, mobility within the asylum system is not incidental but a governing strategy that fragments relational continuity. Trust becomes provisional, attachment risky, and solidarity unstable.

This fragility is not incidental but designed into the institutional architecture of the asylum system. As explored further in subsequent sections, such distancing practices often operate as strategies of relational self-protection rather than disengagement, shaped by environments in which proximity is imposed without mediation or consent. As Ziersch et al. (2017) show, overcrowding, noise, and the erosion of personal space generate distress and strain everyday interactions, conditions under which trust, cooperation, and reciprocal care become difficult to sustain. Withdrawal in such contexts is therefore best understood not as antisocial behaviour but as a protective response to environments characterised by asymmetrical power and uncertain recognition.

Relational wellbeing here is undermined not by isolation, but by a saturation of coerced proximity in which space is shared without consent and exposure becomes a condition of residence. These arrangements do not merely fail to support social life; they reconfigure it in ways that erode relational agency, restrict the development of solidarity, and foreclose the possibility of ethical cohabitation under conditions of displacement.

7.7 Fragile Belonging: Ethnicised Networks and Community Relations

While enforced proximity in institutional accommodation often generated tension and withdrawal, some participants described moments of tentative belonging emerging through linguistic, religious, or cultural familiarity. These connections, however, were rarely unequivocally supportive. Rather than offering stable refuge, they illuminate the complexity of relational wellbeing under displacement, showing how belonging is formed not only through affinity but through necessity, contingency, and survival within socially and institutionally hostile contexts.

Participants recounted how sharing a language or cultural background occasionally offered a fragile form of recognition in otherwise alienating environments. Homa stated:

At first, I was sharing a room with a Nigerian woman. It was very difficult. Later they moved me to share with an Iranian. It was much better. We could talk, understand each other. (Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Homa's account is significant not because co-ethnic proximity secured compatibility, but because linguistic and cultural familiarity initially reduced some of the relational uncertainty produced through imposed cohabitation. As her earlier account showed, the first room-sharing arrangement was experienced through disrupted routines, limited privacy, and an inability to establish control over everyday space. Sharing a language with her subsequent roommate temporarily altered these conditions by making communication and mutual understanding more accessible. Familiarity therefore operated as a contingent relational resource within an accommodation system in which residents exercised little control over with whom they lived. As Ziersch et al. (2017) show, feelings of safety and trust are central to wellbeing in accommodation settings, particularly where broader social ties have been disrupted.

Yet this provisional familiarity did not translate into durable relational security. As Homa's subsequent conflict with the same roommate over her conversion to Christianity demonstrates, shared nationality and language could coexist with religious difference, mistrust, and fear. Co-ethnic proximity therefore did not constitute belonging in itself but provided one possible basis through which recognition could emerge while remaining vulnerable to other social differences and to the institutional conditions of enforced cohabitation.

This complexity extended beyond Homa's experience. Shared nationality, language, or religion did not automatically produce trust, solidarity, or recognition. Many accounts reflected ambivalence or even distrust towards members of one's own community. Parvin explained:

There are some other Iranians in the hotel. But we don't know each other well. Everyone keeps their problems to themselves. You can't really trust people easily. (Participant 12, Iranian woman)

This hesitation must be understood in relation to what Yuval-Davis (2011) describes as situated intersectionality, in which apparent sameness is refracted through divergent political histories, gendered experiences, class positions, and relationships to state power. For many asylum seekers, co-ethnic encounters are further shaped by experiences of political persecution, ideological fracture, or intra-community mistrust within the same national context, rendering familiarity a potential site of risk rather than reassurance. In such contexts, belonging is constantly mediated by suspicion, survival, and histories of rupture.

Research on trust among forced migrants shows that withdrawal and caution often function as protective relational strategies rather than indicators of social disengagement, particularly where disclosure carries material or moral risk (Vähä-Savo & Koivuluhta, 2025). As Lewis et al. (2015) observe, displacement unsettles not only material life but relational ecologies,

particularly where institutional arrangements fail to support the rebuilding of trust, reciprocity, and collective security. Under conditions of legal precarity and enforced dependency, social relations are reorganised around caution rather than solidarity. Distrust thus emerges not as an interpersonal deficiency, but as a structurally conditioned response to environments in which recognition, protection, and mediation are systematically withdrawn (Sundbäck, 2025).

Importantly, asylum seekers are rarely able to choose which co-ethnic networks they enter. Unlike migrant communities formed over time through kinship, neighbourhood, or occupational ties, co-ethnic proximity in asylum accommodation is frequently administratively imposed, severed from prior relations of trust. This lack of choice intensifies vulnerability to moral policing and coercion, particularly under conditions of legal precarity, where social relations are reorganised under constraint rather than mutual choice (Mayblin et al., 2020; Sundbäck, 2025; Vähä-Savo & Koivuluhta, 2025).

For some participants, withdrawal from ethnicised communities became a relational strategy. Individuals described navigating social life through selective affiliation, engaging cautiously with those they felt able to trust, regardless of shared origin. While such discretion could be protective, it often deepened isolation. The labour involved in continuously assessing relational risk further complicated the possibility of sustained belonging.

Relational wellbeing is shaped not merely by whether one finds affinity, but by how that affinity is lived, mediated, and constrained by broader systems of control. Ethnicised networks may offer emotional and practical support, but they also carry embedded social hierarchies and legacies of conflict. They are simultaneously spaces of connection and caution, where solidarity is negotiated under conditions of legal precarity and communal ambivalence

(Menjívar, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2011). In this context, relational life is not simply fragmented but continually negotiated under conditions of constraint and uncertainty, reflecting the limits placed on collective trust under asylum governance.

7.8 Shame, Silence, and the Withdrawal from Social Life

While the previous chapter examined shame as an internal affective state shaping subjective wellbeing, this section focuses on its relational dimensions, specifically how the anticipation of exposure, misrecognition, or moral judgement constrains participation and conditions withdrawal from social life. For asylum seekers, silence does not necessarily reflect emotional detachment, reluctance to connect, or unwillingness to recall traumatic experiences. Rather, it emerges as a relational strategy for navigating social fields structured by moral scrutiny and unequal power.

Relational wellbeing depends not simply on opportunities for interaction, but on the conditions under which individuals can appear before others without fear of symbolic harm. Participants described accommodation centres, faith spaces, and community settings as environments marked by relational insecurity, where speaking could invite suspicion, presence could trigger scrutiny, and disclosure might compromise one's standing in the eyes of others. Mahin reflected:

I don't talk much with others in the hotel. It's not that I don't want to,
but I'm afraid they'll ask about my past, and I'm not ready to explain.
(Participant 18, Iranian woman)

This account does not indicate a rejection of sociability, nor simply a wish to avoid revisiting traumatic experiences. Instead, it reflects a form of anticipatory relational labour, a careful calculation about when and how one can safely enter interaction without being reduced,

exposed, or compelled to narrate oneself on terms not of one's choosing. As Lewis et al. (2015) argue, legal insecurity under asylum governance restructures everyday conduct, reshaping everyday conduct and encouraging cautious engagement. Silence, in this context, functions as a protective boundary against relational misrecognition.

Experiences of shame in such contexts are fundamentally relational. As Probyn (2010) argues, shame is less about inner feeling than about exposure to the gaze of others, arising at moments when one's presence is rendered vulnerable to judgement. Shame interrupts relational momentum, foreclosing participation by making appearance itself risky. This dynamic was evident in participants' accounts of religious and cultural spaces, settings that might otherwise offer belonging but instead became sites of moral danger. Taha stated:

I keep my distance from the group prayers. I don't feel safe sharing who I am, so I just stay in my room when they gather. (Participant 24, Afghan man)

The expression 'I don't feel safe sharing who I am' signals not reticence but a denial of relational selfhood, in which identity must be concealed to avoid sanction, hostility, or exclusion. This illustrates how the cumulative dehumanising effects of the asylum system are lived relationally, as individuals are repeatedly required to fragment or withhold aspects of themselves in order to remain safe.

Social participation in such contexts is governed by normative expectations around visibility, conduct, and moral legibility. As Goffman (1959) observed, interaction is structured through impression management, where legibility operates as a form of social currency. Building on this, Mahmood (2005) shows how participation in collective practices can function as an embodied ethical discipline, shaping how subjects are expected to appear and behave.

In environments where deviation from these scripts carries moral or relational risk, withholding participation becomes a safety-oriented relational negotiation rather than simple disengagement. Absence, here, functions as a protective strategy against exposure and misrecognition.

This relational calculus was also evident in more intimate settings. Participants described withholding emotion even in close relationships to avoid pity, misrecognition, or moral reclassification. Homa noted:

When I feel low, I don't tell anyone, not even to my friend here. I'd rather deal with it alone than have people look at me differently.
(Participant 1, Iranian woman)

Here, shame functions not simply as a feeling but as a structuring social force, shaping how individuals manage visibility and relational positioning. Silence operates as a mode of boundary-making in contexts where vulnerability is not met with care but risks being interpreted as weakness, failure, or moral inadequacy. Shame, in these contexts, is socially produced rather than rooted in individual pathology, emerging under conditions where exposure to judgement is unevenly distributed and protection is uncertain.

Nonetheless, structured social activities intended to foster inclusion could become uninhabitable. Asghar explained:

I stopped joining the lunch at the church near the hotel. Everyone goes, but for me, it's hard to sit there and pretend everything's fine when I feel like I don't belong. (Participant 29, Afghan man)

This withdrawal does not indicate disinterest in connection, but a relational impasse between lived experience and the performative demands of social participation. As Das (2007) reminds us, silence is not simply the absence of speech, but a social and ethical practice shaped by

violence, history, and the limits of what can be said safely. In asylum contexts, silence often becomes the only available means of preserving dignity while avoiding unwanted exposure.

These narratives echo findings by Mayblin et al. (2020), who show that asylum governance produces conditions of slow violence that permeate even seemingly benign social spaces. In such contexts, asylum seekers' withdrawal from social life can be read as a strategy for mitigating relational risk rather than as a lack of sociability. Under conditions where care is moralised and recognition is conditional, silence and withdrawal become socially rational practices of self-preservation.

Across these accounts, shame is not reducible to private pathology. It is an intersubjective phenomenon, produced in environments where asylum seekers are expected to perform legibility, docility, and moral adequacy, while lacking the structural support that would enable safe and reciprocal relational life. Silence, similarly, is not emotional absence but a relational practice that is a refusal to be misread, morally contained, or exposed without protection.

Relational wellbeing, in this context, is undermined not only by the absence of connection, but by the conditions of relational exposure, the demand to appear on terms not of one's choosing, to speak within frames that offer little safety, and to perform belonging without guarantees of recognition. Withdrawal emerges as a practice of self-preservation in social worlds where presence itself can be risky, and where the relational costs of speaking outweigh the promise of connection.

7.9 Surveillance, Self-Monitoring, and the Politics of Being Seen

Surveillance operates not only through formal oversight but through diffuse forms of self-monitoring, in which asylum seekers regulate speech, emotion, and conduct in anticipation of judgement, reporting, or sanction.

Participants consistently described how their movements, speech, and affective states were subject to both formal and informal scrutiny. This atmosphere of omnipresent monitoring produced not simply behavioural constraint, but what Foucault (1995) theorised as the internalisation of surveillance, in which conduct is shaped through the anticipation of being watched. Under such conditions, relational wellbeing is not only fragile but structurally compromised, as people must constantly assess how they are seen, and what normative meanings might be attached to their presence. Asghar stated:

I'm careful about what I say in the hotel. You never know if someone's listening or if they'll tell the staff something that gets you in trouble.
(Participant 29, Afghan man)

This account illustrates how surveillance operates relationally. It is not limited to official oversight, but is enacted through the social field itself, through neighbours, co-residents, and even co-ethnic peers. As Tyler (2020) argues, contemporary governance operates through regimes of stigma and ethical evaluation that diffuse surveillance across everyday social relations, requiring individuals to monitor their actions and self-presentation in order to remain within the boundaries of legitimacy. In such contexts, emotional expression is also regulated, lest individuals fall outside the boundaries of the morally deserving subject. Ramin stated:

I avoid arguing with anyone here, even if I'm upset. If the staff see you raising your voice, they might think you're a problem. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

Here, what is being managed is not only anger, but relational legibility. The expression of legitimate frustration is suppressed, not out of preference for restraint, but because anger, however justified, is read through racialised and bureaucratised lenses as a sign of volatility. As Mayblin et al. (2020) observe, the hostile environment constructs asylum seekers as inherently suspect, producing a situation where any deviation from docile gratitude can be seized as evidence of unworthiness or threat.

Relational agency is thus reconfigured through the constant demand to perform not only gratitude but composure, humility, and affective control. Rahmat mentioned:

Sometimes things happen that make me want to shout, or cry, or argue about something unfair. But I worry that if someone writes a report, it'll go into my case file. (Participant 30, Afghan man)

This fear encapsulates what Anderson (2013) identifies as the politics of the hostile environment, a system in which everyday behaviour is liable to be weaponised against the subject, transforming ordinary emotion into potential grounds for exclusion. Under such conditions, relational wellbeing is conditioned not only by one's access to others, but by the affective and behavioural constraints shaping social life.

Participants described the ongoing need to curate their social presence as emotionally demanding. Tone, complaint, and even facial expression became sites of calculation, as individuals assessed how they might be interpreted by others. This burden of self-monitoring made spontaneous interaction difficult and rendered relationships, whether with co-residents, charity staff, or neighbours, emotionally costly (Darling, 2011).

The cost of these relational strategies is high. Participants spoke of a pervasive sense of mistrust towards institutions, but also towards peers, neighbours, and even potential allies. The internalisation of surveillance does not merely discipline behaviour; it restructures the emotional landscape of relational life, producing fatigue, guardedness, and withdrawal. In such settings, relational life becomes a labour-intensive process of modulation and moral navigation.

Surveillance, in this context, extends beyond cameras or case files. It is embedded in the affective architecture of asylum accommodation, in the administrative gaze of housing officers, in the casual reporting mechanisms embedded in service delivery, and in the normative expectations of appropriate conduct. It shapes who can be seen, how one is interpreted, and what forms of relational expression are deemed legitimate.

In sum, relational wellbeing under conditions of asylum is profoundly shaped by the politics of visibility. To be seen is always to be at risk, of being interpreted, judged, or disciplined. The social spaces where asylum seekers live are not neutral containers but fields of evaluative legibility, where care is conditional, presence is monitored, and the possibility of relational life is always negotiated under the shadow of potential surveillance. In such contexts, relational wellbeing does not flourish naturally; it is painstakingly maintained, contested, and continually under threat.

7.10 Disrupted Kinship and the Relational Politics of Care

Relational wellbeing encompasses not only horizontal ties with peers and communities, but also vertical and intergenerational relations. This includes the capacity to participate in kinship, to exercise care, and to be recognised as a responsible familial subject. For asylum seekers, these capacities are systematically undermined by policies of dispersal, housing instability, and

legal nonrecognition. In this context, relational wellbeing does not merely depend on the physical presence of family members, but on the ability to inhabit familial roles as parent, partner, or caregiver with dignity, autonomy, and reciprocal regard. Asylum infrastructures, however, are not neutral settings. They regulate care through fragmentation, spatial control, and moral surveillance, disempowering individuals from sustaining their familial responsibilities.

While legal exclusions such as the denial of family reunification or the right to work are addressed elsewhere, this section focuses on their relational consequences, specifically, how they disrupt the everyday performance of care and erode kinship-based subjectivity. Tronto (1993) reminds us that care is never purely emotional or private, it is a political practice grounded in structure, requiring the conditions for agency, continuity, and mutual recognition. In the absence of these, care becomes precarious, and the relational identities that depend upon it are rendered unstable.

Participants consistently described the erosion of their parental or caregiving roles, not merely through forced separation, but through everyday constraints such as transport isolation, digital exclusion, and institutional surveillance. Monir shared:

I can't take my son to school because the money we have isn't enough to pay for two bus tickets. In Iran, even the poorest families could still manage the basic costs of getting a child to school. Here, I feel helpless.
(Participant 5, Iranian woman)

This sense of helplessness is intensified under accommodation regimes where everyday caregiving practices are monitored, judged, and rendered visible to institutional authority. This resonates with findings by Sourander (2003), who demonstrates that asylum processes and reception conditions actively erode parental roles and caregiving capacity, producing distress

rooted in present institutional arrangements rather than individual deficiency. I conceptualise this dynamic as ‘relational disablement’, understood as the process through which structural and material constraints undermine individuals’ capacity to sustain care relationships and to inhabit family roles. In this instance, the inability to fulfil a culturally embedded responsibility of parental care fractures the rhythms of everyday relational life, not through absence of willingness, but through enforced incapacity. Asylum infrastructures, in this sense, do not simply separate families; they systematically inhibit the performance of care and destabilise relational identity.

Educational precarity further disrupted kinship roles. Participants reported feelings of shame and frustration when unable to support their children’s education, whether due to language barriers, lack of digital access, or administrative opacity. Monir described:

My child missed four years of school. Now he has one set of torn clothes for winter... I can’t even respond to his school emails because I don’t understand them. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Such accounts reveal not only the hardship of bureaucratic exclusion, but the relational dislocation it produces. The inability to advocate, to clothe, or to guide undermines the parental subjectivity through which relational wellbeing is ordinarily sustained. The failure here is not individual but institutional, embedded in administrative arrangements that deny parents the resources required to care. It lies in a system that withholds the tools of care and then reinterprets the resulting struggle as personal deficiency.

The politics of dispersal further compound these dynamics. Participants described being relocated with no warning, separated from partners, children, or other kin. Communication was surveilled, visits restricted, and proximity politicised. Nooshin explained:

I can't ask my mum to come and visit me here in the hotel, I think someone is always watching us what we do and say to each other... One time I was giving her a handwash liquid that the hotel had given us, because their hotel doesn't give them that... The hotel staff looked at her weirdly, when she put it in her bag. (Participant 13, Iranian woman)

This account captures a relational rupture that is not merely spatial but ethical and moral. Even small acts of familial care become legible as deviance under regimes of moral surveillance. What might otherwise be seen as an ordinary gesture of support, giving hygiene items to one's mother, is reframed within the accommodation setting as suspect or transgressive. In such contexts, relational agency is constrained not only through spatial dispersal but through institutional proximity. Surveillance extends beyond the individual to relational ties, governing how care is enacted and with whom.

As Butler (2004b) argues, precarity emerges not only through material deprivation or exposure to violence, but through the destabilisation of the relational forms that make life recognisable and liveable. Legal analyses of asylum regimes similarly show how family life is fragmented through dispersal, restrictive recognition, and conditional rights, producing profound insecurity in the everyday enactment of kinship (Stevens, 2010). In this sense, asylum policy enacts a form of relational governance, not simply deciding where people live, but regulating who they may care for, how that care is expressed, and under what moral conditions it may be seen as legitimate. Mountz (2011a) similarly observes that asylum infrastructures function as spatial technologies of governance through which mobility, containment, and the organisation of everyday life are administered and regulated.

Despite these fractures, participants often resisted the erosion of their relational roles through small, unofficial acts of care. These micro practices, organising a birthday, offering emotional

support, or preparing culturally meaningful food, emerged as acts of ‘relational resilience’.

Minoo described:

We celebrated my daughter’s birthday with a cake that was donated by a local charity. It wasn’t much, but it made her smile. (Participant 10, Iranian woman)

These gestures do not resolve the structural violence of the system, but they reassert care in spaces where it is marginalised. They are not nostalgic returns to normative family forms, but what I describe here as ‘relational interventions’, modest yet deliberate acts that insist on dignity, presence, and mutual recognition in the face of institutional logics of containment and control. These practices resonate with Papadopoulos’ (2021) account of how displaced subjects reconstitute home through ordinary rituals, objects, and temporal markers that sustain continuity under conditions of involuntary dislocation. Celebrations, food, and shared moments function here not as sentimentality, but as practices of relational world-making, reasserting care, belonging, and familial identity even within abject and institutionally constrained environments.

The disruption of kinship under asylum regimes is not merely a side-effect of displacement, it is a constitutive feature of the system. By denying asylum seekers the conditions for caregiving, systems of governance erode the relational fabric of life. They foreclose the ability to appear as parents, partners, and caregivers, reducing relational wellbeing to a residue of what might have been. The denial of the right to care is not only the denial of a social role; it is the erasure of relational subjectivity. Yet even within this structural violence, asylum seekers continue to enact care in ways that resist institutional logics, sustaining relational bonds under conditions that were designed to sever them.

7.11 Transnational Ties and the Strain of Distant Kinship

Relational wellbeing does not end at national borders. For many asylum seekers, familial relationships remain embedded in transnational social fields, webs of emotional, moral, and practical obligation that connect individuals to kin across time and space (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Yet forced displacement radically strains these networks, producing new forms of relational vulnerability. What is disrupted is not only the proximity of loved ones, but the possibility of fulfilling relational roles through care, support, and presence. Under the asylum regime, these relationships become both symbolically intensified and practically endangered. Participants described how separation from spouses, children, parents, or siblings was a persistent source of distress. These were not abstract or sentimental concerns, but relational burdens that shaped emotional life and everyday practice. Parvin mentioned:

I speak with my mother on the phone, but I can't help her. I can't send money. She is sick, and I feel useless here. (Participant 12, Iranian woman)

Here, the phone does not operate as a consumer object or marker of comfort, but as a fragile relational conduit, a thin thread through which care, obligation, and moral presence are held in suspension across distance. It becomes a medium of connection that simultaneously sustains and exposes absence, enabling contact while underscoring the limits of what can be done. This account illustrates what Wilding (2006) describes as a rupture in the capacity to enact care across distance, where communication sustains connection while simultaneously exposing the limits of relational presence. Under such conditions, feelings of helplessness, moral insufficiency, and relational grief emerge. Relational wellbeing in such contexts is not simply undermined by separation, but by the impossibility of enacting social roles central to one's sense of self and kinship belonging.

Legal and financial precarity compound these ruptures. Participants often described their prior role as providers, now rendered untenable by asylum restrictions. Ramin mentioned:

I am here with my daughter, but my wife and two other children are still in Iran. They are struggling financially. Before we fled, I was working, and we had a good life. Now my wife has to work with two small children, and I can't help them. (Participant 11, Iranian man)

This resonates with Carling's (2008) analysis of the moral economy of migration, in which migrants are often expected, by themselves and others, to support and protect their families across borders. When legal and structural constraints make this support impossible, the result is not only economic frustration but a deeper relational rupture. What is fractured here is not merely material provision but relational identity. It is the capacity to appear as a capable and caring father, partner, or son. In such contexts, the failure to fulfil transnational obligations becomes a source of moral insufficiency and relational grief.

Other participants described how transnational separation redistributed care responsibilities in ways that felt ethically and emotionally untenable. Asghar stated:

I have land in Afghanistan. We managed to save it from the Taliban. But now my son, who is only 12 years old, is the only one left to take care of it. He is too young. (Participant 29, Afghan man)

In such cases, childhood, protection, and responsibility are reconfigured through absence. The family unit persists, but its internal structure is distorted. The strain of distant kinship does not simply result from spatial separation, but from the inability to fulfil relational obligations central to ethical life.

The burden of separation also manifested in emotional dislocation. Monir explained:

What can I tell my son? He keeps asking when he can see his father again. I have no answer for him. (Participant 5, Iranian woman)

Here, the absence of formal mechanisms for reunification translates into relational paralysis, an inability to narrate the future or respond meaningfully to a child's need for reassurance. Butler (2004a) offers a useful framework through her discussion of 'grievability', suggesting that the pain of loss or absence becomes harder to process when there is no structure of recognition, no social or institutional space for relational repair, mourning, or acknowledgement.

Participants described how family reunification was formally contingent on the granting of status and experienced as opaque, delayed, and emotionally exhausting. Saman asked:

Do you know when I get my status, how I can bring my wife and children here? (Participant 7, Iranian man)

This question is not only logistical but existential. While framed as an expression of uncertainty about procedure and timing, it speaks to a deeper uncertainty about whether family life itself can be resumed, repaired, or imagined at all. Drawing on Menjivar's (2006) analysis of legal liminality and bureaucratic delay within asylum regimes, it reflects a condition in which relational life is held in prolonged suspension through administrative processes. Under such conditions, kinship bonds are rendered conditional, deferred, and precariously maintained, as family futures remain indefinitely unresolved in practice.

In some cases, relational rupture was not metaphorical but literal. Saman shared:

My sister and I came hidden in lorries. They separated men and women. I lost her then. I don't know where she is. A charity told me she's not in the UK, but I don't know where she is. (Participant 7, Iranian man)

Here, the asylum process itself becomes a technology of relational disappearance, severing kinship ties through administrative and logistical decisions made without transparency or accountability. There is no institutional mechanism for repair, no platform for tracing or reconnection, only the lingering trauma of relational incompleteness.

Time, too, emerged as a site of relational injury. Participants spoke of missing life milestones, births, deaths, weddings, illnesses, events that ordinarily anchor kinship but now unfolded in absentia. Kamal shared:

My father died while I was waiting here. I couldn't go back. I didn't even say goodbye. (Participant 26, Afghan man)

Such ruptures echo Butler's (2004a) account of mourning as a relational act, one that depends on conditions of recognition, proximity, and ritual. Under asylum, these conditions are foreclosed, and grief becomes a private endurance stripped of social form.

Transnational ties, moreover, do not endure through sentiment alone. They require ongoing financial, communicative, and emotional labour, which the asylum regime systematically undermines. As Ziersch et al. (2017) observe, financial precarity and psychological strain limit the ability to maintain contact across borders, eroding the practical and affective scaffolding through which relational life is sustained. What emerges is a condition of relational depletion, in which the slow undoing of care at a distance weakens not only connection but the very subjectivities formed through reciprocal responsibility and presence.

Despite these constraints, participants engaged in quiet acts of relational endurance through ongoing efforts to sustain presence, care, and responsibility across borders under conditions of legal and spatial constraint. Some described recording voice messages for children at night;

others supported relatives from afar through phone calls or messaging apps, offering guidance, reassurance, or simply a sense of shared time.

While these practices resonate with existing work on relational resilience (Afifi et al., 2016; Powley & Piderit, 2008), I use relational endurance to emphasise not recovery from disruption but the deliberate preservation of relational life through emotional labour, attentiveness, and moral commitment under conditions where disruption is ongoing and structurally produced. These are not incidental gestures but practices of resistance, refusals to let dispersal, precarity, or systemic neglect dissolve the ties through which meaning and belonging are sustained.

Across these accounts, relational wellbeing for asylum seekers is transnationally distributed and structurally strained. It involves not only forging new connections in the host country, but sustaining relational identities and responsibilities across distance, legal limbo, and systemic neglect. These relationships are rarely supported by asylum systems and often rendered fragile by them. Yet they remain vital to how asylum seekers understand themselves as relational beings, not only displaced individuals, but as parents, children, siblings, and partners still tethered to a social world beyond the border.

7.12 Conclusion

This chapter has examined relational wellbeing as it is lived, negotiated, and constrained within the UK asylum system. Across domains of bureaucracy, voluntary care, accommodation, community life, family relations, transnational ties, and temporal governance, it has shown that relational wellbeing is neither a stable resource nor a natural outcome of social proximity. Rather, it is a fragile and uneven achievement, shaped by institutional design, moral judgement, legal precarity, and asymmetrical power relations.

Relational harm under asylum does not primarily take the form of social absence. Instead, it emerges through how relationships are organised: through conditional care, coerced proximity, moral surveillance, enforced dependency, and the systematic denial of contribution. Encounters with institutions and charities are structured by expectations of gratitude and compliance; accommodation regimes impose intimacy without consent while denying mediation or retreat; community and co-ethnic networks offer familiarity without guaranteed safety; family roles are fractured by dispersal, surveillance, and bureaucratic obstruction; and transnational ties are strained by immobility, poverty, and indefinite waiting. In these contexts, relational life is not simply difficult, it is continuously exposed to misrecognition, interruption, and erosion.

Importantly, the chapter has demonstrated that relational wellbeing cannot be understood independently of material and subjective conditions. The denial of work, income, mobility, privacy, and temporal certainty directly undermines the capacity to sustain trust, reciprocity, and shared futures. Equally, the affective labour documented in the previous chapter, containment, endurance, emotional self-regulation finds its limits in relational contexts where recognition is withheld or made conditional. Relational wellbeing therefore emerges as a crucial hinge between material deprivation and subjective strain, as the domain in which structural exclusion becomes intersubjectively lived.

Yet relational life under asylum is not wholly undone. Across the chapter, asylum seekers appear not only as subjects acted upon, but as relational agents who adapt, withdraw, reconfigure, and persist. Distancing, silence, and selective engagement function as strategies of self-protection rather than disengagement. Informal acts of care, mutual support, contribution, and ritual sustain social meaning in spaces designed to fragment it. These practices do not resolve the structural violence of the asylum regime, but they interrupt its

totalising effects. They assert dignity where recognition is denied and maintain relational presence where continuity is threatened.

In this sense, relational wellbeing under asylum is best understood not as the presence or absence of connection, but as a field of ongoing struggle over how people may appear to one another, as dependents or contributors, risks or peers, objects of care or relational subjects. The asylum system governs this field through legal restriction, moralisation, and surveillance, yet it does not fully determine it. Within its constraints, asylum seekers continue to enact relational worlds that exceed institutional scripts, even as they remain vulnerable to rupture.

This chapter therefore positions relational wellbeing as both a site of profound injury and a locus of resistance. It shows that the harms of asylum are not exhausted by material deprivation or psychological distress but are fundamentally relational in nature, enacted through the disruption of care, recognition, reciprocity, and shared time. At the same time, it reveals how relational practices, however fragile, remain central to how asylum seekers sustain personhood, dignity, and social meaning under conditions of displacement.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond the relational domain itself. Taken together with the preceding chapters on legal consciousness, material wellbeing, and subjective wellbeing, this chapter completes a multidimensional account of how asylum governance shapes lived experience across intertwined structural, affective, and social registers. The concluding chapter now draws these strands together, reflecting on their combined significance for understanding asylum not only as a legal or administrative process, but as a deeply relational condition that reorganises the possibilities of life, recognition, and belonging.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter brings the analytical strands developed across the thesis into dialogue. Rather than restating a singular central claim, it reflects on how the preceding chapters have examined the experiences of Iranian and Afghan asylum seekers navigating the asylum system in the UK through a sequence of legal, material, subjective, and relational lenses.

The purpose of this conclusion extends beyond the rehearsal of empirical findings or repetition of chapter-level arguments to synthesise how these dimensions intersect and accumulate over time, and to clarify the analytical and political implications of approaching asylum governance through their combined effects.

Across the chapters, the thesis has traced how harm within the UK asylum system is not primarily produced through moments of overt coercion or crisis, but through ordinary administrative arrangements that are lawful, routinised, and institutionally dispersed. Rather than appearing as exceptional or accidental, harm is embedded in everyday practices such as procedural delay, welfare restriction, and bureaucratic nonresponse. This reading aligns with critical scholarship that foregrounds the role of everyday bordering and administrative governance in shaping migrant lives (Mayblin, 2019; Walters, 2004). The contribution of this thesis lies not in reiterating these dynamics, but in examining how they are lived and sustained across different analytic domains, and how their cumulative effects reorganise everyday life under asylum conditions.

The conclusion therefore returns to the conceptual architecture developed across the thesis, without collapsing its sequence or treating its components as parallel. Legal consciousness is approached as a dynamic and unstable orientation toward law, shaped by opacity, deferral, and mediated access rather than by formal legal knowledge or decisive encounter. Material wellbeing is analysed not as a baseline that fails to be met, but as a managed condition of subsistence through which autonomy, planning, and anticipation are disciplined. Subjective wellbeing is examined through practices of affective labour oriented toward containment and self-preservation under uncertainty, rather than through recovery or resilience. Relational wellbeing is considered in terms of how proximity, care, and recognition are organised, constrained, or withdrawn within institutional settings. Taken together, these analytic strands clarify how asylum governance operates through the sustained production of instability, rather than through its resolution.

This discussion also clarifies the limits within which the claims advanced in the thesis should be understood. The thesis does not suggest that the experiences analysed here are universal to all asylum contexts, nor that suffering is an inevitable feature of displacement as such. Instead, it specifies how the UK asylum regime at this particular time produces specific conditions of living through its legal, bureaucratic, and welfare infrastructures. In doing so, it responds to calls within migration and socio-legal scholarship to attend more closely to institutional specificity and to the temporal dimensions of governance that are often rendered invisible or taken for granted (Darling, 2016a; Mayblin, 2019).

Finally, the conclusion situates the thesis as an intervention that is both analytical and critical. By tracing how endurance, uncertainty, and dependency are normalised through ordinary administrative practice, the thesis challenges narratives that frame asylum harm as accidental,

temporary, or readily remediable through incremental reform. Rather than reducing asylum governance to questions of legal status determination alone, the analysis consolidates an understanding of asylum as a governing arrangement that shapes how life is lived while waiting, often without a stable temporal horizon or reliable relational security.

8.2 Summary of Findings

This thesis demonstrates that UK asylum governance operates in ways that actively reorganise wellbeing rather than simply constraining it. Across the empirical analysis, wellbeing does not appear as a baseline condition that is gradually eroded by adversity, but as something continually shaped through institutionally mediated conditions of legal opacity, procedural deferral, material insufficiency, and regulated social relations. These findings challenge approaches that treat asylum as a temporary disruption. Instead, the analysis shows how indeterminacy is institutionally produced, recalibrating how time is inhabited, how agency is exercised, and how selfhood is sustained under conditions of prolonged uncertainty.

Legal uncertainty was not experienced as an episodic problem located in decision-making moments, but as an enduring structuring force that shaped everyday orientation to the future. Participants' engagement with law was characterised by ambivalence, fragmentation, and cautious distancing. While existing socio-legal scholarship has documented liminal legality and legal violence in migrant lives (Abrego & Lakhani, 2015; Coutin, 2003; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Griffiths, 2014; Menjívar, 2006), this study shows that under the UK asylum regime legal consciousness becomes temporally stretched and affectively charged. Law was encountered less as a coherent system of rights than as a shifting and opaque presence that demanded constant recalibration of hope, expectation, and emotional investment. This produced what is conceptualised in this thesis as transitional legal consciousness, an orientation

marked by provisional compliance, strategic endurance, and a narrowing of future imaginaries. Rather than enabling agency, prolonged legal uncertainty functioned to suspend it, compelling participants to organise their lives around waiting rather than action, and anticipation rather than planning.

Material wellbeing was governed through institutionalised insufficiency rather than absolute exclusion. Financial support, accommodation, and food provision were formally present yet persistently inadequate, producing a condition of managed scarcity that required continuous adaptation. While these findings align with analyses of enforced destitution and hostile environment governance (Mayblin, 2017; Ramachandran, 2024), the study further demonstrates that material deprivation operates as a temporal and relational technology. Scarcity disciplined everyday life by fragmenting routines, limiting choice, and eroding the capacity to sustain continuity over time. Material hardship was therefore not simply an economic condition, but a means through which dependence was normalised and autonomy rendered contingent. The findings problematise policy narratives that frame asylum support as humanitarian provision, showing instead how material systems function as mechanisms of control that regulate pace, mobility, and expectation.

In relation to subjective wellbeing, the findings complicate dominant resilience-based frameworks that emphasise coping, recovery, or psychological adaptation. Participants' emotional practices were oriented less toward restoration than toward containment. Anxiety, emotional numbing, and narrowed affective horizons were not reducible to pre migration trauma alone but were produced and sustained through ongoing conditions of asylum governance, including prolonged waiting, bureaucratic silence, and material insecurity. This supports critical public health literature that foregrounds post-migration stressors as central

determinants of mental distress (Gleeson et al., 2020; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021). However, the analysis moves beyond pathologising accounts by conceptualising participants' emotional labour as affective scaffolding. This refers to provisional and sustaining practices through which individuals maintain psychic coherence and relational viability in the absence of structural support or temporal resolution. Understood in this way, affective scaffolding directs analytic attention away from individual disposition or cultural orientation and toward the governing conditions under which emotional life is organised. Such practices did not resolve suffering or produce wellbeing in a normative sense but functioned to prevent psychic disintegration under conditions where repair was structurally unavailable. Subjective wellbeing thus appears analytically not as flourishing or recovery, but as endurance and self-maintenance in contexts of prolonged uncertainty.

Relational wellbeing was systematically undermined through spatial and institutional arrangements that regulated proximity, intimacy, and dependency. Dispersal, institutional accommodation, and enforced reliance on state or charitable systems reorganised social relations in ways that limited privacy, reciprocity, and relational choice. These findings resonate with literature on dispersal and social exclusion (Hynes, 2011; Ziersch et al., 2017) but extend it by showing how relational harm is actively produced through bureaucratic design rather than emerging incidentally. Participants' capacity to withdraw, refuse intimacy, or negotiate boundaries was frequently constrained, resulting in a denial of relational agency. At the same time, the data reveal how moments of connection and care persisted in fragile and uneven forms, often outside formal systems. These relational practices were not evidence of integration or social capital accumulation, but of situated efforts to preserve dignity and recognisability within constraining conditions.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that wellbeing under the UK asylum system is not simply reduced across material, subjective, and relational domains, but reconstituted through their interaction. Legal uncertainty shapes material dependency, material scarcity intensifies constraints on subjective wellbeing, and relational disruption compounds both. By analytically distinguishing these dimensions while tracing their interdependence, the thesis advances multidimensional wellbeing frameworks (Sumner & Mallett, 2013) by locating their interaction within the institutional organisation and mediation of asylum governance, while resisting additive or compensatory logics. The study shows that asylum governance produces a particular form of lived life oriented around suspension, endurance, and constrained recognition. Wellbeing in this context is not the absence of harm, but the ongoing labour of holding oneself together within a system that systematically withholds stability, reciprocity, and temporal resolution.

8.3 Recognising the Specificities

This thesis approaches asylum not as a universal condition of refuge, but as a historically specific regime of governance whose effects are constituted through the institutional organisation of the UK asylum system. Here, specificity refers not to a bounded empirical setting but to a governing formation through which legality organises material provision, shapes subjective life over time, and ultimately structures the conditions of social relations. This matters because much refugee and wellbeing scholarship continues to travel analytically across contexts by foregrounding displacement as rupture, loss, or adjustment, while often giving limited attention to how particular state systems organise deprivation, dependency, and temporality through routine administrative practice. In the UK context, harm is not concentrated in a singular site of exception such as a camp, detention centre, or border crossing. It is dispersed across everyday infrastructures that are formally framed as care and support.

Dispersal, accommodation contracting, and minimal welfare provision do not merely regulate entry or settlement. They actively structure the conditions under which life is sustained and the terms on which recognition, agency, and future orientation become possible or are foreclosed through institutionalised indeterminacy (Darling, 2016a; Hynes, 2011; National Audit Office, 2020).

A first distinctive feature of the UK asylum regime is the organised production of subsistence without security. The support system provides material provision in ways that maintain ongoing dependence while systematically narrowing routes to autonomy, contribution, and self-direction. This configuration cannot be explained as an unintended consequence of administrative strain. It reflects an institutional design in which impoverishment, restriction, and delay are normalised as forms of administrative reason. Recent UK scholarship has conceptualised this condition as enforced destitution rather than temporary hardship, drawing attention to the durability of poverty produced through policy and procedure (Mayblin, 2021; Ramachandran, 2024). The contribution of this thesis lies in demonstrating that the material regime does not operate solely at the level of economic deprivation. Material insufficiency is shown to function through temporal and legal conditions, reorganising social relations, self-perception, and orientations toward law, and binding subsistence provision to affective containment and prolonged legal uncertainty. The UK case is therefore not simply one empirical setting among others. It is a regime in which deprivation is rendered governable, futures are systematically deferred, and endurance becomes a necessary condition of everyday life.

A second specificity concerns the spatial governance of asylum through dispersal and institutional accommodation. Dispersal functions not simply as relocation, but as a governing

technique that fractures social continuity, dislocates everyday infrastructures, and repeatedly reorganises the field of support on which asylum seekers rely. These effects are not confined to material deprivation but extend across subjective and relational domains (Darling, 2022; Hynes, 2011). The analysis shows how dispersal and accommodation operate together to produce a social topology marked by isolation and coerced proximity, where privacy is scarce, mediation is absent, and cohabitation is imposed without the relational resources required to negotiate difference or conflict. This directly complicates integration-oriented frameworks that presume proximity, community contact, or service access to be inherently enabling. Within the UK asylum regime, the organised conditions of living frequently intensify exposure, misrecognition, and withdrawal, reconfiguring relational life as something to be managed defensively rather than inhabited securely, and limiting the capacity to relate on one's own terms.

A third specificity lies in the institutional organisation and mediation of governance through outsourcing and bureaucratic fragmentation. Across participants' accounts, power was located not in a single identifiable authority but in a chain of delegated responsibilities in which the Home Office, private contractors, and contact intermediaries became difficult to distinguish in practice. The everyday presence of the state was experienced less through direct decision making than through letters, helplines, delayed responses, and subcontracted actors whose accountability remained opaque. The thesis therefore resonates with work on street-level bureaucracy, not because asylum governance is enacted by a single front-line official, but because discretionary distance, procedural deferral, and institutional nonresponse become patterned modes of encounter within delegated and outsourced systems (Lipsky, 1980). Volatility is thus conceptualised not as an experiential condition alone, but as a governing logic

through which responsibility is displaced, timelines are continually destabilised, and institutional absence is normalised.

These regime specificities also shape what is distinctive about the sample and about the kinds of knowledge this study can generate. The study draws on interviews with thirty adult asylum seekers from Iranian and Afghan backgrounds living in England, conducted primarily in Farsi and Dari. The analytic value of this sample is not that it represents Iranian or Afghan experiences as cultural categories, nor that it enables comparison between national groups, but that it offers a concentrated lens on how legal volatility and institutionally produced indeterminacy are lived under the contemporary UK asylum regime. Recruitment was organised through a combination of purposive and snowball routes designed for a population that is dispersed, mobile, and structurally cautious about unfamiliar actors. While some participants first received the researcher's dedicated contact details via third sector intermediaries, the research relationship was maintained as fully independent of any organisation, and additional participants were reached through informal networks and community routes, including individuals outside institutional visibility. In this sense, the sample is best understood as methodologically coherent and analytically targeted rather than service-defined, enabling the thesis to trace how apparently diverse biographies converge around shared system-produced conditions of uncertainty, dependency, and temporal suspension.

The positionality shaping this research cannot be reduced to a single insider or professional location. Knowledge in this study emerged through a multi-positional and relational configuration that shifted across encounters, contexts, and moments of interpretation. My location as a refugee, an Iranian woman, a bilingual Farsi and Dari speaker, a researcher

embedded in academic knowledge production, and a professional familiar with asylum governance intersected in ways that both enabled and constrained what could be known. These positions did not operate cumulatively or transparently. At different moments, they produced proximity, distance, trust, hesitation, or expectation, shaping disclosure, silence, and narrative form within the interview encounter.

The thesis therefore does not treat insider status as a guarantee of authenticity, access, or epistemic privilege. Consistent with critical reflexive scholarship, insider proximity is understood here as a relational condition that may sharpen sensitivity to institutional logics, procedural absences, and the everyday mechanics through which waiting is normalised, while simultaneously risking over familiarity, assumption, or the reproduction of administrative reason unless actively interrogated (Berger, 2015; Bott, 2010). Linguistic and experiential proximity facilitated recognition and reduced the labour of translation yet did not dissolve asymmetries of power associated with legal security, academic authority, or the interpretive act itself. As contemporary work on insider-outsider mobility makes clear, positionality in qualitative research is not fixed but situational, shifting within and across encounters rather than residing in stable identity categories (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Holmes, 2020).

This study therefore approached positionality not as a background attribute but as an ongoing reflexive practice within the research relationship. Attention was paid to how trust was negotiated, how expectations attached to professional familiarity were managed, and how participants oriented to the researcher at times as a cultural insider, at times as an institutional figure, and at times as an external witness. Knowledge was produced through these movements rather than in spite of them, requiring sustained reflexive attention to how narratives were co-produced, framed, and later interpreted (Berkovic et al., 2020; Finlay, 2005). In this sense,

proximity did not resolve power asymmetry, but reconfigured it, extending ethical and interpretive responsibility into the moments through which meaning was produced rather than offering methodological closure.

Finally, the thesis differentiates itself from dominant wellbeing literature by rejecting the assumption that wellbeing under asylum is a state to be restored through adjustment, service provision, or individual resilience. Such frameworks often presuppose that distress is a temporary deviation from an underlying normative trajectory, and that coping represents an adaptive response to disruption. The findings here instead demonstrate that, within the UK asylum regime, coping is not an episodic response to crisis but a structurally demanded mode of living. Endurance is not incidental. It is systematically produced through institutionalised uncertainty, restricted autonomy, and procedural delay, rendering emotional containment and narrowed aspiration necessary conditions for survival rather than indicators of recovery.

Rather than locating suffering primarily in displacement or prior trauma, the thesis traces how harm is produced through ordinary and routine forms of governance. Suffering is shown to be patterned through welfare thresholds, accommodation regimes, bureaucratic silence, and the sustained deferral of legal resolution. In this context, wellbeing cannot be meaningfully understood as an outcome located at the level of the individual psyche or behaviour. It must instead be analysed as a condition constituted through governing arrangements that organise legality, care, and time in ways that normalise instability and suspend resolution. As Mayblin (2019) and Walters (2004) argue, asylum governance operates through mundane administrative practices rather than exceptional coercion, and it is precisely this ordinariness that renders harm durable and politically obscured. By situating wellbeing within this field of living administration, the thesis contributes not another inventory of harms, but an account of how

endurance itself is institutionalised as the socially sanctioned form of life under the UK asylum system.

8.4 Contribution to Academic Research

This thesis contributes to academic research by retheorising asylum as a governing condition that reorganises legality, wellbeing, and time through ordinary institutional and administrative practices rather than exceptional intervention. While scholarship on asylum governance, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing has generated substantial insights into these processes, these bodies of scholarship have largely developed along separate analytical trajectories. By bringing them into relation, this study demonstrates how governance, legality, and wellbeing are mutually constituted through the everyday institutional organisation and mediation of asylum, and how their interaction produces a durable mode of living under the UK asylum regime.

A central contribution lies in the development of transitional legal consciousness as a conceptual extension of existing legal consciousness scholarship. Building on foundational work that understands legal consciousness as embedded in everyday life and social practice rather than formal legal knowledge alone (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Menjívar, 2006), the thesis shows how prolonged legal uncertainty and institutionally mediated encounters with legal authority produce an orientation to law marked by suspension, recalibration, and strategic restraint. Law is not encountered as a stable framework of rights. It is experienced as an unstable horizon that shapes affective investment, future orientation, and everyday decision making even in moments of apparent legal inactivity. This advances socio-legal scholarship by foregrounding temporality and endurance as constitutive elements of legal consciousness under conditions of protracted governance rather than short-term legal encounter.

The thesis also makes a substantive contribution to wellbeing scholarship by challenging outcome-oriented and resilience-based frameworks that continue to dominate refugee research. Much wellbeing literature presumes a normative trajectory in which distress is followed by recovery, adaptation, or integration, often locating wellbeing at the level of individual coping or psychological adjustment. Drawing instead on multidimensional and relational approaches to wellbeing (Krause, 2014; Sumner & Mallett, 2013), this study demonstrates that under asylum governance wellbeing is not something that fails to recover, but something that is actively reorganised. By analytically distinguishing material, subjective, and relational wellbeing while tracing their interaction, the thesis shows how endurance replaces recovery as the dominant form of stability. Wellbeing is thus approached not as an endpoint or individual outcome, but as a socially produced process constituted through the institutional and temporal conditions of asylum governance.

The study also contributes to critical migration scholarship by specifying how harm is produced through ordinariness rather than exception. While much work has focused on detention, borders, and moments of acute violence, this thesis demonstrates how deprivation, uncertainty, and relational erosion are sustained through routine welfare thresholds, accommodation arrangements, bureaucratic silence, and delayed decision making. In line with analyses of everyday bordering and administrative violence (Mayblin, 2019; Walters, 2004), the thesis shows that the durability of harm lies precisely in its normalisation. This shifts attention away from crisis moments and toward the mundane infrastructures through which asylum seekers are governed over time.

Methodologically, the thesis contributes to qualitative research on asylum by demonstrating how multi-positional and reflexive engagement can generate analytically robust knowledge

without claiming insider authenticity or representational authority. By treating positionality as a relational and shifting condition rather than a fixed attribute, the study aligns with and extends reflexive methodological scholarship (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Finlay, 2005; Holmes, 2020). The research design shows how linguistic proximity, experiential familiarity, and professional knowledge can sharpen analytic sensitivity while requiring sustained ethical vigilance. This offers a model for practitioner adjacent and linguistically mediated research that resists both detachment and over identification.

Taken together, these contributions reposition asylum not as a temporary interruption to life that can be mitigated through support or adjustment, but as a governing condition that reshapes how legality, wellbeing, and time are lived. By bringing governmentality, institutional organisation, institutional mediation, legal consciousness, and multidimensional wellbeing into relation, the thesis advances a framework for understanding asylum as a mode of living administration, one in which endurance is not merely an individual response but an institutionally produced condition.

8.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this thesis suggest that policy and practice interventions in the asylum system cannot be meaningfully oriented toward improvement without first addressing the governing logics through which harm is routinely produced. Much existing policy discourse frames shortcomings in asylum provision as problems of capacity, coordination, or delivery. By contrast, the analysis presented here indicates that many of the harms experienced by asylum seekers are not simply the result of implementation failure but are produced through the institutional organisation and everyday mediation of ordinary and legally sanctioned

arrangements that organise subsistence, time, and dependency. As such, the primary implication for policy is not refinement but reorientation.

A central implication concerns the continued reliance on minimal welfare provision as a governing strategy. Policies that maintain asylum support at subsistence levels are often justified through narratives of deterrence or fiscal responsibility. However, as documented in this thesis and corroborated by wider UK scholarship, such arrangements function to institutionalise dependency and prolong uncertainty rather than to meet basic needs (Mayblin, 2021; National Audit Office, 2020). Policy debates that treat support rates as a technical variable miss the deeper issue that subsistence without security reorganises everyday life around endurance. Meaningful reform would therefore require moving beyond minimum threshold provision toward systems that enable temporal stability, predictability, and the possibility of planning, rather than normalising prolonged waiting as an administrative outcome.

A second implication relates to accommodation and dispersal policy. Dispersal is routinely defended as an administrative necessity to manage capacity and geographic distribution. Yet the findings show that dispersal operates as a mechanism that fragments social continuity and undermines relational and subjective wellbeing through repeated displacement and imposed cohabitation. Existing policy frameworks tend to evaluate accommodation in terms of cost, availability, or compliance, rather than its effects on privacy, safety, and relational autonomy. A governance-oriented approach would require recognising that housing arrangements are not neutral containers but active sites through which exposure, misrecognition, and withdrawal are produced (Darling, 2022; Hynes, 2011). Without such recognition, reforms risk reproducing

harm through different contractual arrangements rather than altering the conditions under which people live.

The analysis also has implications for the institutional organisation of asylum governance through outsourcing, delegation, and intermediary organisations. Fragmentation of responsibility is often justified in terms of efficiency or flexibility. However, the findings demonstrate that the distribution of governing functions across state and non-state actors can diffuse accountability and normalise institutional absence, leaving asylum seekers to navigate opaque chains of responsibility with limited recourse. Policy initiatives that focus on improving communication channels or complaint mechanisms without addressing the underlying displacement of responsibility are unlikely to alter this dynamic. Greater accountability would require clearer lines of institutional responsibility and enforceable standards that prioritise responsiveness and continuity over procedural deferral (Gower, 2024; National Audit Office, 2020).

For practice, particularly within statutory and third sector organisations, the findings caution against approaches that frame support primarily in terms of resilience building or individual coping. While such practices are often well intentioned, they risk shifting responsibility for endurance onto asylum seekers themselves and obscuring the structural conditions that demand coping in the first place. Practice models that foreground emotional regulation or adaptation without addressing prolonged uncertainty may inadvertently reinforce the normalisation of sustained coping as an expected mode of life. A more critically informed practice orientation would involve recognising how institutional delay, legal opacity, and material insufficiency shape emotional and relational capacities, while attending to how these conditions are

themselves mediated through everyday institutional encounters and practices, rather than individualising the distress they produce (Gleeson et al., 2020; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021).

The findings also raise important questions for humanitarian and voluntary sector practice. While charitable provision plays a significant role in mitigating immediate hardship, the analysis highlights the limits of discretionary care in contexts where deprivation is structurally produced. Reliance on voluntary provision risks reproducing moralised distinctions of deservingness and gratitude, while allowing state responsibility to remain displaced. This suggests the need for advocacy-oriented practice that does not merely supplement gaps in provision but actively challenges the conditions that produce those gaps, aligning with critical accounts of care that emphasise responsibility and accountability rather than benevolence alone (Darling, 2011; Tronto, 1993).

Overall, the implications of this thesis point toward the need for policy and practice to confront asylum not as a temporary humanitarian problem to be managed, but as a durable governing arrangement that shapes how lives are lived over time. Without addressing the institutional, temporal, legal, and relational dimensions of asylum governance, reforms risk remaining superficial, alleviating symptoms while leaving the underlying structures of endurance intact.

8.6 Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this thesis point toward several directions for future research that extend beyond the scope of the present study, while remaining anchored in its conceptual commitments. These suggestions are not framed as gaps to be filled through additional measurement or broader sampling, but as analytical extensions that follow from treating asylum as a governing condition rather than a discrete legal process.

One priority for future research lies in sustained longitudinal engagement with asylum seekers' legal and temporal orientations. Much existing research captures experiences at particular moments of crisis or transition, often around arrival, accommodation changes, or decision outcomes. The analysis here suggests that what is analytically significant is not the moment of decision itself, but the period in which decision is deferred, and legality is held in indeterminacy. Longitudinal qualitative research could therefore examine how legal consciousness, future orientation, and affective investment shift across different phases of procedural delay, appeal, or partial resolution, and how these shifts are mediated through changing institutional encounters.

Comparative research across national asylum regimes would allow further specification of how different forms of institutional organisation and mediation configure time, dependency, and wellbeing. While this thesis has deliberately focused on the UK context, comparative analysis could clarify which forms of endurance and indeterminacy are regime-specific and which emerge across differently organised asylum systems. Such work would be particularly valuable if it moved beyond policy comparison to examine how institutional arrangements and their everyday mediation shape lived experience under different welfare, housing, and legal conditions. Comparative studies grounded in lived experience could therefore advance critical migration scholarship by resisting abstract typologies and instead tracing how governance acquires practical form within different institutional contexts (Mayblin, 2017; Walters, 2004).

Further research is needed on the relationship between asylum governance and post-decision life trajectories. Much scholarship implicitly treats recognition or refusal as an endpoint, with wellbeing assessed either before or after decision. The findings here suggest that prolonged uncertainty reshapes subjectivity, relational capacity, and future orientation in ways that do not

automatically resolve with legal status. Research following individuals beyond decision points could examine how endurance as a governing requirement carries forward into recognised refugee status, humanitarian protection, or irregularity, challenging assumptions that legal resolution restores stability or wellbeing.

Future work could deepen analysis of the moral and affective dimensions of care within asylum systems, particularly in relation to voluntary and humanitarian provision. While this thesis has examined how discretionary care operates within conditions of structural deprivation, further research could explore how moral expectations, gratitude, and deservingness are negotiated across different organisational settings. Such work would be especially valuable if it examined how care practices intersect with legal uncertainty and welfare restriction, rather than treating humanitarian support as external to governance (Darling, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011; Tronto, 1993).

Finally, there is scope for methodological research that further interrogates positionality, translation, and knowledge production in asylum research. This thesis has treated positionality as relational and situational rather than fixed, but future studies could more explicitly examine how language, legal insecurity, and institutional familiarity shape what is sayable, what remains silent, and how narratives are co-produced. Methodological work attentive to these dynamics would strengthen qualitative research on asylum by foregrounding epistemic limits alongside access and insight, building on reflexive traditions in qualitative methodology (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Finlay, 2005).

Taken together, these directions suggest that future research on asylum and wellbeing should continue to move away from episodic, outcome oriented, or individualised frameworks.

Instead, research should attend to how asylum governance is institutionally organised and mediated to produce particular forms of living through sustained temporal indeterminacy, and how legality, care, and uncertainty remain entangled well beyond formal procedural milestones.

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APPENDIX ONE: Interview Structure

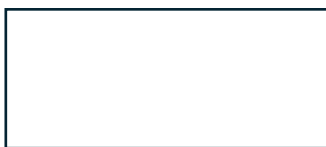
Interview Schedule Interview Guide

Interview Questions	Discussion Areas/Probe
Personal Information: • What would you prefer for me to call you during this interview? • Could you tell me your age and your last occupation in your home country? • Where were you born (Afghanistan or Iran)? Where were you living in A/I before you left the country? • When did you come to the UK? When did you claim asylum? Had you been to the UK before you came this time? • What is your highest level of education? • What languages can you speak and read? • Where do you stay? Is this the first place you live since arriving to the UK this time?	Reiterate that their real name will not be used. How long have you been going through asylum process in the UK? Where are you living?
Everyday Experience	
• How do you spend your day? • Have you had to change any of your normal routines or behaviours due to the asylum process? If so, could you provide some examples?	What are you able to do? Where do you go? Where can you go? What do you like to do but you can't? Why? because of financial constraints, location of residence, lack of internet or other connectivity, lack of ability to work or attend training, etc)
Understanding the Asylum Process	
• Could you describe your journey to seek asylum in the UK? • What challenges have you faced during the asylum process so far? • How did you perceive the asylum process before you started, and how do those perceptions compare to your experience? • Where do you want to end up? Do you think it is achievable? Why?	Transit countries, and why did you decide to come to the UK? What were the main challenges you faced during this process? How have you managed to navigate the legal and bureaucratic hurdles? Were you able to make use of your social or professional connections to assist with the process? How do you think about your next steps?

Interactions with UK Governmental Organizations	
• Since arriving in UK, you've summarised some of the steps you've taken towards asylum. Can you walk me through the government agencies and officials you have had to interact with, and your experiences with them? Can you share specific instances where interactions with these organizations significantly influenced your asylum process, either positively or negatively? • Do you feel that the Home Office have provided adequate support during your asylum process? • Do you have a solicitor? If yes, how did you manage to have one? If no, why? • Do you think the process is clear to you? Do you know your next steps and how long it might take?	Where in the UK did you arrive? Did you claim asylum on the date of your arrival? Who did you first speak with from the UK government? How did that go? Was there anything challenging about this step? What did you have to do next? How did you know what to do? What were the main challenges or obstacles you faced when dealing with government bodies? Were there any specific policies or regulations that were particularly challenging or problematic for you?
Interactions with Third-Sector Organizations (NGOs and Community Organizations)	
• Can you discuss your interactions with third-sector organizations, such as NGOs and community groups, during your asylum process?	Which third-sector organizations did you engage with? How did you first come to hear about and come into contact with them? How did these organizations assist you during the asylum process? What kind of support did they offer? Were there any notable differences in the way various third-sector organizations approached or assisted you? How did these third-sector interactions influence your overall experience of the asylum process? Do you feel that the support from third-sector organizations compensated for the lack of governmental support? Why or why not?
Housing Options	

• Where do you live? How many people are living with you? • What have 3rd sector / govt organisations done, to help you achieve dignified and desired living situation in terms of housing / location?	Do you find your living environment to be safe and comforting? Did you choose the place you are living now? If given the opportunity, what aspects of your living condition would you like to change/improve?
Access to Healthcare	
• Do you have access to healthcare? • How often do you need to visit a doctor? • Have you ever needed any appointment for your mental health? Why?	Do you have a GP? When did you register with one? How long after you have arrived in the UK? How did you register with one? Did you do it yourself? If no, why? If yes, was that an easy process?
Social support	
• How many friends do you have? • Are you connected to any community? • In the event of facing any problem, who would be your initial point of contact? Why?	Are you in contact with people from your country/culture in the UK? How was this happen? How do you feel about it? Were they helpful? How?
Concluding Questions	
• How do you feel about the asylum policies in the UK, and what changes would you recommend improving the system for asylum seekers like yourself? • Knowing what you now know about the situation and the process you have experienced; would you still choose to come to the UK if you had the opportunity to make the decision again? • How do you think the British government can improve service provision to better support asylum seekers?	What types of support have been most helpful to you during the asylum process? What support or resources do you wish were available to you during the process?

APPENDIX TWO: Participant Information Sheet in English



Participant Information Sheet

Title of Study: A Qualitative Study on the Impact of Asylum Process on the Wellbeing of Afghan and Iranian Asylum Seekers

My name is Sayna Nikeaateghad, and I am a postgraduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of asylum seekers in the UK, including their experiences with the asylum process, access to resources and services, and their overall well-being. The study aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by asylum seekers in the UK and potentially inform policies and practices that better support and protect their well-being.

The study is looking for adult asylum seekers who are currently residing in the UK. The researcher is particularly interested in hearing from those who have experienced challenges related to the asylum process and have been impacted by it. Participants must be able to communicate in Farsi, and no specific educational or professional background is required.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequence. It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this research study. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to provide written consent. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Withdrawal will have no impact on your asylum claim, access to any services, or any future application. If you choose to withdraw, any data collected up to that point will be destroyed. Please contact Sayna Nikeaateghad at sn22784@essex.ac.uk, or on 07368662373 if you wish to withdraw from the study.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be invited to participate in a one-on-one formal interview with the researcher. The interview will be conducted in a public location of your choice, and it will last approximately one hour. During the interview, we will ask you about your experiences as an asylum seeker in the UK, including your experiences with the asylum process, access to resources and services, and your overall well-being. This study will not have any impact on your asylum claim or your legal status in the United Kingdom.

You should be aware that there may be emotional risks associated with discussing your experiences. If you experience emotional distress, the researcher will signpost you to the Refugee Council, Mind for support and assistance. In addition, there may be a risk of breach of confidentiality if personal information is

accidentally disclosed. However, all measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Finally, there may be a small risk of discomfort or inconvenience associated with participating in the study. If any discomfort or inconvenience arises during the study, the researcher will take steps to address the situation and ensure you feel supported and comfortable.

If needed, the researcher will provide you with the contact information for the Refugee Council, and Mind, and guide you through the process of getting in touch with them:

Refugee Council contact information:

Website: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7346 6700

Email: info@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Mind information:

Website: <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/6086/annex-g.pdf>

Infoline: 0300 123 3393

By taking part in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences and contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by asylum seekers in the UK. Your participation could help improve the support and resources available to asylum seekers and enhance their overall well-being. Additionally, you may gain personal satisfaction from knowing that you have played an important role in promoting positive change for asylum seekers.

Before participating in the study, the researcher will provide you with a consent form that outlines the nature of the study, what will be expected of you, and what risks or benefits are involved. The consent form will explain how your data will be used and how your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected. You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have before signing the consent form.

You will be invited to a one-on-one formal interview with the researcher, which will last approximately one hour. The interview will be conducted in a public place of your choice, where you feel comfortable and safe to discuss your experiences. During the interview, the researcher will ask questions to gain insights into your experiences as an asylum seeker in the UK. The data collected from you will be anonymised, which means that your personal details will not be included in any reports or publications resulting from this study.

All information that you provide as a participant in this research study will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will be always managed and stored securely, both electronically and on paper, to protect your privacy and ensure that the data is not lost or stolen. Your personal information will be anonymised using numerical identifiers, and any identifying information will be removed from the research data to maintain confidentiality and protect your privacy. Only the researcher will have access to the data, and it will be stored securely in accordance with data protection regulations, both in paper and electronic form, and will be destroyed after a period of 5 years following the completion of the study. The results of the

research will be presented in a way that does not identify individual participants. At the end of that period, the data will be destroyed, both in paper and electronic form.

As a participant in this study, it is important for you to understand that the researcher may learn about activities that are considered illegal by law, and they may have a legal duty to report such activities to the appropriate authorities. In such circumstances, the researcher may not be able to guarantee confidentiality. However, the researcher will take all necessary steps to protect your confidentiality to the fullest extent possible within the limits of the law. They will also inform you of their legal duties and limitations during the informed consent process. If you have any concerns about confidentiality or legal risks, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher for more information.

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to provide written consent. This means that you will sign a document to confirm that you understand the information provided and agree to take part voluntarily. The University of Essex Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study for ethical approval. The Data Controller of this study is the University of Essex, and the contact will be, University Information Assurance Manager (dpo@essex.ac.uk).

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact Sayna Nikeaateghad at sn22784@essex.ac.uk, or on 07368662373 within 3 months of receiving this letter to indicate your decision.

Future publishing, archiving and reuse of the data may be carried out, in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Data may be deposited in the UK Data Service and University of Essex, for reuse by other researchers. Any personal information will be removed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or have a complaint, in the first instance please contact the principal investigator of the project, Sayna Nikeaateghad, using the contact details below. If are still concerned, you think your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction or you feel that you cannot approach the principal investigator, please contact the Sociology departmental Director of Research in the department responsible for this project, Dr Carlos Gigoux Gramegna at cgigou@essex.ac.uk. If you are still not satisfied, please contact the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager , Sarah Manning-Press (e-mail sarahm@essex.ac.uk). Please include the ERAMS reference which can be found at the foot of this page.

Contact information:

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the researcher at:

Sayna Nikeaateghad
PhD Student

Department Of Sociology
Email: Sn22784@essex.ac.uk
Phone Number: 07368662373

* The Participant Information sheet for the study will be translated into Farsi by an accredited translator, and both the Farsi and English versions will be provided to participants.

APPENDIX THREE: Participant Consent Form in English



Consent Form

Title of the Project: A Qualitative Study on the Impact of Asylum Process on the Wellbeing of Afghan and Iranian Asylum Seekers

Research Team: Sayna Nikeaateghad

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet dated 04/04/2023 for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I understand that any data collected up to the point of my withdrawal such as audio-recorded interviews, will be destroyed.
3. I understand that participation in this research study may involve discussing sensitive topics related to my experiences as an asylum seeker in the UK, which could potentially trigger emotional distress or trauma. I understand that the researcher will take steps to minimize any potential risks and ensure my safety and well-being throughout the study, including offering a debriefing session after the interview to check in with me and signpost me for an emotional support if needed. However, I acknowledge that there is a risk that discussing these topics could cause emotional discomfort, and I consent to participating in the study with this understanding.
4. I understand that there may be legal risks associated with participating in this study, particularly if I disclose information about criminal activity that may need to be reported to the appropriate authorities. I acknowledge that the researcher conducting the study has a duty to report certain types of information to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals involved, and that this may result in legal action being taken against me or others. I understand that the researcher will take all necessary measures to protect my confidentiality to the fullest extent possible within the limits of the law. I have been informed of my rights to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence, and I understand that my decision to withdraw will have no impact on my legal status or other aspects of my life.

5. I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored using numerical identifiers and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the project. Confidentiality will be maintained to protect my privacy.

☐

6. I understand that my fully anonymised data will be used for future publishing, archiving and reuse of the data.

☐

7. I understand that the data collected about me will be used to support other research in the future and may be shared anonymously with other researchers.

☐

8. I give permission for the audio recordings of my interviews to be deposited with de-identified transcripts according to the UK Data Service and the University of Essex Ethics Committee. The de-identified transcripts will be in text format using numerical identifiers and will exclude any identifiable information about me or other individuals. The audio recordings will be securely stored and accessed only by authorized personnel for the purpose of producing the transcripts, ensuring the removal of any identifiable information, so that they will be available for future research and learning activities by other individuals.

☐

9. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

Participant Name

Date

Participant Signature

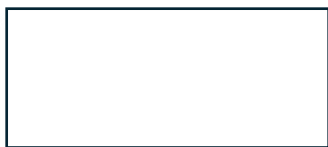
Researcher Name

Date

Researcher Signature

* The consent form for the study will be translated into Farsi by an accredited translator, and both the Farsi and English versions will be provided to participants.

APPENDIX FOUR: Invitation Letter in English



Dear Sir/Madam,

We would like to invite you to participate in a qualitative research study aimed at understanding the experiences of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. This study is being conducted by Sayna Nikeaateghad from the University of Essex.

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into the challenges faced by asylum seekers in the UK, including their experiences with the asylum process, access to resources and services, and their overall well-being. To achieve this, the study will use a data collection method of formal interviews.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and all information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The study involves participating in a one-on-one formal interview with the researcher, which will last approximately one hour. The interview will be conducted in a public location of your choice and will focus on your experiences as an asylum seeker in the UK.

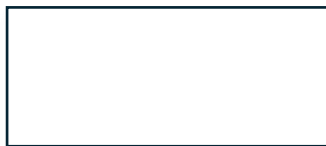
If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Sayna Nikeaateghad at sn22784@essex.ac.uk, or on 07368662373. Thank you for considering this invitation, and we hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Sayna Nikeaateghad
Sociology PhD researcher
University of Essex

* The Invitation Letter for the study will be translated into Farsi by an accredited translator, and both the Farsi and English versions will be provided to participants.

APPENDIX FIVE: Participant Information Sheet in Farsi



برگه اطلاعات شرکت‌کننده

عنوان مطالعه: مطالعه کیفی در تأثیر فرآیند پناهندگی بر رفاه پناجموهای افغان و ایرانی

نام من سائنا نیکا اعتقاد است و من دانشجوی دوره تحصیلات تکمیلی در دپارتمان جامعه‌شناسی در دانشگاه اسکس هستم. من مایلم شما را دعوت به مشارکت در یک تحقیق علمی کنم. قبل از تصمیم‌گیری در مورد مشارکت یا عدم مشارکت، مهم است که بفهمید چرا این تحقیق انجام می‌شود و در آن چه مسائلی وجود دارد. لطفاً وقت بگذارید تا اطلاعات زیر را با دقت بخوانید.

هدف از این مطالعه بررسی تجربیات پناجموهای در بریتانیا، از جمله تجربیات آنها در فرآیند پناهندگی، دسترسی به منابع و خدمات و رفاه کلی آنها است. این مطالعه به دنبال فراهم کردن دیدگاه‌ها در مورد چالش‌هایی است که پناجموهای در بریتانیا با آن مواجه هستند و ممکن است به اطلاعات و عملکردهایی در جهت حمایت و محافظت از رفاه آنها کند.

این مطالعه به دنبال پناجموهای بزرگسال است که در حال حاضر در بریتانیا زندگی می‌کنند. محقق به ویژه به دنبال کسانی است که با چالش‌های مربوط به فرآیند پناهندگی مواجه شده‌اند و تأثیرات آن را تجربه کرده‌اند. شرکت‌کنندگان باید بتوانند به فارسی ارتباط برقرار کنند و نیازی به پیش‌زمینه آموزشی یا حرفه‌ای خاصی نیست.

مشارکت در این مطالعه اختیاری است و شما حق دارید هر زمانی بدون هیچ دلیلی از پروژه خارج شوید. تصمیم برای مشارکت در این تحقیق به شما بستگی دارد. اگر تصمیم به مشارکت بگیرید، از شما خواش می‌شود که رضایت نامه کتبی ارائه دهید. شما می‌توانید در هر زمانی بدون دادن دلیل از مطالعه خارج شوید. خروج از مطالعه هیچ تأثیری بر درخواست پناهندگی شما، دسترسی به هر گونه خدمات یا هر درخواست آتی نخواهد داشت. اگر تصمیم به خروج از مطالعه بگیرید، هر داده‌ای که تا آن زمان جمع‌آوری شده باشد نابود خواهد شد. برای خروج از مطالعه با سائنا نیکا اعتقاد در sn22784@essex.ac.uk یا در شماره 07368662373 تماس بگیرید.

اگر تصمیم به مشارکت در این مطالعه بگیرید، شما به مصاحبه رسمی با محقق دعوت می‌شوید. مصاحبه در یک مکان عمومی انتخابی شما انجام خواهد شد و حدود یک ساعت طول می‌کشد. در طول مصاحبه، از شما در مورد تجربیاتتان به عنوان یک پناجمو در بریتانیا، از جمله تجربیاتتان با فرآیند پناهندگی، دسترسی به منابع و خدمات و رفاه کلیتان سوال خواهد شد. این مطالعه هیچ تأثیری بر درخواست پناهندگی یا وضعیت قانونی شما در بریتانیا نخواهد داشت.

باید بدانید که در گفتگو درباره تجربیات خود ممکن است بحران‌های عاطفی وجود داشته باشد. در صورت بروز هرگونه ناراحتی عاطفی، محقق شما را به «شورای پناهندگان» و «مایند» برای حمایت و کمک هدایت خواهد کرد. علاوه بر این، ممکن است خطر نقض حریم خصوصی وجود داشته باشد اگر به طور تصادفی اطلاعات شخصی فاش شود. ولی همه تدابیر لازم جهت حفظ محرمانگی و ناشناسی شرکت‌کنندگان اتخاذ خواهد شد. در نهایت، ممکن است خطر کمی از ناراحتی یا ناراضیت روحی ناشی از شرکت در مطالعه وجود داشته باشد. اگر در طول مطالعه هرگونه ناراحتی یا مشکلی روحی پیش آید، محقق اقدامات لازم را جهت رفع مشکل انجام داده و مطمئن خواهد شد که شما احساس پشتیبانی و راحتی می‌کنید.

در صورت نیاز، محقق شما را با اطلاعات تماس «شورای پناهندگان» و «مایند» مطلع خواهد کرد و شما را در فرآیند ارتباط با آنها راهنمایی می‌کند:

اطلاعات تماس شورای پناهندگان:
وبسایت: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>
تلفن: ۰۲۰۷۳۴۶۶۷۰۰
ایمیل: info@refugeecouncil.org.uk

اطلاعات مایند:
وبسایت: <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/6086/annex-g.pdf>
خط اطلاعات: ۰۳۰۰۱۲۳۳۳۹۳

با شرکت در این تحقیق، شما فرصتی خواهید داشت تا تجربیات خود را به اشتراک بگذارید و به درک بهتری از چالش‌هایی که پناهندگان در بریتانیا با آن روبرو هستند، کمک کنید. مشارکت شما می‌تواند به بهبود پشتیبانی و منابع موجود برای پناهندگان کمک کند و رفاه کلی آن‌ها را ارتقاء دهد. همچنین، ممکن است شما از آگاهی به اینکه نقش مهمی در ترویج تغییر مثبت برای پناهندگان ایفا کرده‌اید، احساس رضایت کنید.

قبل از مشارکت در این تحقیق، محقق فرم موافقت‌نامه‌ای را برای شما فراهم خواهد کرد که جزئیات و ماهیت تحقیق، انتظارات از شما و مخاطرات یا منافع موجود در آن را شرح می‌دهد. در این فرم، نحوه استفاده از داده‌های شما و چگونگی حفظ ناشناسی و محرمانگی اطلاعات شما توضیح داده شده‌است. قبل از امضای فرم موافقت‌نامه، فرصت داده خواهد شد تا هرگونه سوالی که در ذهن دارید را مطرح کنید.

شما دعوت خواهید شد تا در یک مصاحبه رسمی با محقق شرکت کنید که تقریباً یک ساعت طول می‌کشد. مصاحبه در مکان عمومی‌ای انجام خواهد شد که خودتان انتخاب می‌کنید و در آن احساس راحتی و امنیت می‌کنید تا در مورد تجربیات خود صحبت کنید. طی مصاحبه، محقق با پرسش سوالات، تلاش می‌کند تا درک بهتری از تجربیات شما به عنوان یک پناهجو در بریتانیا داشته باشد. داده‌های جمع‌آوری شده از شما ناشناس خواهد بود، یعنی جزئیات شخصی شما در هیچ گونه گزارش یا انتشارات نتیجه این تحقیق نخواهد آمد.

تمام اطلاعاتی که شما به عنوان شرکت‌کننده در این تحقیق ارائه می‌دهید، به شدت محرمانه نگه داشته خواهد شد. داده‌های شما همواره به شکل ایمن مدیریت و ذخیره می‌شود، چه به صورت الکترونیکی و چه بر روی کاغذ، تا حریم خصوصی شما حفظ شود و اطمینان حاصل شود که داده‌ها گم یا دزدیده نشوند. اطلاعات شخصی شما با استفاده از شناسه‌های عددی ناشناس می‌شود و هر گونه اطلاعات شناسایی‌کننده از داده‌های تحقیق حذف خواهد شد تا محرمانگی را حفظ و حریم خصوصی شما را محافظت کند. فقط محقق به داده‌ها دسترسی خواهد داشت و آن‌ها طبق مقررات حفاظت از داده‌ها، به شکل ایمن، چه در قالب کاغذی و چه الکترونیکی، ذخیره خواهد شد و پس از گذشت 5 سال از اتمام تحقیق، نابود خواهد شد. نتایج تحقیق به گونه‌ای ارائه خواهد شد که هیچ یک از شرکت‌کنندگان را شناسایی نکند. در پایان آن دوره، داده‌ها، چه به صورت الکترونیکی و چه به صورت کاغذی، نابود خواهند شد.

به عنوان شرکت‌کننده در این مطالعه، مهم است که بدانید محقق ممکن است با فعالیت‌هایی آشنا شود که از نظر قانونی غیرقانونی محسوب می‌شوند و وظیفه قانونی داشته باشد که چنین فعالیت‌هایی را به مقامات مربوطه گزارش دهد. در چنین شرایطی، محقق ممکن است نتواند محرمانگی را ضمانت کند. اما محقق تمام تلاش‌های لازم را برای حفاظت از محرمانگی شما به حد کمال طبق قوانین موجود انجام خواهد داد. همچنین طی فرآیند رضایت آگاهانه، او شما را در مورد وظایف و محدودیت‌های قانونی خود آگاه خواهد کرد. اگر نگرانی یا تردیدی در خصوص محرمانگی یا خطرات قانونی دارید، لطفاً درخواست کنید تا محقق اطلاعات بیشتری در این مورد برایتان فراهم کند.

اگر تصمیم به مشارکت در این تحقیق بگیرید، از شما خواسته می‌شود تا یک رضایت‌نامه کتبی امضا کنید. با امضاء این سند، شما تأیید می‌کنید که تمامی اطلاعات ارائه‌شده را درک کرده‌اید و به طور داوطلبانه موافقت با شرکت در این تحقیق را دارید. این پژوهش توسط کمیته اخلاقیات دانشگاه اسکس مورد بررسی قرار گرفته و تأیید شده است. مسئول نظارت بر داده‌های این تحقیق، دانشگاه اسکس است و در صورت نیاز به تماس، می‌توانید با "مدیر اطمینان از اطلاعات دانشگاه" به آدرس ایمیل dpo@essex.ac.uk در ارتباط باشید.

اگر علاقه به مشارکت در این پژوهش دارید، لطفاً ظرف مدت 3 ماه از تاریخ دریافت این نامه، با خانم سائنا نیکا اعتقاد به آدرس ایمیل sn22784@essex.ac.uk یا با شماره 07368662373 تماس بگیرید و تصمیم خود را اعلام فرمایید.

در آینده، مطابق با مقررات حفاظت از داده‌های عمومی انگلستان، ممکن است داده‌ها منتشر، آرشیو یا مورد استفاده مجدد قرار گیرند. این داده‌ها قابل ذخیره‌سازی در سرویس داده‌های انگلستان و دانشگاه اسکس هستند تا محققان دیگر بتوانند بهره‌برداری کنند. هرگونه اطلاعات شخصی قبل از استفاده حذف خواهد شد تا محرمانگی و ناشناس ماندن تضمین شود.

اگر نسبت به هر بخش از این مطالعه نگرانی یا شکایتی دارید، در ابتدا با سرپرست اصلی پروژه، خانم سائنا نیکا اعتقاد، تماس بگیرید. در صورتی که مشکل یا نگرانی‌تان حل نشده و یا احساس می‌کنید نمی‌توانید با سرپرست تماس بگیرید، با مدیر تحقیقات دپارتمان جامعه‌شناسی، دکتر Carlos Gigoux Gramegna، cgigou@essex.ac.uk، در ارتباط باشید. اگر باز هم راضی نیستید، با مدیر برنامه و نظارت تحقیقات دانشگاه، خانم Sarah Manning-Press، sarahm@essex.ac.uk، تماس بگیرید و شماره ارجاع به ERAMS را که در پایین این صفحه آمده است، ذکر کنید.

اطلاعات تماس:

در صورت داشتن هر گونه سوال یا نگرانی در مورد این پژوهش، لطفاً با محقق تماس بگیرید:

سائنا نیکا اعتقاد

دانشجوی تحصیلات تکمیلی

دپارتمان جامعه‌شناسی

ایمیل: Sn22784@essex.ac.uk

شماره تلفن: 07368662373

APPENDIX SIX: Participant Consent Form in Farsi



فرم رضایت

عنوان پروژه: مطالعه کیفی روی تاثیر فرآیند پناهندگی بر رفاه پناهجویان افغانی و ایرانی

تیم تحقیق: ساینایک اعتقاد

1- تایید می‌کنم که برگه اطلاعات مورخ 2023/04/04 مربوط به مطالعه فوق را خوانده و درک کرده‌ام. فرصتی برای در نظر گرفتن اطلاعات، پرسیدن سوالات و دریافت جواب‌های مطلوب به سوالاتم داشته‌ام.

☐

2- من متوجه هستم که مشارکت من داوطلبانه است و هر زمان که بخواهم می‌توانم بدون ذکر دلیل و بدون هیچ گونه جریمه از پروژه خارج شوم. من متوجه هستم که هر داده‌ای که تا زمان خروج من جمع‌آوری شده، مانند مصاحبه‌های ضبط شده، پاک خواهد شد.

☐

3- من متوجه هستم که مشارکت در این تحقیق ممکن است شامل موضوعات حساس مرتبط با تجربیات من به عنوان یک پناهجو در بریتانیا شود، که می‌تواند باعث بروز ناراحتی یا آسیب روحی شود. من متوجه هستم که پژوهشگر قدم‌هایی برای کم کردن هر گونه ریسک احتمالی و تضمین امنیت و رفاه من طی مطالعه خواهد برداشت، از جمله ارائه یک جلسه خلاصه بعد از مصاحبه برای بررسی حالت من و ارجاع من به یک پشتیبانی عاطفی در صورت نیاز. من می‌پذیرم که ریسکی وجود دارد که بحران این موضوعات ممکن است باعث ناراحتی عاطفی شود و من با این درک، به مشارکت در مطالعه رضایت می‌دهم.

☐

4- من متوجه هستم که ممکن است ریسک‌های قانونی مرتبط با مشارکت در این تحقیق وجود داشته باشد، به ویژه اگر اطلاعاتی در مورد فعالیت‌های مجرمانه را فاش کنم که باید به مقامات مربوطه گزارش شود. من می‌پذیرم که پژوهشگری که تحقیق را انجام می‌دهد، وظیفه گزارش دادن انواع معینی از اطلاعات را دارد تا از امنیت و رفاه همه افراد درگیر مطمئن شود و این ممکن است منجر به اتخاذ اقدام قانونی علیه من یا دیگران شود. من متوجه هستم که پژوهشگر همه تدابیر ضروری را برای حفاظت محرمانه اطلاعات من به حداکثر میزان ممکن در چارچوب قانون اتخاذ خواهد کرد. من از حقوقم برای انصراف از مطالعه در هر زمان بدون جریمه یا پیامد

آگاه هستم و متوجه هستم که تصمیم من برای انصراف هیچ تأثیری بر وضعیت قانونی یا جنبه‌های دیگر زندگی من نخواهد داشت.

☐

5- من متوجه هستم که داده‌های قابل شناسایی ارائه شده با استفاده از شناسه‌های عددی به صورت امن ذخیره خواهد شد و فقط برای اعضای تیم تحقیق که به طور مستقیم در پروژه مشارکت دارند، قابل دسترسی خواهد بود. اطلاعات من محرمانه حفظ خواهد شد تا حریم خصوصی من محافظت شود.

☐

6- من درک می‌کنم که اطلاعات ناشناس‌سازی شده من برای اهدافی مانند نشرهایی در آینده، ذخیره‌سازی و استفاده مجدد مورد استفاده قرار خواهد گرفت.

☐

7- من درک می‌کنم که داده‌های جمع‌آوری شده در مورد من برای حمایت از تحقیقات در آینده استفاده خواهد شد و ممکن است به صورت ناشناس با دیگر پژوهشگران به اشتراک گذاشته شود.

☐

8- اجازه می‌دهم که ضبط‌های صوتی مصاحبه‌های من با متون بدون هویت شخصی، بر اساس دستورالعمل‌های دانشگاه اسکس و سرویس داده‌های UK، ذخیره شوند. این متون فقط شامل شناسه‌های عددی خواهند بود و اطلاعاتی که من یا دیگران را شناسایی کند، در آن‌ها وجود نخواهد داشت. ضبط‌های صوتی با امانت در اختیار تیم تحقیق قرار می‌گیرد تا متون مربوطه تولید شوند و هر گونه اطلاعات قابل شناسایی حذف گردد. این موارد برای تحقیقات و یادگیری‌های آتی قابل استفاده خواهند بود.

☐

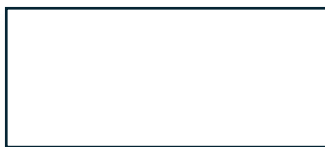
9- من موافقت می‌کنم که در تحقیق فوق شرکت کنم.

☐

نام شرکت کننده ----- تاریخ -----

نام محقق ----- تاریخ -----

APPENDIX SEVEN: Invitation Letter in Farsi



آقا/خانم محترم،

ما مایل هستیم شما را به شرکت در یک مطالعه کیفی تحقیقاتی دعوت کنیم که با هدف درک تجربیات پناهجویان در بریتانیا انجام می‌شود. این تحقیق توسط ساینایک اعتقاد از دانشگاه اسکس انجام می‌شود.

هدف از این مطالعه بدست آوردن دیدگاه‌ها در مورد مشکلاتی است که پناهجویان در بریتانیا با آنها مواجه می‌شوند، از جمله تجربیات آنها با فرآیند پناهندگی، دسترسی به منابع و خدمات و رفاه کلی آنها. برای دستیابی به این هدف، مطالعه از روش جمع آوری داده‌های مصاحبه رسمی استفاده می‌کند.

مشارکت در این مطالعه داوطلبانه است و همه اطلاعاتی که شما فراهم می‌کنید به شدت محرمانه نگه داشته می‌شود. مطالعه شامل شرکت در یک مصاحبه فردی رسمی با پژوهشگر است، که حدوداً یک ساعت طول می‌کشد. مصاحبه در یک مکان عمومی انتخابی شما انجام می‌شود و بر روی تجربیات شما به عنوان یک پناهجو در بریتانیا تمرکز دارد.

اگر به شرکت در این مطالعه علاقه‌مند هستید، لطفاً با ساینایک اعتقاد در sn22784@essex.ac.uk یا با شماره 07368662373 تماس بگیرید. بابت در نظر گرفتن این دعوت از شما سپاسگزاریم و امیدواریم به زودی از شما خبر بشنویم.

با احترام،
ساینایک اعتقاد
پژوهشگر دکترای جامعه‌شناسی
دانشگاه اسکس