

Title Page

'Thank you for asking me about my story': An exploration of the perspectives of forced migrant parents, practitioners and strategic actors in south Wales

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Abstract

This thesis presents a multi-disciplinary, qualitative study of how the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking parents in Wales are supported. The study comprises three aspects, drawn from (i) interviews with parents (n=10), (ii) practitioners (n=33) and (iii) strategic actors (n=15). The participants represent two case study areas, a city context (experienced at supporting refugee families), and valleys communities hosting Syrian refugees for the first time. Like much of the migration literature, this study is context specific, and represents a moment in time when three geopolitical factors collide, the 2012 refugee “crisis” (sic), the Brexit Debate, and, as the research ended, a global pandemic. The research considers the experiences of the parents, focusing on constructions of identity, belonging, needs and aspirations. Issues of practice are also explored with an emphasis on cultural competence, strengths-based approaches, multi-agency working and practitioner self-care. Strategic considerations including the UK systems for asylum and protection, devolution, austerity, and community cohesion are also explored. Throughout the thesis, the voices of the participants and the obligations on the researcher to bring about social good are prioritised.

The research explores the lived experiences of asylum-seeking parents in Wales, often characterised by constrained circumstances, uncertainty, lengthy waits for asylum judgements, alongside the challenges of integrating into a new society and grieving for what has been left behind. One of the biggest challenges for families and the practitioners that support them, is negotiating bureaucratic and often opaque Home Office procedures. These systems, all too often, stand in stark contrast to the Welsh Parliament’s vision of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary. For things to improve significantly, Welsh Government would need an extension to existing devolved powers, to move their vision beyond rhetoric and into reality. However, the rhetoric of sanctuary does have some impact, and most parents in the study liked living in Wales and found it a welcoming host nation. Nonetheless, there was some evidence that the Brexit vote in 2016 had contributed to some parents feeling less welcome. At the practice level, parents were supported by committed, passionate, empathetic, and culturally aware practitioners. However, high workloads, insecure funding and budget cuts were ever present challenges. At a strategic level, there was a strong

recognition of the importance of providing a supportive welcome to forced migrant families. However, this was constrained by austerity policies, post Brexit uncertainties, competing priorities and limitations of current devolved powers. The study highlighted the potential for developing a strength-based and distinctly Welsh approach to hosting forced migrant families, focusing on agency, autonomy and reciprocity.

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
CoP	Communities of Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EU	European Union
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FSW	Family Support Worker
GP	General Practitioner
HV	Health Visitor
MP	Member of Parliament
MS	Member of Senedd
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHS	National Health Service
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
UK	United Kingdom
WO	Women's Officer

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Life often takes us to places we would prefer not to go. In some ways it would be easier to shut off our minds and hearts to atrocities that exist in our world. Visiting the refugee camps of North France in 2016 was one such experience; listening to parents and children at the children’s centre in Grande Synth Camp, Dunkirk made me a witness to heart-breaking stories of loss, suffering and incredible resilience. Having seen and heard, I could not then unsee and unhear, and hence, this research journey began. I am grateful to Kirsty Frazer, (People in Motion), Janet Harvell (University of Worcester), Freya White, (Children’s Centre Manager) and Mark Escott (Lifechance Education) for sharing the experience of the camp with me and modelling compassionate, strength focused activism to support and empower displaced families. These inspirational individuals have informed both my thinking and my practice in so many ways. I am also grateful to my managers at the University of Worcester, Dr Karen Hanson (then Head of Department for Children and Families) and Ann Jordan (then Head of School of Education) for recognising the importance of the fieldwork at Dunkirk and making it possible for me to participate.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

“The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned” wrote poet and activist, Maya Angelou (Angelou 1987, p.196).

However, for displaced people everywhere this notion of home is often elusive and obscured by trauma, and the quest to establish a “new home” is fraught with challenges. This was the case for the parents in this study that had arrived with their children in Wales as forced migrants.

Drawing on the narratives of forced migrant parents and the service professionals in Wales, this thesis considers parents’ diverse experiences, multi-layered needs, and aspirations, along with the understanding and ability of public services to respond. The thesis seeks to identify learning to inform policy and practice in supporting families who have been forced to flee their homes.

This chapter explains the origins of the research and its contextual significance, provides an overview of the theoretical perspectives that have underpinned my approach, and outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Motivation for the research: a personal reflection

In 2016, I had the privilege of visiting the Dunkirk humanitarian camp. In the Children’s Centre, I met parents and listened to their accounts of homes destroyed, livelihoods lost, and relatives killed or displaced. They discussed fears for their own safety and for the futures of their children whilst reflecting on lengthy and perilous journeys, the details often hazy as the parents recalled the countries crossed. They told me of life in the camp, the hardships and tedium, and the challenges of parenting in an adverse environment. They described their time in the camp as a liminal space; suspended between their past lives in the countries they called home, and their future home in the UK.

The parents’ aspiration was to settle in the UK, which was perceived as a tolerant nation, with a legal system and welfare state that treated citizens well; a place where jobs were plentiful, education and health services were excellent, and where they

could build positive futures. The English language was itself an attraction, as most had acquired some English, whilst many were fluent. However, their knowledge of the UK was limited, and the UK itself was viewed as co-terminous with England (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were not familiar terms). When asked what they knew about the UK, the answer was invariably “London” and “Manchester United” and beyond that, details became vague, even for those with relatives already in the country.

These conversations, my own observations within the camp, and professional discussions with practitioners working there, gave me an understanding of the issues the families had faced both in their countries of origin, in transit and in the camps. I gained a sense of the strength and resilience of these families, who had overcome incredible odds to leave their countries and reach Dunkirk. However, past trauma and the harsh realities of life in the camp had left a discernible mark on the families. Some parents talked of depression, fatigue, and ill health. Others told me about their anxiety for their family’s future or their guilt at leaving loved ones behind in unsafe conditions. The children, living on the French coastal plain, painted pictures of national flags or the mountains of home, and acted out smuggling scenarios and police brutality within their play. Practitioners discussed the need for practical and therapeutic intervention to support the families to make a successful transition into their new lives in Europe.

I returned to the UK in June 2016, in the fortnight leading up to the referendum on continued European Union (EU) membership¹. The media was a frenzy of arguments and counterarguments. Different voices clamoured for attention; we should remain in the EU for fear of economic collapse; we should leave so that we could control our own borders and reduce levels of immigration. Many commentators highlighted an undercurrent of xenophobic sentiment, with this view supported by a rise in reported hate crimes (Home Office 2017). The media circulated confused messages about immigration, asylum seeking and refugees, and

¹ The United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, commonly referred the Brexit referendum, took place on 23 June 2016. The referendum resulted in 51.9% of the votes cast in favour of leaving the EU. Despite the referendum not being legally binding the UK Government committed to implementing the result. The issue proved divisive both within UK parliament and the nation as a whole.

raised concerns about the nation's infrastructure and the continued pressures on public services that were already depleted by years of austerity (Fetzer 2020).

The juxtaposition of the experience of the camp and my return to the UK led me to ponder what the future held for parents and children arriving in the UK. In Dunkirk, I had witnessed incredible human resilience in the face of multiple difficulties and challenges. Much of my professional life (as a manager of services for children and families) to this point had been concerned with supporting the needs of families challenged by multiple adversity. I thought that I had seen and witnessed most things that life could throw at a family. However, the stories from the camp challenged that assumption. I considered how the needs of families could be better understood and met and wondered how forced migrant families could be better supported to integrate within a society currently characterised by so much tension, misunderstanding, and conflicting values. Hence, this research journey began.

For Clough and Nutbrown (2002) the research problem is defined from the perspective of the researcher, which is informed by the individual's personal and professional biography. Hence, all research is, to some extent value laden (McNiff 2013). Reflecting on my experiences, the origins of this research interest resonate with my own personal, professional, and academic biography. I grew up in an area of 'multiple deprivation'² and watched families struggling with a range of social, financial and health issues, which impacted on their self-esteem, personal efficacy, and ability to thrive. As some commentators suggest (Chalkin et al. 1999) within an exposition of historical cultural theory, beliefs, values, and societal norms all play an important role in children's development.

Later, my undergraduate degree, focused on philosophy and comparative religion, sparked an interest in diversity, beliefs, and cultural expression. Then as a practitioner, working within areas of 'social deprivation', I realised the futility of addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged children in isolation from the family. Working within a city context, the communities I supported were culturally diverse, and included forced migrant families. Within this role, I recognised the importance of

² The inverted commas here are used because terms such as deprived and deprivation are highly emotive and can often be used pejoratively. Whilst there are technical definitions available, such terms are often used imprecisely, and are not necessarily the terms that those living and working in the areas would choose to describe their communities.

engagement, participation, empowerment, and strength-based approaches. Subsequently, my senior management role in local government meant that I needed to balance my passion for meeting the needs of families with the political, practical, and financial constraints within which I was working. This has instilled a degree of pragmatism and a desire to inform policies and practice that can be successfully implemented.

1.3 Semantic considerations

Language, as Descaries (2014) points out, can never be neutral. Rather, it is laden with meaning and subjective interpretations which are formed through an interplay between the author and the reader's own experiences and associations. Whilst much of this process operates at a subconscious level, there is, perhaps, a more insidious force at work (Gramsci 1971). Cultural hegemony denotes the way in which the ruling class employ social norms to maintain and justify the status quo and thereby assert their own dominance. Whilst there may be many manifestations of hegemony, the use of language is perhaps the most pervasive and pernicious (Gramsci 1971). For Mayr (2008, p.14), "*as a practice of power, hegemony operates largely through language*".

As officers at the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, Diedring and Dorber (2015) emphasise, "*the use of humane, appropriate and accurate language is critically important when describing people on the move and their predicament*". Conversely words like 'tsunami', 'crisis' and 'illegal immigrant' serve to instil fear in the populations of host countries and to stigmatise those who are forced to migrate. This responsibility of getting the language 'right' was important in writing this thesis. No terms employed within the migration debate are without controversy. This has led some commentators to call for the use of neutral terms, so instead of referring to a migrant or refugee, (which will have both legal and informal definitions and usages) we talk about 'people' or 'parents' or 'children', adding further descriptors where necessary. Wherever possible, I have used these more generic and humanising terms, referring to parents, children, and families. However, there are occasions where more specificity is necessary, and in these cases, I selected what appear to me to be the least imperfect of the imperfect definitions. Hence, throughout the thesis the following terminology has been employed:

- *Forced migration* refers to those who have left their homes to cross borders because of war, conflict, persecution, or poverty. I deliberately make no judgement on the motivations for migration. The terms refugee and asylum seeker are also used within their technical definition to describe legal status where this is appropriate (Home Office 2011).
- *Country of origin* denotes the country from which the families have fled.
- *Host nation* describes the country where the family is currently residing. For these purposes Wales is described as a host nation in addition to the UK more generally.
- *Parent support* denotes support given to parents and their children by practitioners within their professional role. The term is also extended to include formal volunteering roles such as those put in place through a support organisation.
- *Precarity* denotes a state of insecurity, whether that be in relation to Home Office status, housing, income, or employment. The word is employed as a deliberate alternative to the more widely used 'vulnerability' as it locates the source of the insecurity within structural and systemic factors rather than as qualities embodied by the individual.
- *Liminality* is an anthropological concept first developed by Van Gennep (1960) in the context of rituals connected to life's transitions. In migration studies it is often used to depict the ambiguity and uncertainty often associated with migration. Liminality can encompass temporal or special notions (Kirk et al. 2017). Johnson (2017) in considering domestic abuse, explores the relationship between precarity and liminality, arguing that there is a bi-lateral influence between these two states.
- *Inclusion* has been deliberately chosen as an alternative to the more widely used integration. This reflects the Welsh Government's stance on inclusion of forced migrants as a means of encouraging active and meaningful participation in all aspects of Welsh life (Welsh Government 2019a). It stands in contrast to technical terms such as resettlement and to terms such as assimilation which can often ignore the responsibilities of the host nation to

adapt and accommodate, by placing all the emphasis upon the individual to change to fit the needs and expectations of the hosting country. This aspect is explored more fully in chapter two.

1.4 Contextual significance and rationale

Chapter two provides a thorough contextualisation of the issues presented within this thesis. However, it is helpful to summarise some key aspects of the context at the outset.

1.4.1 Forced migration

The last decade has seen the largest levels of global migration in living memory with approximately 3.5% of the world leaving their country of origin (World Economic Forum 2020). Whilst many people leave their home to study, to work or for family reasons, the numbers of people forced to migrate owing to war, conflict or persecution has doubled in the last ten years (UNHCR 2018 United Nations. Among these are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2016). This situation needs to be set within a broader context of global migration made necessary by climate change, poverty and land/water shortages which is anticipated to heighten over the next two decades (Rigaud et al. 2018).

Asylum claims remain low within the UK, compared with other European countries (Refugee Council 2019; Eurostat 2020). However, in 2015, the Migration Observatory reported its highest level of net migration (329,000³), the increase largely attributed to escalating unrest within the Middle East Region (Vargas-Silva et al. 2016)⁴ along with an accompanying lack of tailored development solutions to support populations forced to migrate (World Bank 2016). Additionally, the UK Government gave an undertaking to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable refugees from refugee camps in Syria (UK Government 2016). However, both in terms of the headline figure and the proportion of asylum claims per 1,000 of the population (currently 0.51) the figures remain low (Refugee Council 2020). In the Welsh context, it is estimated that there are approximately 6,000-10,000 refugees living in

³ By comparison, net migration in 2012 was 161,000 rising to 200, 000 in 2013 against a government target to reduce net migration to tens of thousands.

⁴ Net migration is defined as the difference between immigration and emigration levels and includes people of all citizenships, including British citizens. This measure includes migration for any reason and is often used as a headline statistic which ignores the complexity of migration.

Wales (Crawley 2013; Parker 2018a) the majority of whom are living within the four dispersal areas (Newport, Cardiff, Swansea, and Wrexham) set up in 2001 in response to the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. More recently, the other unitary authorities in Wales have begun welcoming refugees under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (Home Office 2017).

It has been noted that Wales is seen as a tolerant nation, with attitudes that are more positive to forced migrants than those apparent in other areas of the UK (Lewis 2007a; Williams 2015a). This view is supported by the stated policy agenda of Welsh Government of Wales as a *Nation of Sanctuary* (Welsh Government 2019a; Welsh Government 2019b), which sits in stark contrast to the hostile environment⁵ rhetoric of the UK Government. However, the rhetoric does not always reflect the reality, and some researchers have suggested a hardening in public attitudes towards forced migrants in Wales (Mann and Tommis 2012; Parker 2018b).

1.4.2 Parent support for forced migrants in Wales

The support needs of forced migrant parents in the UK are not widely researched or understood. Whilst there are examples of responsive and innovative practice at local level in engaging and supporting forced migrant families, much of this activity is uncoordinated and under-resourced (Chiarenza et al. 2019). Forced migrant families are challenged by multiple adversity, with specific challenges related to physical and emotional health, education, poverty, employment, and legal issues, coupled with the lasting impacts of trauma and the need to adapt to a new language, culture and environment (Phillimore et al. 2007; Marson and Ferris 2018). However, a focus on difficulties experienced by forced migrants does not always recognise their resilience, which can be harnessed to enable families to resettle and flourish.

Importantly, forced migrants are not a homogeneous group. Families arriving in Wales will have had diverse prior experiences and will come from a range of racial, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. Any service response needs to recognise and respond to these factors, providing bespoke and tailored service solutions.

⁵ The hostile environment policy agenda, first announced in 2012 is a set of administrative and legislative tools designed to reduce immigration and make staying in the UK difficult for those without leave to remain. The policy is explored more fully in Chapter 2.

The extent and speed to which refugee needs can be met is contingent on the resource situation in public authorities including competing service needs⁶. While this tension has always existed within public services, the situation is exacerbated by financial austerity and budget reductions, particularly in relation to local government (Gray and Barford 2018). A report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015) identified local authorities under pressure, an increase in inequalities, staff and services experiencing unsustainable levels of stress and a reduction in preventative programmes supporting vulnerable groups. In 2021, during a global pandemic, this situation has been further exacerbated (IFS 2020a). Similar pressures have been experienced in Wales (Audit Wales 2021). One of the biggest impacts of financial cuts has probably been reductions in discretionary budgets, particularly related to staff development and training. Several studies have identified links between provision of training and development activities and employee confidence, morale, and productivity (Conway et al. 2014; Asenova et al. 2015) arguing that often the impacts are felt keenly in services for children and families (Horton 2016; Webb and Bywaters 2018). Therefore, this study will consider how forced migrant parents' support needs are understood, prioritised, and addressed within a challenging public service context.

As well as structural service constraints, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individual practitioners play a significant role in determining the success of supportive interventions. In working responsively to support refugee families there are social, cultural, and practical issues that practitioners and multi-agency partnerships need to navigate. Hence, practitioner narratives and professional discourses provide insight into how this is managed.

This study explores the issues and experiences of parents and their children living in Wales. It further seeks to understand the perceptions of frontline support service practitioners, in relation to their understandings of the issues, their response, and their own professional development needs in relation to welcoming families. All this needs to be set against a political and policy backdrop, which will itself impact on the experiences of both families and the frontline practitioners (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

⁶ Such competing priorities might include caring for an ageing population or provision of housing solutions

Through interrogating the narratives of parents, service professionals and strategic actors, the study identifies learning to inform policy and practice.

1.5 Theoretical underpinning of the research

The research draws on interdisciplinary theories, including, sociological, biological, psychological, and political conceptions. The study is predominantly conceptualised within sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978) postulating that circumstances surrounding individuals and their behaviours are affected specifically by social and cultural factors. This is equally the case for the parents, the service professionals who support them, and for policy makers.

Employing strength-based approaches (Saleebey 1996) served to challenge traditional deficit-based models which focus on risks, needs, and addressing weaknesses. This thesis advocates an approach which enhances strengths and builds on characteristics that are already present in individuals. Within a strengths-based model, an emphasis on developing resilience presents a helpful focus for thinking about intervention. Moreover, a recognition that disadvantage is often structural, rather than individual in origin (Ilcan et al. 2018) provided a useful lens for framing the experiences of participants within a broader context of social and political inequality.

Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological systems theory (1979) was beneficial for understanding how the multiple environments within which families exist, influence the family's experience, albeit in a complex interplay with structural issues (such as family composition) and psychological issues (such as resilience) (Jones et al. 2003).

1.6 Research aims and questions

This study aimed to better understand the experiences, needs and aspirations of refugee families entering the UK, and the support that they receive. The study aimed to generate findings that could extend the current knowledge base and inform policy and practice.

The central research question guiding this study was:

What are the family support needs of forced migrant parents living in Wales and how can these best be met?

This research question was supported by the subsidiary questions identified below.

How do forced migrant parents make sense of their experiences and perceive their support needs? How do they feel those needs are being or have been met?

How do strategic actors and practitioners understand the needs and experiences of forced migrant families and how is this reflected in the service response?

What approaches and/or models have been found to be effective in supporting forced migrant families, recognising existing service pressures?

What learning can be identified from the study to inform policy and practice?

In addressing these questions, it was important to explore the narratives and discourses of parents, frontline practitioners supporting them, and those responsible for developing and implementing policies that affect their lives. I was keen to understand the varied ways in which the forced migrant parents constructed their own needs and histories and how they engaged with services, participated, and perceived the impacts of the service support. Additionally, it was useful to focus on staff understandings, orientations, professional theories, and concepts and how they seek to respond to the multi-layered needs of the individuals they work with.

1.7 Guide to the thesis

Chapter Two provides a thematic review of literature related to forced migration and considers the interplay between ideology, policy, and discourses of migration. The chapter explores global demographic trends, causal factors and geopolitical issues related to forced migration. There is a specific focus on the migration experiences of women (including mothers). Consideration is then given to the UK policy contexts, where the UK Government's Hostile Environment narrative stands in sharp contrast to the Nation of Sanctuary approach within Wales. An examination of the limitations of devolution questions the extent to which Welsh Government's vision for a Nation of Sanctuary can be realised.

Chapter Three considers how best to support and empower parents, through a focus on generic family support literature that centralise forced migrant experiences and perspectives. Issues that impact at an individual and family level are critically explored with particular emphasis on liminality, adversity, precarity and resilience. The role of the practitioner in providing support to forced migrant parents is then highlighted, with particular emphasis on the value of adopting strength-based approaches. Furthermore, the chapter considers the barriers and challenges practitioners experience and the value of effective supervision, self-care, and practitioner networks. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the potential for using socio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 2005) as a theoretical framework. It is argued that this approach provides an opportunity for holistic inquiry and helps to make sense of the interplay between the various domains of influence impacting on the family.

Chapter Four locates the methodology for the study within a constructivist approach, wherein knowledge can be construed as both subjective and transactional, in recognition that the realities of participants are diverse and multiple. A rationale is provided for using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to provide insight into aspects of personal lived experience. As Smith and Osborn (2015, n.p.) highlight this is particularly helpful in the context of examining aspects of experience that are “complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden”. In examining my positioning as a researcher, I reflect on the ways in which this impacted the study design and implementation, and explore ethical considerations, and the motivation to use the research to bring about good (Bogolub 2010; Bloor 2010). The chapter outlines the methods utilised in the study, the selection of participants and the research settings. The value of adopting a case study approach is considered, and a rationale is provided for involving three participant groups; parents, practitioners, and strategic actors. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the research process.

Chapter Five presents findings from semi-structured interviews with 15 strategic actors. The participants included elected representatives at local, Welsh and UK government, senior officers from public services and representatives of campaigning and advocacy organisations. The chapter identified a strong consensus between

strategic actors in Wales about the potential of the country to radically rethink the response to people fleeing persecution and conflict. The concept of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary is presented as a distinctly Welsh and a values-driven approach to refuge. However, there was less consensus about the extent to which the vision of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary can be realised within existing devolved powers. The chapter considers barriers, challenges, and enablers to taking forward the Nation of Sanctuary approach, with effective partnership working and a focus on community cohesion and inclusion being key to success.

Chapter Six presents findings drawn from 26 semi-structured interviews and one focus group with practitioners. The practitioners represent a range of statutory and third sector organisations and includes three volunteers. The chapter begins with an exploration of liminality. The families they worked with experienced the uncertainty that often accompanies the Home Office processes, but practitioners were also challenged by ambiguous job roles, insecure funding and shifting organisational priorities. However, within this unpredictable milieu, they strived to maintain positive, trustful and hope inspiring relationships with forced migrant parents. The practitioners were witnesses to hardship and atrocity, but they also highlighted the rewarding nature of their role. Nevertheless, supporting forced migrant families was emotionally challenging work and practitioners reflected on wellbeing and self-care.

Chapter Seven presents findings generated with 10 forced migrant parents. The chapter explores how parents made sense of their shifting sense of identity, place and belonging (see also Chantler-Davis (2011)). The importance of physical and psychological safety is considered, with reference to how working with trusted practitioners can support parents. The chapter also considers factors which support the resettlement process, highlighting the importance of reciprocity, authentic friendship, and public acceptance alongside more pragmatic concerns such as navigating health and education systems and improving English language skills. The chapter concludes with a consideration of parents' hopes and aspirations for their own and their children's futures.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter, contextualises the thesis against a backdrop of current events and policy changes relating to forced migration. The chapter summarises the findings aligned to the original research questions. The implications

of these findings for policy and practice are then explored. I then reflect on the research journey, appraising the methodological decisions made, the limitations of the work, and the contribution of the thesis to confirming and extending our knowledge of supporting forced migrant parents in Wales. I also consider how my identity as a researcher has been challenged and transformed, and finally I consider areas for future research.

1.8 On a personal note...

The completion of this thesis has been fraught with challenges. Shortly after commencing the primary research, whilst presenting some emerging themes at the Postgraduate Colloquium at Cardiff University 2017, I collapsed during my presentation and needed life-saving surgery for a rare and previously undiagnosed genetic condition. Having been rushed by ambulance to University Hospital of Wales, I woke up several days later in a highly disorientated state, in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit. A lengthy period of rehabilitation followed, as I gradually adjusted to my new normal. This traumatic experience impacted all aspects of my life, including the doctoral study. A forced move to part-time working provided me with uninterrupted time, when I was able to really tune in to participants without competing demands of work pressures. This allowed me to be fully emotionally present within the parent interviews, and I also found that my empathy skills were honed by my own experience of trauma, albeit in very different context. However, spending several days on life support, and the ongoing effects of the subsequent “ITU⁷ delirium” challenged my cognitive abilities. My memory was affected, and my higher order executive functioning was impaired. Writing, refining, and redrafting became a significant challenge, my confidence plummeted, my progress was sporadic, and I felt lost in the process. Having people around to support me (notably my supervision team, family, and work colleagues) proved invaluable at this time. It was like having my very own cheerleading team, and I recognised once again how often practitioners fulfil this role for the parents in my study. It has been my privilege to interview inspirational individuals, to champion within this thesis the work that they are doing, often in difficult circumstances, and to highlight the challenges they face.

⁷ ITU stands for Intensive Therapy Unit.

Chapter Two

Migration, Resettlement, and Integration: Policy and Discourses

2.1 Purpose, approach and overview of literature review

Reviewing the literature enables the researcher to “limit the scope of their inquiry and convey the importance of studying a topic to readers” (Creswell 2003, p.27) and to identify gaps within previous studies and extend existing scholarly dialogue (Marshall and Rossman 1999). This process is an interactive undertaking (Merriam 2009), and in developing this review, I was struck by the complexity of literature related to forced migration in sociological, psychological, political, and managerial disciplines. The literature related specifically to forced migrant parents was sparse. Accordingly, my role in creating a meaningful review was that of the bricoleur (Lévi-Strauss 1967), working to create something meaningful from the available materials. This approach has been particularly useful in considering superdiverse populations (Johnson 2012) and contexts which are “*heterogeneous, multilingual and transnational, and frequently in localities characterised as ‘resource-poor’*” (Phillimore et al. 2019, p.231).

It was necessary to consider the definitions, issues, policy, and trends both pertaining to migration generally and to parents more specifically. This presented significant challenges, not least in relation to the breadth and complexity of issues presented, and the ensuing need to provide a review that was manageable, meaningful, and sufficiently specific to the focus of the study. The ‘messiness’ of conducting research (Naveed et al. 2017) into the real world of refugee parents and the practitioners who work with them was apparent, and to provide the necessary theoretical underpinning, I explored various disciplines, themes, and perspectives before compiling these elements in a new formulation specific to my research focus.

This process resulted in two literature chapters, which provide a broad overview, setting the scene for what is to follow, rather than a systematic and comprehensive review of a narrowly defined area of literature. Whilst a systematic approach to the review of literature would have embodied several advantages, not least in relation to the transparency of process (Tranfield 2003), and the bounded scope of the search strategy (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008), for this study, there was a risk that the

predetermined foci of such a review might also limit the study, given the inherent complexity of the subject matter. I agree with Moustakas (1994, p.112) who suggests that a “thematic review organises the core themes within the study and presents their findings within the core themes”. Hence, I adopted a thematic approach which enabled broad coverage of wide-ranging topics, and allowed for situational choices, which enhanced the specificity of the review (Collins and Fauser 2005).

Incomplete or inadequate definitions identified at the outset of the project could affect the conclusions of the review and the subsequent choices informing the research design (Bryman and Bell 2011). Therefore, I avoided simplistic definitions that ignore the nuances of different perspectives inherent within the complex and interconnected phenomena explored in this review (Rolfe 2006). A thematic review helped to create a nuanced and comprehensive understanding.

My starting point in tackling this review, was to undertake a search for the key terms ‘refugee’ and ‘parent support.’⁸ This yielded little of relevance, so I adapted elements of *preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis* (PRISMA) (Moher et al. 2009). This entailed a database search strategy for each theme, and then a scanning of abstracts to decide what was to be included or excluded. This approach generated some helpful starting points, and from the citations in these initial papers, I adopted a strategy of backward snowballing (Wohlin and Prikladnicki 2013). I was then able to funnel down to the most relevant sources (Berthon et al. 2003). This thematic approach was consistent with the role of the bricoleur and facilitated eclectic and multi-disciplinary engagement with the literature (Johnson 2012) enhancing the range of perspectives considered. Grey literature including Government documents and media reporting also provided a useful evidence base.

The themes that emerged were inter-related but approaching them categorically enabled a robust exploration of the prevailing discourses within each theme prior to considering the connections between them. Key themes have been identified and presented within these two interconnected chapters. These themes are presented under the domains of a socio-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

⁸ For this purpose, I used LibSearch index and Scopus, alongside Google Scholar).

2.1.1 Approaching the literature via socio-ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977,1979) provides a framework for considering the varied impacts of the social, cultural, and political environments that surround the individual. The model has been widely used in education, social work, and health fields (Eriksson et al. 2018; Fearnley 2020; Murphy 2020). Socio-ecological theory has also been applied in specific contexts related to at-risk populations. For example, Hardesty and Ogolsky (2020) consider its application to domestic abuse, strongly on sociocultural factors alongside the individual and relational factors that are more frequently studied. Firmin (2017) has applied the model to contextual safeguarding, arguing that relationships in family communities, neighbourhoods and online can provide both risk and protective factors that affect the safeguarding of the individual. In a study of human trafficking, Zimmerman and Kiss (2017) apply socio-ecological theory to the wider determinants of trafficking and labour exploitation. Greenbaum et al. (2018) also apply socio-ecological theory to trafficking, suggesting that factors at the individual, relationship, community, and society levels can interplay to influence risk of exploitation. Moreover, they assert that understanding of nested systems and the relationships between them can facilitate prevention through targetting factors at each of these levels. The theory has also been applied to research surrounding forced migrants (Betancourt and Khan 2008; Timshel et al. 2017; Thommessen and Todd 2018) recognising the ways in which an interplay between the individual and aspects of the environment can affect the experience of integration.

The Socio- ecological theory is discussed more fully in Chapter Three, but briefly, as Thommessen and Todd (2018) articulate, systems theory provides a way of understanding the dynamic relationships between the individual and the influences that surround them. For Bronfenbrenner, the systems most proximate to the individual (namely the family and support workers) exert the strongest and most sustained influence date. However, the macrosystem which comprises social norms, cultural expectations along with the broader policy and legal frameworks, is, perhaps particularly important in the case of forced migrants. Positioning the literature review

within a socio-ecological system provides a useful way of structuring the literature, beginning with the distal systems that provide the socio-cultural backdrop against which the individual's experience can be viewed, before focusing (in chapter three) on the influences that exert a more immediate effect.

This chapter focuses on the macro context, exploring wider discourses of migration, resettlement, and integration, and considering UK and Welsh policy contexts. The chapter explores the interplay between ideology, policy, and discourses of migration. This includes a critical exploration of definitions related to forced migration and consideration of demographic trends, causal factors and geopolitical issues that impact at a macro level. Additionally, the chapter considers the causes and impacts of migration, incidence and trends, definitions, and categories, many of which are fiercely contested.

2.2. Migration: an overview

For Bakewell (2011), it is imperative to unpack the terms we use to describe the processes, conditions, and categories of migration. Different actors within the migration debate and process may use the same terms but in different ways and without considering the implications of different conceptualisations and usages of terms. As Erdal and Oeppen (2017) highlight, it is important for studies of migration to critically interrogate the terms used, how these terms are employed and the associated consequences.

The notion of a discourse used within this context was first articulated by Foucault (1972) who defined a discourse as a way of constructing knowledge taking account of subjective analysis and power relationships. Accordingly, a discourse does not occur in a vacuum, rather it is influenced and challenged by competing discourses. For McDowall-Clark (2013, p.22), such discourses become “established ways of understanding society and embedded as knowledge”. Hence, discourses may influence societal concepts of refugee and family, with impacts (consciously acknowledged or otherwise) on policy and practice. Moss et al. (2000) recognise this potential impact of discourse on policy and practice, arguing that there needs to be philosophical, political, and semantic exploration of issues concerned with values and ethics, and specifically how we frame individuals. This idea of framing was articulated by Goffman (1974), where frames serve to organise ideas, experiences

and perceptions about a subject and to inform future actions relating to that subject. Accordingly, discourses serve as frames through which issues are categorised, understood, and responded to.

2.2.1 Forced migration: definitions, causes, trends

This section provides an overview of recent migration through an exploration of definitions, causality, and recent trends.

2.2.1.1 Definitions related to migration

Human migration can be defined as a movement of people between places, with the purpose of settling (IOM 2019). From an anthropological perspective, people have always migrated for many reasons including survival, opportunity, and colonisation (Crawford and Campbell 2012). However, within our increasingly globalised world, migration is a multi-faceted phenomenon that is interwoven with geopolitical, social, cultural, and economic considerations.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020 n.p.) described the term "migrant".

“While there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for duration of one year or more.”

Section Three of the UNHCR Emergency Handbook (UNHCR 2020b) makes an important distinction within this definition of migration, recognising that despite the way in which the words are often used interchangeably, migrants are fundamentally different from refugees

“Refugees are outside their own country because of a threat to their lives or freedom. They are defined and protected by a specific international legal framework. The term ‘migrant’, on the other hand, is not defined under international law, and is sometimes used differently by different

stakeholders. Traditionally, the word 'migrant' has been used to designate people who move by choice rather than to escape conflict or persecution, usually across an international border ('international migrants'), for instance to join family members already abroad, to search for a livelihood, or for a range of other purposes".

Despite this critical distinction, the external appearance of the migration may appear to be similar, with refugees and migrants often using the same networks, routes, and modes of transport. This results in a phenomenon termed "mixed movements" or "mixed migration"⁹. Mixed movements have contributed to much of the controversy surrounding the current European refugee situation (Van Hear 2011; Farmaki and Christou 2019)¹⁰, resulting in media coverage presenting migrants as a homogenous group and using narratives which emphasise threats (Lebedeva et al. 2016).

Lee (1966, p.49) proposes an all-encompassing definition of human migration:

"a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence" suggesting that "the distance of the movement or the voluntary or respectively involuntary character of the action is not restricted, and no distinction is made between external and internal migration."

This universal conception serves to remove the stigma created by the migration debate. However, a converse argument is that within heterogeneous movements of people, it is crucial to identify different categories to ensure that the individual has the appropriate framework of rights, responsibilities and protection applied (UNHCR 2011).

There are two further distinctions within the migration literature and the wider societal discourses of migration. Lee (1966) distinguishes between internal migration (which happens within the designated borders of countries) and external migration (which is often termed immigration or emigration). The International Organization for Migration (2018) emphasises that internal migration is the most prevalent form of migration

⁹ For example, refugees from war-torn countries used the same routes of passage and transport as economic migrants from Pakistan, Nigeria and Albania making it difficult to distinguish the two groups (Shneikat and Ryan 2017).

¹⁰ Opponents of immigration claim that refugee migrants entering Europe are in fact economic migrants who falsely seek refugee status. Verkuyten (2011) recognises the complexity of mixed migration arguing that there is a continuum of forced and voluntary migration, and that individuals may shift between these categories as circumstances change.

globally. Conversely, external migration (movements across designated borders) accounted for 244 million people, an estimated 3.3% of the world population. There are numerous motivations which drive migration at individual, family, or community level. Similarly, migration may be voluntary or involuntary. The nuances inherent within these notions of “choice” will be explored further in this section.

Lee (1966) describes migration as a threefold process across time and space, envisaging a place of origin, a destination, and a journey between the two. He argues, simplistically, that within these elements, push and pull factors impact individuals in different ways. Accordingly, within the place of origin, there may be people, memories, possessions, or commitments which act as pull factors, making migration difficult. Conversely, there may be push factors that make staying difficult or unattractive. The place of destination will be characterised by a similar dichotomy of push and pull factors, for example, opportunities, language, people, social norms, and attitudes. Whereas the process of migration itself, including the journey and legal aspects, may be fraught with challenges. Hence, migration, even when freely chosen, is a complex phenomenon with material, social and psychological dimensions of which the push- pull model is over-simplistic. This is further considered in Section 2.2.1.2.

At this point, it is helpful to consider a further distinction often applied within migration studies, related to concepts of choice and coercion. As a binary distinction migration is often viewed as either voluntary or involuntary. However, in the complex and varied contexts of migration the notion of voluntariness is strongly contested (Yarris and Castañeda 2015). Richmond (1988) made a similar distinction, identifying slavery, war persecution and political factors as potential drivers of involuntary migration (see also Luibhéid 2013). For Verkuyten (2014), the distinction is evident in public discourse, with a dichotomy drawn between involuntary or forced migration (‘real refugees’) and those who exercise choice (‘economic migrants’). This categorisation results in stereotypical portrayals of the extent to which different groups of migrants are viewed as worthy (Appelbaum 2002, 2017) or deserving of support (Verkuyten et al. 2018). This is not helped by the UN definition of migrant which encompasses both involuntary and voluntary migration, as the term migrant is used loosely and heterogeneously negating differing understandings and portrayals (Blinder and Allen 2016).

Verkuyten et al. (2018) undertook studies from a social psychological perspective to identify whether the degree of perceived choice that migrants have in leaving their country of origin had any bearing on the public support they elicited in their country of destination. Using an online survey, they asked 928 participants in Holland to identify their agreement or otherwise with statements linked to ideas of migrants' perceived choice using a seven-point Likert scale (Likert 1939). They concluded that public support (or otherwise) for the rights and assistance towards migrants was influenced by the degree of perceived voluntariness with which they left their country of origin, relating to ideas about the 'real' refugee or 'worthy' migrant. For Casas-Cortes et al. (2015) this dichotomy has resulted in creating the persona of the 'illegal migrant' as undeserving of public protection. The notion of coercion is also problematic in relation to people who have gone to great lengths to escape hostile regimes, in such cases, they have demonstrated much resilience and self-determination (Appelbaum 2017). To describe them as "forced", perpetuates images of helplessness and dependency at odds with the fortitude and resources they have demonstrated. Van Hear et al (2018) make the point that even during an individual's migration journey, the balance between compulsion and choice may alter over time, for example, with the initial flight forced but then some autonomy around when and where to settle or move on beyond that point. Castles (2003) highlights the ways in which individuals' choice even to flee conflict may be severely curtailed by a lack of resource; in this case they are "forced" not to migrate but to remain in an endangered state (Castles 2007). Hence, individual circumstances, agency and resources as well as structural barriers may all influence the ability or otherwise to flee (Bakewell, 2010)

Erdal and Oeppen (2018)¹¹ draw on their previous research with migrants in the UK and Norway (Erdal 2012; Oeppen 2013) to critically question notions of voluntariness in migration. They reject a binary distinction between forced and voluntary migration, suggesting that there is a continuum of experience and perceived choice. They question whether 'forced migrant' is a self-identified term or an imposed label, arguing that the individual's perception of alternatives at given points in the migration journey are more reflective and nuanced than external binary labels. As Castles et

¹¹ Erdal (2012) used semi structured interviews and focus groups to explore the perspectives of Norwegian migrants (n=30) of Pakistani descent. Oeppen (2013) in a nonempirical study considers the impact of information campaigns on individual decision making

al. (2014) point out in their book on migration, the term ‘forced migrant’ is problematic as notions of self-determination and autonomy are rarely the only considerations within migration. For Erdan and Oeppen (2017), there needs to be a recognition of the complex factors within migration, and an open dialogue about the experiences of migrants across the choice continuum. However, it is important to recognise that within current international policy and legal contexts, the distinction between forced and voluntary migration, (although highly subjective and open to interpretation), still dominates decision-making for individual situations. Therefore, the various definitions and categorisations applied within formal migration processes have impacts (UNHCR 2008).

The Refugee Convention 1951¹² forms the basis of international refugee law, providing definitions and articulating the rights, protection, and assistance that refugees should be afforded within countries that have signed the Treaty. The most widely accepted definition of a refugee is set out in Article I of the Convention:

“any person who ... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (UNHCR 1951, p.14).

Building upon this definition, the UNHCR (2011) state that:

“A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so.

¹² The Convention (UNHRC 1951) was originally focused on protecting European refugees in the aftermath of the Second World War but a subsequent document, the 1967 Protocol, expanded the scope of the Convention to cover worldwide incidence of displacement. Hereafter in this chapter, I refer to the Convention, which unless otherwise specified relates to the 1951 document.

This definition embodies an absence of choice and privileges the idea of well-founded fear of persecution or harm. The same source describes an ‘asylum seeker’:

“When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum – the right to be recognised as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded.”

Shacknove (1985) asserts that focusing on persecution is problematic as this is part of a wider issue related to the ability of a State to support its people. Shacknove proposed an expanded definition, positioning a refugee as an individual whose country does not meet their basic needs and therefore requires recourse to the international community to meet these. Walzer (1983, p.44) described such individuals as “necessitive strangers”, distinct from either refugees or migrants. For Pogge (1997), those fleeing for political or religious reasons should not be prioritised over economic migrants fleeing absolute poverty.

Widgren (1990) further criticises the international definitions by highlighting the inequality of provision and spending in refugee camps as compared to within convention-signed countries arguing that this disparity creates inequity and brings into question the West’s role in perpetuating this situation. This situation encourages individuals to make hazardous journeys (often facilitated by people smugglers) to convention signed countries (Amnesty International 2009), thus creating the marketisation of the convention alongside shared obligations which are based upon principles such as safe havens, international cooperation, and burden-sharing, as enshrined in the convention.

Kukathas (2005) argued for a broadening of the definition of refugee, pointing out that natural disasters such as famine, drought and earthquake are not covered within the narrow definition of the Convention. This call for a broader definition is supported by Feller (2011) who questions whether the Convention is still fit for purpose and by Myers’ (2005) widely reported estimate of 200 million people needing to migrate for reasons of climate change by 2050¹³. This has led to attempts to define “climate refugees” (Friends of the Earth 2005) and to incorporate this into the definitions. As

¹³ This estimate is based on predictions drawn from current trends.

the IOM (2008) contends, the absence of a wider definition that includes environmental causes of migration means that individuals migrating for all but extreme weather events are not allowed automatic access to entitlements like food, shelter, or healthcare. Cheer (2017) further noted the potential for economic migrants to be helped at home if there is political will and resource to do so.

In addition to calls to expand the UNHCR definition, there have also been calls to narrow it, or indeed to make it more relevant to the current context. Millbank (2000) challenges Convention-based systems, arguing that it advantages the mobile (those able to move and with the financial resources to do so) and disadvantages those without such resources, and particularly women¹⁴. Millbank (2000) writing in Australia, before the current swathe of mixed migration movements to Europe, was already proposing alternative models which would incorporate absolute poverty and migration forced by climate change. Ghosh and Enami (2015), conversely, contend that confusion is caused when migration studies do *not* distinguish between the terms, refugee and migrant, despite the notable differences between them.

The simultaneously arbitrary and subjectively interpreted nature of definitions of migration has led Olsen et al. (2016) to suggest that labelling individuals with *any* terms such as migrant, or even those with more positive connotations of worthiness, like refugee serve to reinforce “otherness”, which can impact negatively on forced migrants’ sense of belonging (see section 3.3). They argue that these agreed definitions feed into media and public discourses of migration, solidifying notions of worthiness. Whilst there are technical definitions of terms such as refugee and asylum-seeker, they are often used interchangeably within media representations (Goodman et al. 2017) and lay discourses (Nightingale et al. 2017; Parker 2018a).

The definitions of the Convention are contested. Moreover, there is debate as to how helpful it is to categorise groups of migrants. However, these categorisations drive entitlement and thereby affect the individual’s experience and the services they receive (see section 2.4.1). Consequently, definitions and categorisations must be considered even when they are problematic.

¹⁴ The gendered aspects of migration are explored further in 2.2.4.

2.2.2 Prevalence and trends

This section considers refugee numbers, composition, and trends at the global, regional, and national level. However, it should be noted that differences in definitions between the different levels mean that the statistics at each level are not necessarily comparable or reconcilable with those other level.

Global situation

The UNHCR 2011 describes forcibly displaced people as those forced to leave their homes as result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order. The numbers of forcibly displaced people have grown substantially as illustrated in Table 1:

Year	Forcibly displaced people (million)
2019	79.5
2018	70.8
2017	68.5
2016	65.5
2015	65.1
2014	59.2
2013	51.2
2012	42.7
2011	38.5
2010	41.1

Table 1: Global trends in forced migration (UNHCR 2020)

Increasing political instability has led to what the UN describes as “a longer-term rising trend in the number of people needing safety from war, conflict and persecution” (UNHCR 2020a). Further analysis illustrates the categories of forcibly displaced person in 2019 (Appendix 1.1). Of the total number of forcibly displaced people in the world (79.5 million in 2019), more than half (57%) are internally displaced within their own country. Of the remaining 43% of forced migrants who are externally displaced, 38% are under the age of 18 (Appendix 1.2). Externally displaced people come from many parts of the globe but for 2019, Syrians were the largest source with 6.7 million displaced persons, followed by Venezuelans¹⁵ (4.5m), Afghans (3.0m) and South Sudanese (2.2m). Most forced migrants (73%) will settle

¹⁵ Most displaced Venezuelans stay in Latin America and the Caribbean, while the remainder settle in North America and Southern Europe.

in neighbouring countries, with developing countries hosting 86% of the world's forced migrants (UNHCR 2021c). The distribution of forced migrants is shown in Appendix 1.3. The foregoing is important as it provides useful context and accurate data, which is too often missing from public discourses, or manipulated for political effect (Mouzourakis 2014). Just over a quarter of forced migrants are resettled within Europe and this is considered below, before focusing specifically on a UK context.

Europe and the EU

According to Betts and Kainz (2017), the refugee situation in Europe arose chronologically in four distinct phases.

- Phase 1: The Syrian crisis and the Arab spring of 2011-2014. In principle, no one in Europe had been interested in the crises; the refugees had been distributed among the neighbouring states and in UNHCR camps with some flow across the Mediterranean mainly towards Lampedusa/Italy.
- Phase 2 of November 2014 - August 2015: A new land trail to Europe had been opened via the Greek island of Lesbos.
- Phase 3 from September 2015 - December 2015: The refugees on Lesbos tried in large numbers to reach the northern countries of Europe. Germany opened its borders after Chancellor Merkel proclaimed that Germany is a strong country that could provide a new home.
- Phase 4 December 2015 – 2018 / 2019: The borders were closed again and the land route for refugees was closed by the Turkey Agreement. Relatively small numbers of people managed to make it through closed borders, with an even smaller number heading for the UK, usually through North France.

Europe saw rising numbers of refugees apply for asylum within the EU (Europa 2018) and others who did not meet the UNHCR criteria for being described as a refugee (sometimes referred to as economic migrants) who also applied for EU asylum. These pressures led to increases in the numbers of foreign nationals applying for EU asylum as illustrated in Appendix 1.4. Although the situation peaked in 2015, and subsequently declined, the year 2019 saw an increase of 13% in asylum applications.

However, this idea of a series of linear phases presents something of an oversimplification of a much more complex picture made up of series of events, conditions and processes (Crawley 2018a; 2018b) encompassing the financial crisis of 2008, the Arab Spring 2011 as well as various wars and conflicts and a rise in populist politics in the USA and Europe. The same recognition leads Dragostinova (2016) to question the unprecedented nature of the “migrant crisis”, arguing that there have been other significant movements of people, and that the proportion of refugees hosted in Europe remains low in relation to other parts of the world.

A significant proportion of asylum applications will fail. However, the distribution of successful asylum applications across the countries in the EU illustrates that the lack of an EU-wide policy on asylum meant that applications were skewed towards a few countries, particularly Germany (Figure 1).

Successful asylum applications, 2014-17

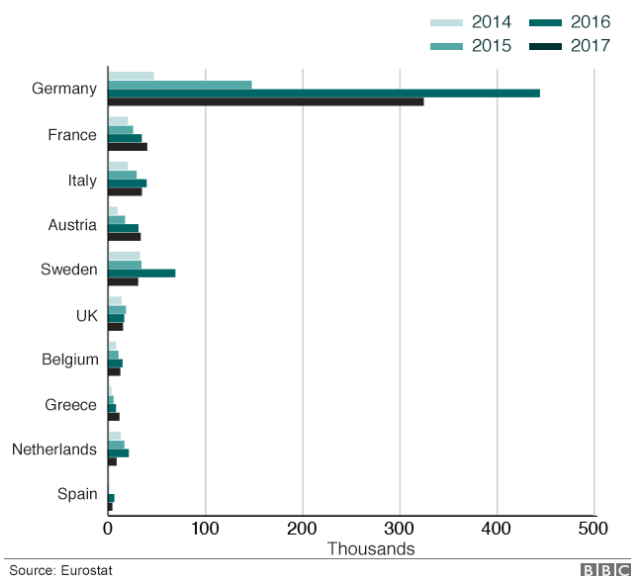


Figure 1: Successful asylum applications (Eurostat 2021)

Furthermore, as illustrated in Appendix 1.5, there is considerable variation between countries in the distribution of asylum success across different age groups (particularly children).

The relationship between UK and Europe regarding cooperation around asylum has been contentious. The UK signed up to some arrangements (for example the Dublin

III Regulation (UK Government 2017)¹⁶ for deciding the member state responsible for the examination of an asylum application) whilst opting out of other aspects of cooperation including the Family Reunification Directive (European Commission 2003)¹⁷. This complexity seems set to continue now that Britain has withdrawn from the EU and is pursuing its own agenda via the Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Parliament 2021).

United Kingdom

There are two processes to consider in relation to refugee settlement in the UK.

- The conventional asylum process used in the UK whereby asylum seekers enter the country and apply for asylum
- Separate schemes designed to resettle vulnerable persons, separate to the UK's in-country asylum process referred to above.

Asylum process

In the UK, asylum applications have shown an upward trend from 2010 as illustrated in Figure 2. This trend began at the outset of the Syrian civil war and accelerated in 2015, which was when media attention in Europe turned to the issue of migration (see section 2.3.1). Despite a small dip in 2017/18 the overall trend has remained upward, although movement restrictions associated with the pandemic resulted in significant reductions in applications in 2020/2021.

¹⁶ The Dublin III Regulation identifies the Member State responsible for determining an asylum application using a hierarchy of criteria.

¹⁷ Family reunification Directive establishes the rules under which non-EU nationals can bring their family members to the EU country in which they are legally residing.

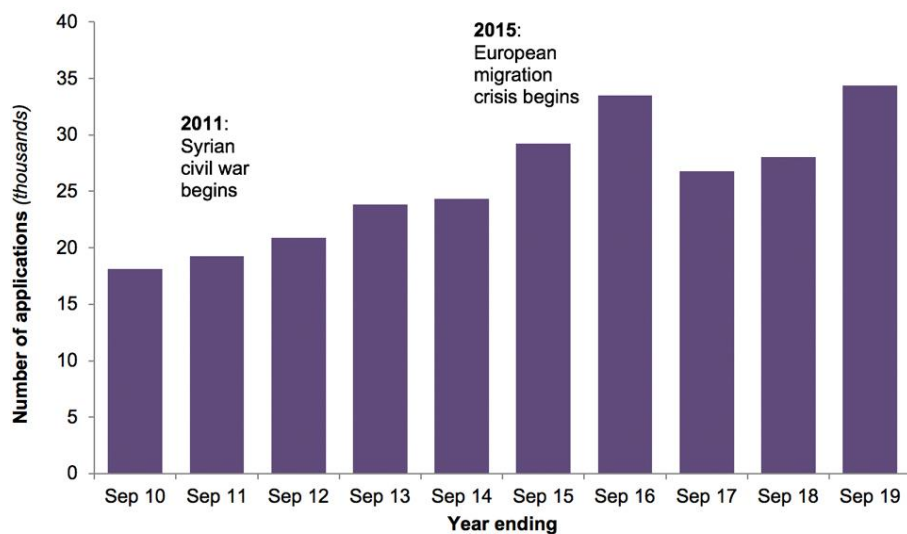


Figure 2: Asylum applications within the UK (Home Office 2019)

In 2018 the results of the asylum process were:

- 67% of initial decisions were refusals;
- 26% were granted asylum;
- 3.5% were granted Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave;
- 3% were granted leave to remain under other categories¹⁸.

The percentage of decisions to grant refugee status was the lowest in the past five years (Refugee Council 2019). This trend continued in 2020 with Covid restrictions resulting in significant delays to the processing of claims (Home Office 2021).

Despite media portrayals to the contrary (see section 2.3.1), levels of forced migration to the UK have remained relatively stable since 2010 and at a low level when considered as a percentage of the population or compared to other nations. UK asylum applications come from many different countries, with the highest percentage of applications from the Middle East. Applications from some countries have much higher rates of approval than others or the average rate of success, due to conditions in the countries concerned, as well as political priorities at the time.

¹⁸ An example of other categories would be family or private life rules; a category introduced in 2011.

Re-settlement schemes

Of the roughly 26,000 refugees resettled in the UK since 2010 under the four settlement schemes, 74% (19,176) were nationals of Middle Eastern countries, and 19% (4,990) were nationals of sub-Saharan African countries. A pause in resettlement schemes during the pandemic of 2020 (The Migration Observatory 2021) resulted in a sharp decrease in numbers resettled. The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) introduced by the UK government in 2021, in response to the changed political situation in Afghanistan has committed to resettling 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years.

The distribution of asylum seekers and resettled refugees across the UK is currently uneven. The Northeast and Northwest of England has the highest numbers of forced migrants with lowest numbers hosted in the South East region¹⁹. Of the 12 regions of the UK, Wales hosts the fifth highest numbers of forced migrants although numbers remain low at 1.3 per 1,000 of the population (The Migration Observatory 2021).

Wales

Dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales began in 2001 following the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which aimed to relieve pressure on housing in the South East (Parker 2018a). The Home Office keep records of the numbers of asylum seekers receiving support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 who have been dispersed to Wales and other parts of the UK. The relevant data for Wales mirrors the UK picture (Figure 2) with numbers remaining relatively stable but falling in 2019 and 2020.

Of these 3,009 receiving Section 95 supports, the majority were receiving both subsistence and accommodation with only a very small number receiving subsistence-only support. Asylum-seekers in Wales are distributed among local authority areas with a concentration in cities. However, over a three-year period from 2016 to 2019 this concentration appears to be even greater as illustrated in Table 2 with non-cities accepting less numbers. This situation may change with the

¹⁹ There are many possible reasons for the geographical inequity in hosting refugees, but the reason most frequently cited is that of affordability and availability of housing stock.

introduction of resettlement schemes to which all Welsh local authorities are signed up.

Area	31 December 2016	31 December 2019
Cardiff	1409	1238
Newport	519	453
Swansea	923	800
Wrexham	146	131
RCT	-	1
Vale of Glamorgan	-	3
Neath/Port Talbot	1	-
Bridgend	4	-
Gwynedd	3	-
Merthyr Tydfil	2	-
Monmouthshire	1	-
Conway	1	-
Total	3009	2626

Table 2: Distribution of asylum seekers in Wales Home Office 2020²⁰

Refugees have also been directly admitted from their home country to the UK under the Vulnerable Persons Refugee Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children Refugee Scheme (VCRS). The refugees come largely from Syria.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Wales	0	45	362	268	350	339	1364
UK	143	1194	4400	5371	5095	4897	21100
Wales as % of UK	0	3.8	8.2	5.0	6.9	6.9	6.5

Table 3: Resettled refugees in Wales 2014-2019 Home Office 2020

Between 2016 and `2019 numbers have remained consistent, in line with UK trends. In the period 2014-2019, refugees were distributed over the 22 local authority areas in Wales as illustrated in Table 4:

²⁰ These figures relate to subsistence and accommodation

Local Authority	Numbers
Blaenau Gwent	20
Bridgend	41
Caerphilly	32
Cardiff	87
Carmarthenshire	159
Ceredigion	74
Conway	17
Denbighshire	73
Flintshire	49
Gwynedd	39
Isle of Anglesey	20
Merthyr Tydfil	8
Monmouthshire	37
Neath/Port Talbot	52
Newport	118
Pembrokeshire	48
Powys	118
RCT	53
Swansea	146
Torfaen	33
Vale of Glamorgan	68
Wrexham	72
Total Wales	1364

Table 4: Refugee distribution across Welsh local authorities (Home Office 2020)

Over the last five years, all Welsh Local Authorities have hosted refugees and/or asylum-seekers, although numbers outside of the dispersal areas remain relatively low (apart from Carmarthenshire). The fact that all unitary authorities have welcomed forced migrants is a distinctive feature of Wales and adds momentum to the notion of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary (see section 2.3.3.2).

Understanding the scale of forced migration internationally, Europe-wide, within the UK and Wales provides important contextual information, challenging both media representations (see section 2.3.1), and public perceptions, which tend to

overestimate the numbers entering (Refugee Action 2012; Duffy et al. 2015; Holloway et al. 2019). These statistics demonstrate the complexity of forced migration within the UK. The distinction between asylum-seekers arriving spontaneously and those who are part of a government resettlement scheme is important because the categorisation drives rights and entitlements.

However, statistics can be used in different ways to support varied political perspectives. One interpretation suggests that in 2017 the UK resettled more refugees than other EU Member states (Migration Watch 2019)²¹. However, since resettled refugees are only a subset of the total number of people a country may host, this is misleading. Accordingly, the UK could be seen to be doing less than many other countries, particularly middle- and low-income nations, but also many European nations. Statistics also influence public opinion, which impact how refugees and asylum seekers are perceived within their host communities. The next section focuses on the drivers of forced migration.

2.2.3 Causes of migration.

Discussions of the causal factors of migration are contentious. Some of these causes are inherent in the definitions and have already been noted (see section 2.2.1.1), including war, poverty, persecution and increasingly climate change. A number of attempts have been made to theorise the causes of migration, although often these are oversimplistic and fail to recognise the complexity of the human situations that they seek to explain. These models are considered below as they continue to influence policy.

One model promoted by the UN identifies three high-level factors driving migration, commonly termed the '3Ds of Migration' (Global Commission on International Migration 2005), relating to development, demography, and democracy. In relation to development, it is the case that the countries of origin are often economically impoverished, and people leave these countries to try to secure a better life. The demographic factors may include famine or drought. However, what the UN definition fails to note is that one of the drivers (perhaps the strongest driver) is that

²¹ Migration Watch is a right-wing UK think tank with an explicit aim of campaigning for lower migration. The use of its interpretation in this chapter is to illustrate that statistics can be variously interpreted in order to "prove" a particular point or hypothesis.

of conflict be that civil war or inter-state war (as in Ukraine²²). One might argue that some of this conflict may be a consequence of lack of democracy but there are other factors to consider such as religious or ethnic conflicts. Conversely, the destinations of flight/migration may offer positive incarnations of the same 3D factors, being characterised by strong economic development or growth, a shrinking or aging national population (demography), which in turn offers employment opportunities and strong democratic features like freedom, protection, and welfare systems. However, not all the countries of destination will embody these positive characteristics, and in some cases the perception may be very different from the reality, with significant barriers to employment for refugees (Bloch 2007). From this threefold model Sussman (2010) identifies a series of practical and political considerations, arguing that migration has significant benefits for destination countries, which often have ageing populations that cannot alone service the demands that perpetuate a prosperous economy²³. Zimmermann (2016) describes the consequences for the host country in relation to social welfare and employment, identifying barriers such as a lack of language skills and cultural differences. He also describes a political crisis of the European states and institutions, resulting in the closure of the Schengen borders, provoking resistance to the distribution of refugees in Europe, and accompanying the emergence of populist right-wing parties. However, Zimmermann (2016) also stressed that the situation offered opportunities, not least in relation to the needs of the domestic labour market. Berlingieri et al. (2014) expressed a similar perspective, with the caveat that migrants need to have an adequate level of education to be able to connect to the European host country and contribute. Within this model, migration can be seen as a net asset to destination countries. However, through focusing so strongly on economic factors, this model does not provide an adequate explanation for forced migration where both the ability and desire to migrate are affected by a wide range of highly individualised factors.

When describing the causal relationships that drive migration, Bansak et al. (2015), building on the earlier work of Lee (1966) articulate a series of push and pull factors similar to those in force field analysis (Lewin 1943). Despite a number of criticisms of

²² At the time of submission of this thesis, an escalation of the Russo- Ukrainian conflict had resulted in Russia invading Ukraine in violation of international law and Ukrainian sovereignty.

²³ Post Brexit, within the UK there have been reported unfilled vacancies in many sectors, particularly manufacturing and service industries (The Independent, 2021). Botterill et al (2020) found a reluctance and ambivalence in workers from the EU to apply for settled status, given the hostility they were experiencing.

this theory, it continues to dominate much of the migration literature and influence policy making. Whereas Lee focused on the macro movements of people across borders, Bansak et al (2020)²⁴ apply the theory to individual decision-making. Such push and pull factors, they argue, may be economic or non-economic and it is the balance of these factors that determines whether individuals, families and larger groups decide to stay within the country of origin or migrate to a different destination. Simplistically, this model can be used to describe why the UK exerts significant 'pull factors' for migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, making it a preferred destination. However, like Lee's original theory Bansak et al. (2015) within their reductionist analysis of factors impacting on migration, ignore the complex, individualised and highly nuanced factors that influence an individual's actions, where emotions, opportunities, resources, constraints and chance all impact on decisions and actions.

Betts and Collier (2017)²⁵ contend large-scale movements of people out of region drain skills and resources from areas that need them. They advocate instead for the development of well-resourced, in-region havens, or places of safety proximate to countries of origin where individuals can settle. However, Crawley and Duvell (2017) criticised this ethnocentric approach, arguing that it reflects the authors' antipathy to mass migration and presents refugees as the problem to be fixed, in-region, away from the West, reinforcing public and political fears relating to migration. Indeed, the whole concept of push and pull factors seems to ignore the harsher realities of humanitarian situations in countries of origin, where survival may be dependent on flight from a country. Turner (2015) points out that migration itself may involve dire circumstances for refugees, as they undertake hazardous journeys, spend time in formal and informal refugee camps and encounter social and political unrest as they travel. Within such circumstances, it seems trite and offensive to reduce the decision-making of individuals to a management-style options analysis.

The inherent weaknesses of the models explored above have led to the development of more nuanced understandings of migration that recognise "different and complex ways that refugee migration affects individuals, families, groups,

²⁴ Bansak et al (2020) apply economic tools to the topic of migration to help explore motivations and to consider the impact of migration on the individual, the host nation, and the country of origin.

²⁵ Betts and Collier (2017) have written an influential and controversial polemic on the subject of migration.

communities, countries, and regions” (Bloch 2020,p.436). Bloch provides a critical overview of the way in which the theory of forced migration has developed over time, moving away from deterministic categories and binary classifications (for example, push- pull, voluntary-forced) to reflect the more multi-faceted and often messy situations that drive migration, and that do not fit neatly into the models explored above. Drawing upon the earlier work of Kunz (1981), Bloch explored the complex interplay between reasons and motivations for flight, individual circumstances, resettlement, and return, arguing that whilst refugee movements at first appear to be individual and distinctive, patterns emerge in the causes and movements which can be explored to provide wider insights into migration. This more nuanced conceptualisation of migration is further developed by Richmond (1994) who identifies constructs to help understand refugee movements, including conflict, identity power, structuration, and communication (Hynes 2021). Richmond (1993) challenges the binary distinctions of forced/voluntary arguing instead for a continuum across this spectrum which also embodied notions of proactivity and reactivity.

Castles (2003, pp.29-30) argues for the development of a comprehensive sociology of migration as it is a “central aspect of social transformation in the contemporary world”. He calls for holistic interdisciplinary studies, which prioritise participatory research to explore “the human agency of the forced migrants and of the sending and receiving communities”. This recognition has led to the establishment of interdisciplinary centres such as the Migration Observatory²⁶. Whilst it is important to consider the specific causalities and cultural specificities of forced migratory movements, this emphasis can mask wider issues of structure, power, and economics (Portes 1997). One aspect, missing from this analysis of overarching issues of power and resource relates to gender, which is the focus of the next section.

²⁶ The Migration Observatory (established 2011) is based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford with the aims of “providing, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues.”

2.2.4 Migration and gender

When migration is framed in structural terms, it is easy to lose sight of gender related issues, roles, and relationships (Morokvasic 1984). Grasmuck and Pessar (1991), assert that from the 1990's onwards, feminist sociologists have recognised the gendered nuances of migration²⁷. However, for Boyd (2004, p.1), the migration literature is characterised by the "*near-invisibility of women as migrants, their presumed passivity in the migration process, and their assumed place in the home*"²⁸. However, too often women are portrayed as passive followers of male-initiated migratory movements (Shishehgar et al. 2017), rather than as actors in their own right (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003, 2011).²⁹ More recently, there has been an emphasis on democratising the research process, giving women a voice and developing participatory methods that support understanding of women's experiences of migration (O' Neil 2019).

In a mixed method study in the US³⁰, Donato (2010) identified that women (not necessarily refugees) were risk-averse in relation to migration and less likely to travel without documentation. She also noted that migration itself was fraught with risks for women, particularly in relation to trafficking and sexual assault. Bartram et al (2014) note how migration is often influenced by gender relationships but also recognise how gender roles can be affected by migration. By migrating, they argue, men often lose some of the power and influence they knew in their country of origin, but women may gain new roles and enhanced control over their affairs. Afsar (2011)³¹ counters this, asserting that women may also experience greater isolation, particularly when they are not able to learn the host language because of childcare issues. Afsar's study, using an intersectional analysis framework, reported contradictory outcomes, thus highlighting the complex and nuanced experiences of female migration. She

²⁷ See also Giles et al. 1996.

²⁸ See also Callamard (2002) and Camino and Krulfeld (1994).

²⁹ In a summary of scholarship on migration and gender from the 21st Century.

³⁰ The study uses existing data from Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects (MMP and LAMP) studies which measured migration flows from 200 randomly selected household in each of six locations. Donato then considered the outcomes at individual level to estimate the chances of individuals deciding to migrate. Whilst not specifically focused on forced migration, it does consider the specificities of gendered decision making (see also Donato et al. 2006).

³¹ The article draws on a large number of secondary resources from regional and international organizations. For impact analysis, however, it focuses on Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, drawing on movement flows and earlier empirical studies.

recognised a gap in understanding of gendered issues and a paucity of adequate and reliable data.

Newbold et al. (2013), in a qualitative study using informal semi-structured interviews with female refugees in Canada (n=9), identified the vulnerability of single female refugees but also their resourcefulness and resilience. They found that the women were receptive to support from religious and non-governmental agencies and that the uptake of such support contributed strongly to positive outcomes. This “vulnerability” of female refugees is most often reported in relation to violence and particularly sexual exploitation. Vu et al. (2014) identified that refugees are “*highly vulnerable to sexual violence during conflict and subsequent displacement*” in a meta-analysis of 19 studies. They noted that accurate estimates of the prevalence of sexual violence are difficult to secure as refugee women are reluctant to report incidents to the authorities. Parker (2015) also reported high levels of sexual violence, including partner violence among female refugees, adding that whilst such events are disclosed to humanitarian agencies, they are not reported to police and are grossly underreported in official statistics.

Martin (2017)³² explored the realities of women’s experiences of forced migration, (as opposed to the rhetoric of the UNHCR) and argued that policies need to enable women to participate more fully in decisions affecting themselves and their families. Moreover, she contends that there need to be measures in place in host countries to support improvement in forced migrant women’s socio-economic status to allow them to live safely and with dignity.

The issue of trafficking is particularly relevant in relation to forced migrant women (Anderson and Rogaly 2005), who make up the majority of individuals exploited for domestic labour or within the sex industry (American Psychological Association 2014).

2.2.5 Trafficking

Aronowitz (2001, p.163) defines trafficking as a “*form of irregular migration*”, distinct from economic migration or asylum. Whilst human trafficking is not a new phenomenon, it is a subject of growing humanitarian concern within the UK and

³² This source is not an empirical study, but a 25-year retrospective of UNHCR policies on refugee women.

internationally. The Palermo Protocol (United Nations 2000, p.2) defines trafficking as:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”.

Trafficking includes sexual or domestic servitude, commercial sexual exploitation, forced labour or donation of human tissues and organs (UNODC 2011). Whilst trafficking often takes place internally, within a country, it can also involve crossing borders. According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS 2020), only a quarter of reported cases involved UK citizens, with the remainder being foreign nationals. Hence, discussions about migration and trafficking often overlap. Lee (2011) notes that trafficking is often confused with illegal immigration and argued for robust systems to ensure that those affected are not criminalised.

Broad and Turnbull (2019)³³ undertook a critical analysis of the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 (UK Parliament 2015)³⁴. They concluded that the policy remained problematic and served to further marginalise already vulnerable groups. However, they also noted the inherent complexity of trafficking as an issue distinct from but connected to forced migration. Critics of the Act also claimed that it was heavily focused on law enforcement and weak on victim protection. In 2018, a private member's bill, The Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill (UK Parliament 2018) was passed by Parliament and extended the period and range of support offered to victims.

Issues relating to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation are complex and fraught with contradictions. It is important to note that 96% of reported trafficking cases in Europe for the purposes of exploitation relate to women and girls (Eurostat

³³ There are no details of study methodology as this source is a commentary on the subject rather than an empirical study.

³⁴ The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is designed to combat modern slavery in the UK and consolidates previous offences relating to trafficking and slavery. It includes several provisions including a new statutory defence for slavery or trafficking victims compelled to commit criminal offences, the provision of child trafficking advocates, the establishment of an independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and the seizing of traffickers' assets.

2015). In a multi-method, exploratory study³⁵ commissioned by the Home Office, Kelly and Regan (2000) explored the trafficking of women into the UK for sexual exploitation. Their data included information about routes into the UK, coercion and deception employed to recruit the women, and the roles they undertook on arrival. Moreover, they documented the exploitation, maltreatment, and violence the women suffered whilst in the UK, calling for proactive support from specialist NGOs. Zhang (2009, p.178) highlighted that whilst there is a growing academic literature related to trafficking, very little is based upon primary research, and hence, the voices of survivors are often absent, with “*imagination filling the gaps*”.

In a study commissioned by The European Commission, Walby et al. (2016) explored the gender dimension to human trafficking, focusing on sexual exploitation. The study comprised of a review of the academic and policy literature, the development of in-depth case studies and a high-level gender analysis. The authors noted the gender specific harms of this form of trafficking, relating to the abuse of women’s bodies with ongoing physical and psychological impacts. They called for better coordination of services as well as access to quality non- exploitative employment. They also noted the importance of trust-building with victims who may have ongoing fear and suspicion of enforcement agencies and other professionals. The role and understandings of practitioners is further explored in Chapter Three.

In a discussion paper considering the way trafficked women are constructed within political discourses, Aradau (2004) argued that women are subject to double identification; being labelled as illegal migrants on one hand and as victims of abuse on the other. This results in interventions that are driven by notions of risk or pity, which suppress any agency of the woman herself, emphasising a need for research which prioritises women’s own perspectives on their situation, their current needs, and future aspirations.

This section has highlighted a growing academic interest in trafficking as a gendered phenomenon. Although trafficking is often discussed as part of a wider debate on migration and asylum, it is important that it is given a specific focus, as the

³⁵ The study included a review of the current legal framework, international policy and previous research, a national survey of the 43 police forces in England and Wales, in-depth interviews with thirteen key personnel, media and internet searches, and secondary analysis of official data on immigration patterns, organised crime and prosecutions for prostitution

perspectives of trafficked women are often lost within wider discussions, resulting in further marginalisation. Hynes (2021) makes an important distinction between trafficking and human smuggling, a distinction which is not always recognised by Governments (Hepburn and Simon 2013). Whilst both situations are subject to exploitation, smuggling entails a one-off financial transaction in exchange for illegal entry to a country. The important aspect of policy related to forced migration is now considered.

2.3. Refugee policy formation and underpinning influences

This section explores how migration policy is formed internationally and nationally. The basis of international law regarding refugees and asylum seekers is enshrined in the Geneva Refugee Convention (1951).³⁶ The Convention was supplemented in 1967 with a *Protocol Relating to The Status of Refugees*, which made provision for newly arising refugee situations, beyond 1951. The United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) was appointed guardian of the convention and protocol (UNHCR 2011).

Whilst the Geneva Convention provides an internationally endorsed system for supporting refugees, it is not without its critics (Feller 2011). Millbank (2000) describes the Convention as anachronistic, arguing that whilst it served a useful purpose during the Cold War, it was not designed for mass migratory movements such as those seen in recent years. It is important to note that not all countries are signed up to the convention. Moreover, there are difficulties generated by the convention itself, for example, inequalities of outcomes between convention refugees and camp refugees, and the fact that it affords no protection until a refugee reaches a signatory country (Millbank 2000). Lehmann (2019), however, points to the evolutionary nature of the Convention which has moved beyond its Eurocentric

³⁶ The Geneva Refugee Convention³⁶ (ratified in 1954) developed in response to people displaced during the Second World War. This multi-lateral treaty set out a definition of those eligible for asylum along with the rights that these individuals are afforded under international law and the responsibilities of host nations. Briefly, these rights are designed to protect individuals needing refuge through the provisions of articles which set out the ways in which refugees should be treated within host countries. These articles include a respect for personal status such as marriage (Article 12), the provision of administrative and legal assistance (Article 16), travel documents (Article 27) and identity papers (Article 28) and the possibility of naturalization (Article 34). They also protect refugees from discrimination (Article 3) and award access to services such as elementary education, and healthcare on a par with nationals and access to other rights such as higher education, employment, and property on a par with other non-nationals.

origins and proved adaptive to changing contexts and will need to continue to evolve alongside an international protection regime to meet new challenges.

2.3.1. Media narratives

There is debate about whether the media drives or responds to public opinion about migration. Betts and Collier (2017) highlight that despite the media focus on the 10% of refugees trying to enter Europe, 90% of the world's refugees live in developing countries, mostly in extreme poverty or in refugee camps. Bertram (2018) asserts that most refugees flee to areas proximate to their countries of origin, which tend to be poorer nations. Hence, although refugees have become a major political issue in Western countries, media images showing large numbers of refugees heading for the UK, such as UKIP's "Breaking Point" poster³⁷ are misleading and exaggerated. Regardless of this, scholars have identified a crisis narrative in media reporting within the UK and Europe (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017).

Holmes and Castena (2016) contend that media coverage has been characterised by hyperbolic, emotive language which served to shift the responsibility for the situation away from social, political, and economic macro structures to displaced individuals themselves. The focus of such representation is often on the problematised implications for host countries (see Zimmerman 2016). The role of the media in perpetuating the 'crisis' narrative of refugee movements cannot be overstated (Gourgiou and Zabarowski 2017). This is supported by Greussing and Broomgaarden (2017)³⁸ who noted a predominance of stereotyping of refugee issues across most media outlets within the tabloid press and 'quality' media

Alongside the crisis narrative, is a more sympathetic narrative emphasising tragedy. For example, the iconic media photograph of Alain Kurdi³⁷ which is credited with raising public awareness about the human cost of the humanitarian crisis (Vis and Goriunova 2015), and an exponential rise in donations to refugee charities (Henley

37 The poster (which critics pointed out was similar to Nazi propaganda from the 1930s) depicted a line of refugees trying to reach Europe, beneath a headline "Breaking Point the EU has failed us all" The controversial poster produced as part of the Euro-sceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP). Leave Campaign was much criticised in the UK and beyond as misleading and having racist undertones.

38 Greussing and Broomgaarden (2017) completed a frame analysis of media reporting of forced migration in six Australian newspapers throughout 2016,

2015). However, these media representations are not without their critics, with some arguing that such images are exploitative.

“A snuff photo for progressives, dead-child porn, designed not to start a serious debate about migration in the 21st century but to elicit a self-satisfied feeling of sadness among Western observers” (O’Neill 2015)³⁹.

Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) suggest that sympathetic media offerings associated with charitable endeavours or political activism, often fail to humanise refugees, or recognise their agency, and in turn become part of the problem.

The ways in which refugee issues are framed within the media (Entman 1993; Eberl et al. 2018) can influence citizen understandings of what the arrival of refugees may mean for host countries, with public opinion, in turn, impacting on policy-making (Heidenreich et al. 2019).

2.3.2. UK policy contexts

For Parker (2018a), the UK policy agenda towards asylum seekers has been one of restriction and disincentivising. He highlights a raft of measures introduced beyond the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 which increasingly restrict rights and entitlements. Attempts to draw clear distinctions between refugees (portrayed as deserving) and ‘economic migrants’ (undeserving) have, Parker (2018a) suggests, led the Joint Committee on Human Rights (2007, p.10) to argue that Britain is pursuing a “*deliberate policy of destitution*”. Providing a historical survey of legislation introduced by successive administrations from 1993 to the present, Parker concludes that an explicit agenda of hostile environment is being pursued by the UK government. As seen in section 2.3.2, this stands in direct contrast to the political rhetoric in Wales.

Hostile Environments for Immigration

The term hostile environment was first used in 2012 by the then Home Secretary, Theresa May who, in an interview, stated her aim to create a hostile environment (May 2013) for illegal immigrants (Kirkup and Winnet 2012). This was further embedded in the Immigration Act (2014) which introduced measures designed to

39 This article appeared in The Spectator newspaper: “Sharing a photo of a dead Syrian child isn’t compassionate, it’s narcissistic” the Spectator expressed disgust at the way the photo was being mindlessly shared.

make staying in the UK increasingly difficult for people without leave to remain, in the hope that they may leave voluntarily. These measures would, the Government argued, create a hostile environment without access to public services and benefits (Hiam et al. 2018), and thereby reduce numbers of illegal immigrants journeying to or staying within the UK.

The policy has been widely criticised in relation to the health impacts (Hickman et al. 2008; Steele et al. 2014). Similarly, Luibhéid (2013) challenges the construction of the illegal immigrant and considers the legal and social limitations that can be generated by a policy of hostile environment, through exploring migrants' relationship with their community irrespective of their status.

The policy of *Hostile Environment* is exemplified with the Windrush Scandal⁴⁰ where, in 2017, individuals were “*Illegally detained, deported and denied rights*” (JCWI 2019, n.p.). The Home Office commissioned an independent review, which argued that the Windrush affair arose from complex causes, including the application of historical legislation which had racist motivations (Williams 2020, p.12). Some have argued that this may represent a turning point in hostile immigration policy. However, at the time of writing, it is too early to analyse whether this may indeed be the case. It would be remiss, when discussing factors that influence policy within the UK, to ignore the issues related to the 2016 United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum, which is explored within the next section.

The EU referendum and BREXIT

After decades of political debate about the role of the UK in the European Union (EU) a national referendum was held in 2016 posing the question of whether the UK should remain or leave. The result (52% for Leave and 48% for Remain) was that the UK should leave the EU. Inevitably, following the referendum result there was analysis of the referendum results. Opinions have been polarised:

⁴⁰ Windrush was a 2018 British political controversy concerning people who were detained, denied legal rights and deported from the UK by the Home Office. Many of those affected had been born British subjects and had arrived in the UK before 1973, particularly from the Caribbean, as members of the Windrush generation named after the ship that transported the first groups of West Indian migrants to the UK in 1948 (Rawlinson 2018)

- The Leave Campaign put forward exaggerated claims for the benefits of Brexit, which significant numbers of voters believed,
- The Remain Campaign over-played their hand in relation to claims about the negative implications of Brexit after the referendum result (Project Fear).
- The binary choice put to voters was over simplistic and therefore people did not understand what they were voting for.
- The leave vote included strong concerns about immigration, and significant numbers voted for Brexit in a bid to control borders and reduce immigration into the UK (Ashcroft 2016)

While these proposed explanations may hold some truth, over time the analysis suggested deep-seated economic and societal issues which have remained unresolved by political parties. For Burrell and Hopkins (2019), along with other factors such as populism and Donald Trump⁴¹, Brexit has created divisive and polarised categories surrounding race and class, which serve to oversimplify the issues and deepen existing divides. A change in public attitudes during this period is also supported by rising levels of hate crime within the UK (Devine 2018a).

The next section considers a further contextual factor – the policy of financial austerity, which determines the resources available within public services to address local and national priorities.

Financial austerity in public services

The Recession of 2008-09⁴² was one of the largest and deepest economic recessions⁴³ in history which impacted negatively on both developing and developed nations, including the UK. There are many negative effects on society and the economy resulting from recession (Irons 2009) including:

⁴¹ Donald Trump became President of the United States of America in 2016. A controversial figure from outside the political elite. For some (De la Torre et al. 2019) this election was a triumph for populism, an approach which pitches the interests of the masses against a corrupt elite (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017)

⁴² The Great Recession was a period of marked global decline in national economies that occurred between 2007 and 2009. The scale and timing of the recession varied. At the time, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concluded that it was the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression (1929 -1941).

⁴³ An economic recession implies that the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country's economy contracts in size instead of expanding as it does in most years.

- Demands for public services increase, especially demand for welfare benefits consequent on higher unemployment
- Government tax revenues remain stagnant or declines because individual incomes and company profits may decline.

During a recession it is common for governments to borrow funds to make up the shortfall in public revenues to sustain public services. The amount of borrowing then adds to the country's national debt. However, the scale of the Great Recession was such that government borrowings in many countries (including the UK) rose to unsustainable levels (IFS 2011). In response, many countries began to follow what became known as austerity policies (McBride 2014; Peck 2012). Austerity is a politico-economic term which has two main aspects:

- **Economic** – given the unsustainable levels of borrowing, governments implemented policies to reduce the level of annual borrowing which, broadly comprise two strands – increases in taxation and reductions in public spending.
- **Political** – while the need to reduce public borrowing might be accepted, many will argue that austerity was done in a manner which had the greatest impact on the most deprived parts of society (Ridge 2013). In the UK, tax increases were imposed by raising the rate of VAT, but this is a regressive tax which hits hardest on the poor and expenditure reductions were achieved by large-scale cuts to welfare benefits which impacted negatively on the poor (McKloskey n.d.).

Although austerity was originally seen as a short-term remedy, the intractable nature of the Governmental debt problem and a disorderly Brexit process meant that it continued longer than politicians and the public originally anticipated (Fossum 2019). Despite Government promises that austerity was over, the economic situation continued to be uncertain (Nabarro and Schultz 2019) even before the pandemic, which is likely to negatively impact the situation further.

Some academic commentators have argued that the austerity policy was flawed (Griffin 2015),⁴⁴ entrenched existing inequalities (Blyth 2013) and there were

⁴⁴ Griffin (2015), writing from a feminist perspective argues that austerity policies have further entrenched inequalities experienced by minoritised populations and women.

alternative ways of addressing the financial deficit (Room 2015)⁴⁵. Such an economy might have generated levels of economic growth, which would have facilitated reductions in government borrowing and negated the need for public service cuts.

The austerity debate impacts on public attitudes towards migration, including forced migration (Hansen 2018) as there is a common political perception that refugees place additional demands on the public purse (OECD 2017). This can lead to moral panics in wider society (Cohen 2011) related to scarce resources and stretched public services.

However, some political scientists and economists have pointed to refugees as part of the solution. For example, Hansen (2018) argues that refugees have both the potential and the desire to contribute positively to the growth of the economy, but that austerity policies are preventing the public investment in resettlement and training necessary to make this happen. However, as Zamore (2018, p.46) notes, such initiatives need to be coupled with measures to promote dignity, autonomy, and citizenship, as “the parallel provision of services to refugees, and the exclusion of refugees from national and local systems and development plans, traps refugees into situations of protracted deprivation”.

A nation divided? Inequalities and “left behind communities”

The UK displays large scale inequalities compared to other developed countries (Equality Trust 2019). In terms of income distribution, in 2017/18⁴⁶, 42% of all disposable household income in the UK went to 20% of people with the highest household incomes, while 7% went to the lowest-income 20% based on disposable income before housing costs have been deducted (House of Commons 2021). Wealth in the UK is even more unequally divided than income. In 2016, the ONS calculated that the richest 10% of households hold 44% of all wealth. The poorest 50%, by contrast, own just 9% (GDP 2018). These inequalities reflect a sharp divide between the regions of the UK (ONS 2017). The South East dominates the UK demographically, politically, economically, and culturally. This is reflected in a

⁴⁵ Room (2015) suggested that the Government should have borrowed more money to invest and re-build the UK's economic capacity, as a post-industrial low-carbon economy.

⁴⁶ These figures are provided rather than later figures, as this reflects the timeframe when the primary research was being undertaken.

consideration of social issues such as health and education (Public Health England 2017).

The domination of London/South East in the UK has detrimental effects on the rest of country and leads to the concept of the two nations – asperous London (and the South East) and an impoverished rest of the country (Arnorsson and Zoega 2018). While this is an over-simplification, since there are pockets of affluence and poverty in any region, the reality is one of inequalities in income, wealth, health, employment and virtually any other indicator (Latham and Prowle 2011). These inequalities impact on public attitudes towards migration that tend to galvanise along a similar North/South fault-line, with polarised public narratives on refugees (and other migrants) with a threat narrative most prevalent in more economically deprived areas (Holloway et al. 2019). Simplistically, these areas also coincide with some of the highest levels of Leave voters in the Brexit campaign, leading some academics to associate public antipathy to migration in these areas with racism and xenophobia (Khalili 2017). Conversely, Bonikowski et al. (2019) challenge the idea that it is economic deprivation that drives such attitudes, arguing instead that Leave areas tend to be more conservative and less progressive than the South East. Regardless of causality, these stark divides in social attitudes towards a range of issues including migration has led to the concept of ‘left behind communities’ becoming a focus of academic and political interest⁴⁷.

The ‘left behind’ communities

The concept of ‘left behind’ communities is often associated with attitudes towards immigration (Goodwin and Malazzo 2017). This section considers some of the limited research about left behind communities and is particularly pertinent to the Valleys case study within this research (see section 4.6.3).

Sensier and Devine (2016) studied relationships between the Social Mobility Commission’s index⁴⁸, the leave vote, and adult opportunities in 324 locations in

⁴⁷ Hence, poorer areas may have more antipathy towards migration but (owing to a range of factors like cost and availability of housing stock), it is often within these areas that forced migrants are placed.

⁴⁸ The Social Mobility Index was calculated on behalf of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. It was first published in 2016 and updated in 2017. It compares the chances that a child from a disadvantaged background will do well at school and get a good job across each of the 324 local authority district areas of England.

England. They found strong correlation between areas with a low score on the index and a high leave vote, especially in areas with fewer adult opportunities. Rejecting the north/south divide, they identified that dissatisfaction existed across England in areas which were perceived not to benefit from economic growth derived from globalisation⁴⁹.

The Metropolitan, London- based, cosmopolitan economic culture which had largely benefited from the rapid increase in the service economy under globalisation saw itself as being part of wider political entities and was content with membership of the European Union both in economic and political terms. Elsewhere, a nationalistic non-cosmopolitan culture often saw itself as being a community of victims of globalisation whose economy and job prospects were threatened by the free-market policies being then adopted by the European Union, particularly the issue of European immigration and free movement of peoples. The cosmopolitan culture would describe itself as forward-looking, the nationalistic culture was positioned as looking back to a mythical 'golden age' when things in their community were better (Alabrese et al. 2019). Kaufmann (2016) in a discussion paper written shortly after the referendum, also noted that these leave voting communities were likely to hold a range of conservative social values, dislike change and difference, and value certainty, security, and continuity. They were, he argued settlers (see also Rose 2011) motivated by resources and by fear of perceived threats, pessimistic about the future and concerned with issues that directly affect themselves and their families.

Bateman (2016) suggests that fast-paced changes in society, globalisation and a two-speed economy has created a sense of alienation and a feeling of being 'left behind'. Moreover, such groups may be "*united by a general sense of insecurity, pessimism and marginalisation*" (Goodwin and Heath 2016, n.p.). This has fed into a growing sense that the establishment (both UK and European) do not represent their views or interests.

Becker (2017) support this view with their neighbourhood analysis of referendum voting, reporting that that areas with higher levels of multiple deprivation measured in terms of education, income and employment were more likely to vote leave than their more advantaged counterparts. Since the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, the

⁴⁹ This study focused on England but some of the same factors may be at play in Leave -voting areas of Wales.

notion of political discontent reflecting geographic divisions has found growing favour. Coyle and Ford (2017, p.67), argue that political alienation has become entrenched in left behind areas since the 1980s, due to the fraying of the '*economic and social fabric*' and the failure of successive governments to reverse this decline. Specifically, they argue for '*the devolved nations and the North of England as being the locus of discontent*', identifying regional divisions as the wellspring of political anger.

The South Wales Valleys as Left Behind Communities

One of the case study areas for this study, the South Wales Valleys, voted strongly in favour of Brexit. Scully (2016) drew on a series of public attitudes surveys conducted by the Wales Governance Centre and identified attitudes towards immigration as a strong factor within this Valleys vote. This was expressed not in terms of racism or xenophobia, but rather in relation to community concerns about local wages and pressure on public services (see section 4.3.2.3). Scully noted that the communities viewed themselves as left behind in economic terms, and the fact that the area was a net beneficiary of EU funds did little to alleviate this perception. He also found little evidence within the valley communities to support the "long cherished" view of Wales as more progressive and internationalist than England (Scully 2016). This view is supported by Cuerden and Rogers (2016, p158) who, in a study considering hate crime in Wales following the Brexit vote, argued that Brexit (along with other factors) has an "*impact upon the way in which non-indigenous people are treated, which results in an increase in criminality*" against minoritised groups.

2.3.3 Welsh policy contexts

When discussing forced migration within Wales, it is important to note the devolved nature of many policy areas.⁵⁰ To an extent, devolved administration precedes devolution (Greer and Jarman 2008) with areas like health managed locally rather

⁵⁰ Following the 1997 referendum on devolution for Wales, The National Assembly for Wales was established in 1999. Subsequently, in 2006, The Government of Wales Act introduced powers for the devolved administration to develop primary legislation.

than within UK Government. As Parker (2018a) notes the process of devolution took place concurrently with changes to UK asylum policy and coincided with the establishment of dispersal of asylum seekers to Wales in 2001. As Chaney (2016) suggests, support for Welsh Government and for additional powers has grown over time. The UK Government retains powers over asylum in Wales along with other reserved matters such as policing and welfare benefits. However, other issues which affect the daily lives of forced migrants residing in Wales (such as health and education) are devolved functions. Many researchers point to the ‘inclusive rhetoric’ that has characterised Welsh Government since its inception (Giudici 2014; Parker 2018b). This rhetoric is, as both Williams (2015b) and Parker (2018b) assert, often accompanied by a myth of tolerance. It should also be noted that Welsh Government has published specific strategies and plans relating to refuge and asylum, most recently, Nation of Sanctuary, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (Welsh Government 2019) in which a vision of a Nation of Sanctuary is set out along with actions designed to support the wellbeing and integration of forced migrants.

Nation of Sanctuary?

The Cities of Sanctuary Movement (established 2005) is a loose affiliation of organisations and individuals committed to the broad aim of ensuring that people seeking sanctuary are “welcome” within the town or city. The Birmingham Declaration (Sanctuary Summit 2014) sets out the core principles of the movement:

1. all asylum seekers refugees and migrants should be treated with dignity and respect;
2. a fair and effective process to decide whether people need protection should be in place;
3. no one should be locked up indefinitely;
4. no one should be left sick or destitute in a society; and
5. we should welcome the stranger and help them to integrate.

Wilcock (2019) contends that Cities of Sanctuary Movement grew out of North American attempts to counter national policy on such issues such as slavery and civil rights by changing the discourse to one of welcome and inclusion. Bauder and Gonzalez (2018, p.125) posit that the sanctuary movement allows for a local inclusive approach even where there may be a national backdrop of exclusion and

hostility. For Wales, however, there was a growing national consensus that the sanctuary movement provided a useful vehicle for articulating and activating a more humane and hospitable environment for forced migrants.

In 2010, Swansea became the first Welsh and second UK city to take on the mantle of City of Sanctuary. In 2014, Cardiff was also declared a City of Sanctuary and to date there are now nine Cities or Towns of Sanctuary in Wales, including a Valleys of Sanctuary group, based in Rhondda Cynon Taff. From 2014 onwards, there was a growing awareness of Cities of Sanctuary in Wales and a developing impetus to establish Wales as the first officially recognised Nation of Sanctuary. The Welsh Government commissioned a report, *I used to be someone* (Welsh Government 2017), which made a range of recommendations designed to improve the lives those seeking sanctuary in Wales. This was followed in 2018 by the publication of *The Nation of Sanctuary- Refugee and Asylum-seeker Plan* (Welsh Government 2019a) endorsed by the UNCRC as a “humane and yet pragmatic approach to the reception of refugees and asylum-seekers” (Welsh Government 2019a, p.4). The theme of Refugee Week 2020 in Wales was identified as *‘Imagine the potential of Wales as a true Nation of Sanctuary’* (Welsh Government 2020), with a focus on the reciprocal benefits Wales can derive from hosting refugees, including skills–sharing, entrepreneurship and cultural diversity. The week included a specific spotlight on the contributions of refugee doctors during the pandemic.

Supporters of the sanctuary approach view it as a *‘much needed and healthy antidote to the creeping criminalisation of migration’* (Hintjens and Pouri 2014, p. 224). What little research there is with forced migrants themselves suggest that the approach is well received (Darling and Squire 2013). Guma et al (2019) in their study which explored three case study areas in Wales,⁵¹ described how each area developed its own construction of sanctuary, linked to notions of place-making developed by the actors in that locality, and with the potential to transform civil society within that place. Accordingly, the sanctuary movement is perceived as a form of community development, as well as an expression of hospitality.

⁵¹ The three case studies were Aberystwyth, Mumbles and Splott in Cardiff, selected for their diverse geographies

However, Wilcock (2019, p.148) argues that by perpetuating notions of worthiness and using victim/hero stereotype within their discourse, too often the Cities of Sanctuary movement “*align with the state’s conditions for right of presence*”. Villazor (2008) stresses the importance of understanding sanctuary within its historic context and its contemporary and often politicised usage. However, little has been written to explore the semantic nuances of the term sanctuary, and particularly how it is understood by those most directly affected by forced migration.

2.4 Adapting to a new culture

Having considered some of the specificities of the UK-wide and Welsh policy agendas concerning migration, this section now focuses on concepts linked to integration. The term, integration, is explored in relation to its semantic meanings, and considered in relation to other concepts such as resettlement, assimilation and acculturation, which, whilst written mainly within a broader context of migration, have some resonance for forced migration.

2.4.1. Resettlement

Resettlement is defined as “*the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement*” (UNHCR 2011, n.p.). The concept of resettlement is applied to those refugees who are deemed particularly vulnerable.⁵² On resettlement, they are transferred to a safe country with the aim of rebuilding their lives. This definition would apply to refugees settled in Wales as part of the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme.⁵³ Resettlement is viewed as a permanent solution providing forced migrants with an opportunity for a new life in a place of safety (Swing 2017).

Careful planning, support, and adequate resourcing for participating local authorities (Home Office 2019) allow for a smooth transition and planned reception, which can improve the experience for individuals who are resettled in this way. However, as Pittaway et al. (2009) found in their qualitative research with resettled refugees in Australia, this positive experience can often be hampered by lack of support and

⁵² They may be considered most vulnerable either because of health conditions or because they are considered at high risk of harm within the refugee camp where they are resident.

⁵³ Under the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme which the UK Government undertook to resettle 23,000 refugees by 2020 (GOV.UK 2015)

information on arrival and a lack of voice in decisions affecting their lives. Despite these challenges, resettlement does avoid some of the stressors generated during spontaneous arrival. Arnold et al. (2019) notes that there is inequity in a system which prioritises resettled refugees for targeted support, even though their needs may be very similar to those who arrive by other means.

The biggest criticism of resettlement lies in its scope and scale. Amnesty International (2020) pointed out that in 2019 only half a per cent of the world's refugees were resettled. This has led to the UN calling for an increase in resettlement places, through expansion of existing schemes and development of new programmes to meet need. The next section considers the relationship between the forced migrant and the expectations of the host country.

2.4.2 Assimilation and acculturalisation

Cultural assimilation theory describes the processes whereby different cultural groupings become more alike over time (Crispino 1980). There is a recognition that processes can be spontaneous, forced or nudged⁵⁴ (Thaler and Sunstein 2008), and can happen gradually or quickly (Cole 2020). Whilst it is accepted that the process of assimilation is bi-directional with impacts on both the host country and migrants, critics argue that this can have impacts on migrants' sense of their cultural heritage which can become obscured during this process.

Acculturalisation denotes how minority groups adapt to the social and cultural norms of their host nation (Oppedal and Toppelberg 2016). However, culture can be defined in narrow socio-cultural terms (Berry and Georgas 2008) and the process of cultural transmission is seen as one-directional. This has led Rudmin (2009, p.109) to suggest that acculturation be replaced with the term "second- culture acquisition", which has the benefit of seeing the second culture acquired as an addition and not a replacement. It has been recognised that the processes involved with acculturalisation can act as significant stressors for forced migrants (Keles et al. 2018) as they learn new languages, become familiar with cultural expectations, and adapt to their new life circumstances. Oppedal (2006) stresses that for the

⁵⁴ Nudge theory is a concept in the study of human behaviour. It uses positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions as ways to influence the behaviour and decision-making of groups or individuals (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

acculturation process to be successful, the individual needs to be knowledgeable and skilled within the culture of the host nation but also within their own cultural heritage (Oppedal 2006). This is explored more fully in the following section on integration.

2.4.3 Integration

The term "integration" is used diversely within politics, science, and society and it is important to recognise that it can embody different meanings for different people (Castles et al. 2002; Favell and Hanson 2002). For Kuhlman (1991, p.1) *"Definitions of integration are sketchy or altogether absent, and there has been little theoretical reflection on how to measure integration or on the factors that determine it. Consequently, our understanding of the integration process remains incomplete."* Bertram et al (2020, p.83) helpfully define integration as *"the process by which migrants gain social membership and develop the ability to participate in key institutions in the destination country"*. However, Rudmin (2009) argues that the terms assimilation and acculturalisation are fraught with difficulty and can result in marginalisation. This has led many scholars (Phillimore 2011; Stura 2019; Arnold et al. 2019; Berry 2008) and governments to find preference for the term integration (Home Office 2019).

Nonetheless, Tossutti (2012) urges caution as the word integration is "used to denote one-way adaptation to the dominant way of life. Bulcha (1988, p.86) argues that integration is not always a harmonious process, and that some degree of conflict is inevitable. There have been several attempts to create theoretical understandings or models of integration (see Berry 2005; Esser 2009; Valtonen 2004). However, all definitions of integration, particularly those that seek to define successful integration are value-laden and subjective (Schwartz et al. 2017; Aiyar et al. 2016, Parker 2016).

Ager and Strang's (2008) model is arguably the most accepted approach to integration (Scottish Refugee Council 2010) since it is based upon inductive methodology, conceptual analysis, extensive primary research in two fieldwork

sites.⁵⁵ Within their conception, Ager and Strang identify ten key components of integration as illustrated in Figure 3.

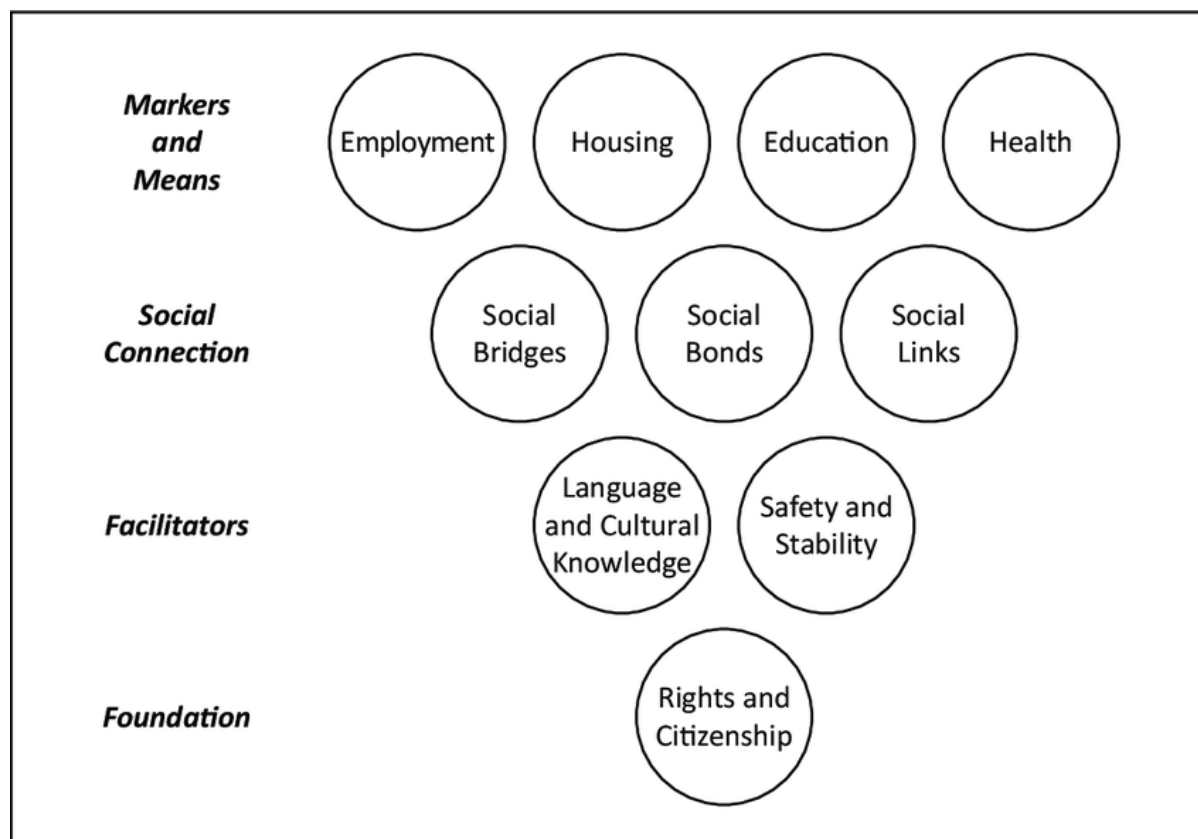


Figure 3: Domains of integration (Ager and Strang 2008)

This model has been supported, critiqued, and developed by others (see Phillimore and Goodson 2008; Bosswick and Heckmann 2006; Bhatia and Ram 2009; Parker 2017). There is widespread acknowledgement that whilst imperfect, as it fails to consider the interaction of these elements (Cheung and Phillimore 2014), it provides a theoretical understanding of integration and a means of operationalising it. Whilst there has been much written about the meaning of integration and its suitability as a policy aim, there has been less focus on what integration means to forced migrants, and how practitioners might support individuals to integrate.

2.4.5 Inclusion

⁵⁵ which included a robust social mapping exercise and 62 semi-structured interviews) and secondary analysis of survey data

The Welsh Government Refugee Inclusion Strategy (Welsh Government 2006) deliberately uses the word inclusion as opposed to integration (Threadgold and Court 2005, p.11). This, they argue represents:

“a conscious desire to move away from possible connotations of assimilation in the ‘integration’ concept, instead suggesting that ‘inclusion’ as a policy theme represents an active celebration of diversity and sociocultural partnership and participation with the preservation of individual identity and custom rather than amalgamation into mainstream practice”.

The Welsh Government approach is based on a concept of social inclusion, defined by The World Bank (2021 n.p.) as:

“The process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity”.

There is a recognition that *“Refugee inclusion should begin on day one of arrival”* (Welsh Government 2005. p.25). As Threadgold and Court (2005 p.11) highlight, inclusion enables forced migrants to:

“Become participants in different sectors of society with an emphasis in conscious and active processes involving policies of public agencies or employers as well as the newcomers themselves”.

This is aimed to tackle all aspects of disadvantage and potential exclusion, including financial and digital inclusion, whilst also encouraging agency and participation. However, terms such as inclusion are subject to individual interpretation and often used imprecisely (Hesse 2000; Ahmed 2004) ignoring the nuanced intersectional aspects of disadvantage and exclusion (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005). Moreover, as Threadgold and Court (2005) highlight, Welsh Government’s vision is subject to political, policy and legislative changes at both UK And Wales level. For Guma et al (2019) inclusion is conceptualised as a grassroots civil society approach focusing on solidarity and welcome. As such, it inevitably involves local populations and entails creating safe, welcoming, and neutral spaces (Huizinga and van Hoven 2018).

2.5. Chapter summary

This chapter considered broad issues pertaining to migration as well as the specificities of UK and Welsh Government policy relating to forced migration. The inevitable discord between devolved and non-devolved functions was explored, particularly in relation to the desire to create a distinctly Welsh and welcoming culture of refuge (Welsh Government 2019a). However, it is evident that forced migration cannot be discussed without considering wider contextual issues, which in the public discourse, impact upon social attitudes and understandings. As Goodwin and Heath (2016) contend, the EU Referendum has polarised issues not simply related to EU membership, but also to the wider migration debate. For families arriving in Wales and, perhaps particularly those settling in pro-leave communities, this attitudinal shift may impact their experiences. These issues are explored further in the Chapters five and seven.

2.5.1 Implications of this chapter for the study

Bearing in mind the multiple ways in which words surrounding migration are used and understood, it is important to use such terms precisely, having first unpacked the nuances of their meanings (Bakewell 2011). The difficulty with this, however, is that each of the available terms is, to some extent, problematic. Having considered the alternatives, it appears that ‘forced migration’ and ‘forced migrant’, despite the difficulties with these terms (see section 2.2.1.1), nonetheless offer the most precise and least misleading semantic possibilities. Within this usage there needs to be a recognition that notions of voluntariness and coercion are complex and subjective. Moreover, such terms need to be considered alongside concepts of agency and resilience to avoid perpetuating stereotypical notions of helplessness.

This chapter has considered how a person’s refugee status drives entitlement to support on arrival in the host country (section 2.2.1.1) and reminded me of my first visit to one of the support projects which participated in this study. The support worker beckoned to a man who was making up a baby bottle for his son at a counter in the corner. “*This is Alison*”, she said, “*She is doing some research with parents. What would you like her to know about your life?*” He thought for a moment and then replied, “*I am more than just my status*” (Reflective Journal 2017). When I went back to do the interviews a few weeks later, this family had been moved to another area of Wales and was no longer able to participate in the study, but his words stuck with

me. A focus within the research on this element of status and the benefits it confers became an important area to explore with participants.

The interplay between gender and migration, both in relation to patterns of migration, but also to perceptions and experiences within the host nation (Pesar 2003) have highlighted the need for a specific focus on women's experiences, particularly the perspectives of forced migrants who are also single parents, and whose voices appear to be absent from much of the migration literature.

A policy aim of integration is evident in both UK and Wales's approaches to migration. However, there is a paucity of research about the experience of families of integration, or indeed how practitioners support it. The primary research for this project thus focuses upon these aspects.

Finally, the notion of sanctuary plays a significant role within Welsh Government approaches to forced migration, and whilst the Welsh Government action plan sets out how this notion can be operationalised, there has been little attempt to explore meanings and understandings of sanctuary both within the indigenous population and those who are making Wales their new home. This aspect provides a fascinating focus for exploration within the primary research.

The next chapter considers how best to support forced migrant parents. It focuses on empirical studies that highlight their experiences and perspectives. The chapter will discuss how issues impact at an individual and family level, with particular emphasis on adversity, precarity and resilience. The role of the practitioner will also be critically explored.

Chapter Three

Supporting Refugee Parents: A Review of Literature

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two considered macro issues of migration, including socio- political constructions and broader discourses. This chapter will explore the literature regarding the experiences of refugee parents and the role of the practitioner in providing support.

This literature review was initially undertaken at the outset of the research project and periodically revisited up to the submission of this thesis. This period coincided with a growing interest in forced migration, and I have been able to take advantage of a developing body of research to inform the study (see section 3.12). However, the specific focus of refugee parents remains an under researched area. The literature explored is complex; international and drawn from many disciplines. Whilst some sources are specific to my research focus, others are drawn from generic sources. Once again, I find myself in the role of a bricoleur (section 2.1) working with disparate materials to create a meaningful structure. One of the inevitable challenges of reviewing such an amorphous body of evidence lies in the language employed (for example, parent, mother asylum seeker, migrant). Hence, at the outset I made the decision to use the terms of the authors cited.

The literature is reviewed within four main sections. Firstly, attention is drawn to the perspectives and experiences of parents who have fled war and persecution. This section considers the impact of migration on parents' wellbeing, their ability to care for their children. Issues related to identity, culture and relationships are explored with reference to theoretical concepts such as multiple adversity, precarity, liminality, intersectionality, resilience, and self-determination.

Secondly, the relationship between the practitioner and parent is considered, focusing on parent support. The third section considers practitioner experiences of supporting refugee parents, with emphasis on the barriers and enablers to support, issues related to professional identities, integrated working, professional hierarchies, and the importance of practitioner self-care. The value of adopting strength-based approaches against a backdrop of societal discourses of hostility, is discussed with an emphasis on the practitioner's role in inspiring hope. The chapter concludes with

an evaluation of the relevance of the examined literature to this study, identification of gaps in the literature, and areas where further research is required. The value of applying a socio-ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner 1979) to understanding the experiences of refugee parents is explored, with reference to studies that have adopted this approach. Finally, consideration is given to how this review of literature has informed the methodology for the study, which will be considered in Chapter Four.

3.2 Being a refugee and being a parent

This section explores the nuanced and individualised constructs of identity, gender, culture, family, and relationships. Much of the literature related to parenting and migration is focused on motherhood (East et al. 2018; Vervliet et al. 2014; Lisiak 2017). There may be several reasons for this, including gender roles in countries of origin, strong focus on the pre and postnatal phase, and the professional backgrounds and interests of researchers working in this area (Madziva and Zontini 2012; Whitmarsh 2011). The focus on motherhood aligns with this study because, unexpectedly, all but two of the parent participants were female, the males being part of a married couple (see section 4.6.4).

3.2.1 Forced migrant women, multiple identities, and intersectionality

It is important to recognise that issues of culture and identity are not fixed and immutable (Bartolomei et al. 2003), but continually shifting through experiences and interactions (Burke and Stets 2009). Thus, as Hall (1994, p.222) asserts “*instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process ...*”. Such fluidity of identity is supported in literature (Everett and Wagstaff 2004; Kumsa 2006) and is often compounded by a tension between how the individual self- defines, and how they are defined by others (Hall 1994). For parents who have crossed continents, this idea of identity is even more complex, entwined with people and places left behind (Real 2011), and characterised by coming to terms with new ways of being in their host country (Lacroix 2006).

Forced migrant women are often subject to multiple forms of marginalisation (Callamard 2002). This can impact negatively on their sense of identity and

experience of empowerment (Siddiquee and Kagan 2006). Bloch et al.(2000) argue that women frequently take on the role of maintaining cultural identity, often against a backdrop of pressures such as loss of support networks, isolation, and asylum concerns, (further discussed in section 3.3.3). Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) in a case study of Sudanese and Somali women living in a refugee camp in Kenya⁵⁶, considered how the label of ‘refugee woman’ embodies multiple forms of oppression but also ideas of strength and positive status. Women may be perceived as vulnerable and in need of protection, but also have a perceived positive status as a wife and mother, as well as other identities linked to religious, political, and occupational affiliations. Pittaway and Pittaway (2004) describe how these identities merge, shift and come to the fore, but also how they are defined against a dominant culture that seeks to simplify and homogenise this multi- faceted identity into singular descriptors. How women are perceived by others may also influence how they perceive themselves. Pittaway and Pittaway (2004), introduce the notion of intersectionality (see also Crenshaw 1989; Abeysekera 2002), whereby multiple identities⁵⁷ intersect, affecting women’s lived social experience. In turn, multiple discriminations are intertwined with these identities, affecting their ability to access rights (Real et al. 2002). Hence, the combined “*dangerous label*” of refugee woman renders women vulnerable to discrimination, including silencing and sexual violence (Pittaway and Pittaway 2004, p.128). However, Yuval-Davies (2011) disputes the inevitability of marginalised identities resulting in discrimination, arguing that they equally facilitate empowerment, self-advocacy, and advocacy for others. Defining the multiple, shifting, and interconnected identities of marginalised identities can raise awareness of the experiences of oppressed groups (McCall 2005) in a way that can inform policy change and positive practice (Chantler 2012).

3.2.2 Mothers and motherhood

In a qualitative study using the theoretical lens of intersectionality, Watts et al (2015) conducted interviews with young mothers (n=16) who had fled their countries of origin. All the women mentioned the difficulty of embracing parenthood whilst

⁵⁶ The authors state that the paper is part of a larger research project. Hence, they do not specify the number of women who participated, nor do they discuss their methodology. The case study setting is a refugee camp in Kenya, home to approximately 88,000 predominately Sudanese and Somali refugees, many of whom have been there for over 10 years.

⁵⁷ Such identities may include gender, marital status, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, a socio-economic and a socio-legal status

negotiating new lives in their host country and managing the adjustments that this entailed. However, for many of the women their newly acquired identity of mother brought happiness, a perceived increase in status, and increased sense of purpose. This is consistent with findings from studies related to mothers from other marginalised groups (Irving and Giles 2011). The positivity of women's responses was associated with the level of support they reported from services, their own families, and the wider community.

Vervliet et al (2014) examined the experiences of unaccompanied mothers under the age of 25 (n=20) and proposed four intersecting identities: namely refugee, unaccompanied, young, and mother. The researchers also identified four themes that were common across women's narratives. Firstly, the women experienced constrained living conditions related to housing arrangements, opportunities for education and work, and financial pressures. The second theme related to mental health difficulties⁵⁸. Thirdly, the women spoke about the importance of creating connections with others, most notably other refugee parents. Practitioners also featured as an important source of emotional and practical support, with many women noting that the relationship with an older woman was a substitute for a relationship with their own mother. Feeling connected to their child also alleviated loneliness and brought joy. The final theme related to motherhood as a turning point, which increased self-esteem, and changed priorities. Positivity was evident even when the pregnancy had been unplanned.

Similarly, Korukcu (2017) investigated the experiences of Syrian refugee mothers (n=7) who gave birth in Turkey and reported significant challenges with beginning parenthood in a foreign country. Challenges related to language barriers, lack of support, financial difficulties, discrimination, loneliness, and isolation. The women had little social support and limited formal education, which can affect transition to motherhood and experiences within a host country (see Meleis 2010). Korukcu found that having practitioners (in this case, nurses) to advocate for the mother's rights and needs resulted in more positive outcomes. Small changes in practice, such as providing translation enhanced the positivity of their experience. Despite difficulties

⁵⁸ Vervliet et al (2014) attributed emotional and mental health difficulties to a combination of factors including past traumatic events, current migration related difficulties, becoming a mother and separation from their natural support system of family and friends.

reported, many women were able to express hope for the future and identify positive aspects of becoming a parent (see also Verliet et al. 2014).

These studies relate to early experiences of parenting at and immediately beyond birth. There is a sparsity of research regarding those parents who have migrated with older children, with the extant literature research focusing on child welfare and education perspective. For example, Bergset (2017) conducted interviews with mothers and fathers from 16 families in Denmark. Her findings challenged the prevailing perception (see Von Brömssen and Olgaç 2010) suggesting that refugee parents are less involved in their children's education than parents who had not experienced migration. For Bergset (2017) the parents, whilst reporting challenges, positioned their own initiative as key to their child's experience and success. Bergset highlighted examples of "thwarted parental agency" (p.72), where the parent was unable to form an effective relationship with school staff. However, in cases where home-school partnerships flourished, outcomes were more positive (see also Intxausti et al. 2013; Renzaho et al. 2011b).

Lewig et al. (2010)⁵⁹ explored experiences of parenting in host countries, and reported challenges associated with parenting in an unfamiliar culture. This was attributed to cultural difference in values, parenting styles and approaches to discipline, although lack of social support and isolation also played an important role. Family support programmes, such as facilitated play sessions, were found to be effective in providing professional and peer support to address these challenges (see also Dolan and Sherlock 2010).

Renzaho et al. (2011a) researched parents and children who had migrated from Africa to Australia⁶⁰ (n = 85 participants). They noted cultural aspects of parenting, including strict boundary setting, close parental monitoring of all aspects of children's lives and a parent-led style of family decision making. They argued that parent support systems needed to be cognisant of the cultural aspects at play within the intergenerational relationships and provide a space for exploring the dissonance that may arise for parents and children when navigating the expectations and norms of

⁵⁹ This study used practitioner survey, practitioner interviews and focus groups with the refugee community. The authors report that a total of 55 practitioners took part in interviews and 130 individuals took part in focus groups, although the paper does not specify how many of these were refugees and how many were parents.

⁶⁰ The parents and children in this study were not necessarily forced migrants but did include refugee families.

their host country. The next section explores this aspect more fully, drawing on cultural theory and trauma- informed understandings to elucidate the experience of refugee parents inherent within resettlement.

3.3 What is left behind, what lies ahead, and the space between

This section recognises the refugee experience as one of liminality. This anthropological term describes the ambiguity that characterises being in the middle of a transition, where something has been left behind but what is to come has not been fully realised (Horvath et al. 2009). Overland et al (2014) writing in the context of Scandinavian approaches to working with refugees consider this as standing on the threshold, waiting to be invited in, a metaphor that all too often resonates with the processes and time lapses of the migration experience (Thomassen 2009, p.19). Many refugees experience long, physical journeys which add geographical elements to the liminality (Lønning 2020) others spend time in state controlled liminal spaces such as refugee camps or detention centres (Mountz 2011; Ramadan 2013).

The sense of impermanence associated with liminality can feel like a suspension of time and reality (Turner 1969,1974)⁶¹. The seemingly interminable experience of liminal waiting is described Parker (2018b)⁶² as “*just eating and sleeping*”. However, Wimark (2019) introduces the notion of liminal homemaking whereby LGBTQ+⁶³ refugees describe making temporary spaces into liminal homes, demonstrating a need for comfort, stability, and home.

Mzayek’s (2019) ethnographic study examining the wellbeing of Syrian refugees resettled in the United States of America (n=37), used observation, interviews, and field notes, to explore the subjective experiences of refugees during different stages of migration and resettlement. A key finding was that individuals used resilience techniques (see section 3.4), including envisaging a hopeful future, to deal with the waiting. Turner (1977, p.37) viewed liminality as “*betwixt and between*”; looking backwards as well as looking towards the future. Hence, the ensuing sections

⁶¹ This sense of impermanence was described by Turner 1974, during anthropological fieldwork in Zambia

⁶² in a study “*Just eating and sleeping*” which considers the narratives of Welsh asylum seekers (n=19))

⁶³ LGBTQ+ is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning).

consider how parents look to what has been left behind as well as to what may lie ahead.

3.3.1 Loss, grief, and trauma

Whilst attention is given to the stressors of migration and resettlement, the impact of the multiple losses associated with the refugee experience is under-researched (Miller and Rasco 2004). The sum of what is left behind is vast (Bryant et al. 2020) and, as well as people, homes, and possessions, it may include identities, associations, statuses, and ways of being (Capo et al. 2007). Even though experiences of loss may be profound, for most refugees these do not cause long term psychological damage (Nickerson et al. 2014) and may not require specialist intervention (Wortman and Boerner 2012). Some people however may develop a longer-term psychological disorder.⁶⁴ An Australian medical study (Schweitzer et al. 2018) attempted to quantify the percentages of newly arrived refugee women reporting psychological distress, using demographic and medical questionnaires. They found that of their sample (n=104 women from various ethnicities and risk groups), around 20% experienced Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), with much higher numbers reporting anxiety and depression. Having children was predictive of higher levels of trauma and anxiety but was not associated with higher levels of depression. The number of trauma events experienced was the highest predictor of traumatisation in line with previous findings (Carswell et al. 2011)⁶⁵. They concluded that interventions need to consider pre-migration trauma and difficulties encountered on settlement.

In a UK study, Taylor et al. (2020) used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the experiences of forced migrants (n=12). They were interested in grief, loss, change and trauma, and considering strategies that helped individuals to cope. All participants reported ongoing effects from trauma, including sleep disturbance, high anxiety levels and traumatic flashbacks. In some cases, suicidal thoughts were also reported. Taylor et al. (2020) reported that where social support was lacking, impacts of trauma were exacerbated by isolation. Accordingly, meaningful social

⁶⁴ longer term psychological distress caused by the losses associated with migration may be described as Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder (PCBD) or Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD). These terms are often used interchangeably as subcategories of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) (Killikelly and Maercker 2017),

⁶⁵ This is in line with theory related to adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), where the number of ACEs is seen as predictive of later challenges and poor outcomes. (Boullier and Blair 2018)

relationships with others (which may include practitioners) can act as a protective factor, which whilst not diminishing the experience of trauma, they may enable adaptive coping strategies.

In a German study, Comtesse and Rosner (2019) used quantitative questionnaires with individuals at different stages in the asylum process (n=99) to consider how asylum processes affect wellbeing. More than ninety per cent reported the loss of a close family member. Levels of grief and depression were high but were lower for those who had achieved settled status, suggesting that uncertainty and stress of the asylum processes amplified effects of trauma (see section 3.3.3.1).

In considering the impact of trauma on parenting capacity and skills, an Australian study, involving 110 parents and 178 children, used questionnaires to explore parent and child experiences of loss. Analysis suggested that children's mental health was directly related to parents' experiences of prolonged grief and more emotional warmth (evident in parents with the lowest levels of grief) was associated with less emotional and conduct problems for children. This supports the importance of psycho-social support (Fazel et al. 2005) to parents on arrival in a host country (see section 3.8.2).

The aforementioned studies suggest that levels of traumatisation are high among forced migrant mothers. The adverse experiences they have endured in their country of origin and transit will have left their mark on the women's lives. The pressures of asylum systems may add additional stress and amplify the effects of unresolved trauma. Many parents will need intervention to be able to deal with their trauma; for some this will necessitate specialist treatments whilst for others, psycho-social support will be beneficial. The impacts for children are significant, although it is important not to generalise what these impacts may be, or assume that all children will experience trauma, as some demonstrate incredible resilience and show remarkable ability to overcome adversity (Pinson and Arnot 2007; Rutter 2003). It is important for those working with parents and children to understand unique situations and responses, build strong relationships based on trust, provide emotional support to enable parents and children to feel safe (Kohli and Mather 2003) and to be present and available, acting as a "first line of defence" in identifying needs that may need addressing through intervention (Gallagher 2014, p.11).

3.3.2 Looking forward: aspirations and opportunities

In their consideration of identity in liminal situations, Ybema et al. (2011) highlight the importance of looking forward and envisaging a future self-living within a new situation. For many parents, it is this hope of providing a better future for their child that is a driver for migration (Browne 2017). This aspiration provides motivation through the multiple challenges that beset them throughout the migration journey.

Research suggests that parents arrive in the host country with high aspirations for their children (Peters 1988), and that parents are prepared to make sacrifices to enable these aspirations to be realised (Baizerman and Hendricks 1988). Banks and MacDonald (2003) in a study of mainly Sudanese refugees at different stages of education (n=18) highlighted that the aspirations that parents have for their children may not always be realistic and could result in undue pressure on the child to succeed. In an Australian mixed methods study with 10 adult participants and their children, Atwell et al. (2009) found that resettled refugee parents encountered significant challenges in resettlement which impacted on their ability to coherently articulate their hopes and aspirations for the children. They found that whilst all the parents were positive about available opportunities, their social capital (Bourdieu 1979) and resilience determined their ability to navigate processes and systems to realise those opportunities. Whilst parents may be able to envisage positive futures, the process of getting there can be challenging and frustrating. The following section considers such challenges and the positive difference that attuned practitioners can make to negotiating these experiences.

3.3.3 The space between: navigating the system

In the space between looking back and looking forward is the here and now, a liminal time of waiting (Jeffrey 2008), which can take months or years to resolve. Within this period, parents negotiate their way through the asylum process, whilst also dealing with the challenges of limited resources.

Navigating the system

McFayden (2019) explored the various processes that asylum seekers must negotiate to receive a right to remain. For McFayden (2019), the onus is on the individual asylum seeker to present a coherent account of their experiences and to have these believed. However, particularly for female asylum seekers, who may

have had experiences that for them are unspeakable, trauma can fundamentally affect their ability to narrate a chronological account of events and attempting to do so can result in re-traumatisation (Zgoda 2016;McFayden 2019; De Angelis 2020).

What may be seen as lack of cooperation or flaws in the narrative, can often be attributed to the way trauma affects cognitive processing, whereby memory production is often adversely affected (Wigren 1994). Recognising this, Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015, p.69) identify a continuum of ability and willingness of asylum seekers to relate their stories, from full and detailed disclosure on one hand to “*near complete silence*” on the other (see also McFayden 2019). Focussing on the experiences of asylum seekers (n=not specified) navigating the UK system, Griffiths (2012) identified mutual distrust between the individual and the Home Office institutions. Participants provided numerous examples of errors, misunderstandings, delays, and inconsistencies as well as perceived deceptions both by the Home Office and by participants themselves, for whom lying became a “*rational response to negotiating a complex and inconsistent immigration system*” (p.12).

Similarly, Whyte (2011, p.21) describes an asylum system with shifting goal posts and unpredictable outcomes, arguing that this “blurriness” is by design not accident and contributes towards a climate of hostility. Whether the opacity of the system is deliberate or, as Griffiths (2012) contends, attributable to service pressures and a lack of training, it confounds both refugees and practitioners, resulting in stress, fatigue, and a seemingly endless waiting. The frustrations and stress (Yakushko 2008) that accompany this state of uncertainty are often exacerbated by constrained circumstances and resources which in turn limit choice and efficacy. This is explored further within the next section.

Constraint and destitution

Vervliet et al. (2014) explored the constrained circumstances affecting forced migrants.⁶⁶ These constraints, whilst particularly evident in initial accommodation, may continue when families are placed in shared houses. The impact of poverty amongst forced migrant parents in the UK is well documented (Alsopp et al. 2014; Phillimore and Thornhill 2010). Whilst poverty is inherent within the entire asylum

⁶⁶ Such constraints go beyond financial constraints and include lack of privacy, noisy environments, and inadequate space for children to play

process, there are points at which destitution is a real risk. This is the case for failed asylum claimants, but also for the period immediately following a positive decision and the transition to state benefits. This can result in hunger, with Refugee Action (2013) reporting that asylum seekers often struggled to feed themselves and their children. Shortage of essential goods was a common experience, and families often could not afford essential items such as clothing, toiletries, and medications (see also Taylor 2009). Phillimore and Thornhill (2010) also reported difficulties for pregnant mothers and those with young children in affording essential baby equipment (see also Stewart et al. 2015, 2018) .

Whilst many charitable organisations have attempted to meet these needs, the availability of and quality of resources provided locally remains a lottery. Communication is an unaffordable cost, which affects the ability to keep in touch with relatives in other countries, including the country of origin, as well as difficulties in communicating with services ⁶⁷and legal representatives (Lewis 2007b; Hamilton and Harris 2009). It is important to recognise that living in constrained circumstances is linked to stress and depression (Betancourt et al. 2015), exacerbating the trauma already experienced in war and in transit (Miller and Rasmussen 2016). The effects of poverty and adversity may also be intensified by a lack of natural support networks (Williams and Thompson 2011), and language and cultural barriers (George and Tsang 2000). Aspinall and Watters (2010, p. 62) report how the Asylum Support Partnership (ASP)⁶⁸ have produced ‘destitution tallies, which highlight widespread poverty amongst forced migrants, which disproportionately impacts on those with children. They also identified delays in processing claims as a common factor amongst those who experience hardship.

Alsopp et al (2014, p.7) explored different understandings of destitution which for some researchers means the absence of any state support, whilst for others the definition embraces those in receipt of government support, the rate of which is insufficient to meet basic living costs. Destitution can be defined thus:

⁶⁷ Including refugee support systems, health services and benefits agencies.

⁶⁸ The Asylum Support Partnership (ASP) is the mechanism for by which the United Kingdom carries out and delivers its requirements following the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951. By forming a consortium this has enabled the organisations in Britain to carry out joined up Asylum Support since many of the organisations carrying out such services had been started independently in different parts of the country.

“a person is destitute if he does not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it (whether or not his other essential living needs are met); or he has adequate accommodation or the means of obtaining it but cannot meet his other essential living needs” (UK Parliament 1999, section 95).

Some have questioned whether there is a “*a deliberate policy of destitution*” (Joint Committee on Human Rights 2007, p.110), which deters individuals from seeking asylum in the UK (Squire 2009; Spencer 2011; Alsopp et al. 2014). This view positions enforced destitution as an intended outcome of Government policy, which serves both to discourage others from seeking refuge (Bloch et al. 2000) and to induce failed asylum seekers to leave the UK (Cholewinski 1998; Waite et al. 2015). Alongside experiences of hardship and constraint, is the uncertainty and insecurity that individuals encounter throughout the asylum process. This concept of precarity is explored in the next section.

Precarity

The term precarity is often used in employment contexts (Bourdieu 1998;1999) but it is increasingly applied in social justice contexts (Anderson 2007). Waite (2009) defines precarity as referring to uncertainty and insecurity arising from societal malaise or because of prior experiences. Writing in the context of young refugees, McWilliams and Bonet (2016) describe a continuum of precarity from living in unstable regimes through transit and the trials of the asylum situation and into their lives post-settlement. This experience of precarity may be exacerbated by living in disadvantaged communities (Morrice 2007) and, post-decision, engaging in precarious forms of labour with little stability or progression (Oner et al. 2020). As noted in Chapter Two, populist movements related to Brexit, may be attributable to precarity experienced by the indigenous inhabitants within host nations⁶⁹ which can contribute to anti-migration sentiment which affect the experiences of hostility reported by many forced migrants (Khalili 2017; Goodwin and Malazzo 2017). The tensions between sympathy and hostility will be explored in the next section.

Hostility and Sympathy

Several studies have identified hostile societal attitudes toward refugees, partly driven by negative media portrayals and government policies which increase

⁶⁹ For example, job insecurity and vulnerable housing.

hardship and suffering (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005; Humpage and Marston 2005; Louis et al. 2007), and refugees are often portrayed as a threat to national security (Craig and Lovel 2005; Ross-Sheriff 2006). Sale (2005, p.32) notes how such hostility can permeate support systems, including child welfare services, resulting in parents feeling unsafe and believing that they are being misunderstood and discriminated against. Wroe (2018) points to the hostility that is inherent within the asylum system and refer to the weaponisation of fear of deportation and separation, which may be used to deny access to services⁷⁰. Humphries (2004), cautions that too often workers can become inadvertently complicit within this hostility, implementing policies that are degrading and inhumane, and misaligned with their own core values. Similarly, Mort (2019) notes that hostility towards migrants is often given legitimacy through laws and political rhetoric. Hence, the hostile environment (see 2.3.2.1), whilst explicitly targeting those without legal right to remain in the UK (illegal immigrants), can infiltrate all aspects of institutions and their interactions with individuals, so that racial discrimination becomes endemic and often unconscious. Thus, *“hostility cements the chasm between those deemed deserving and undeserving, putting many at sustained risk in their daily lives”* (Mort 2019, p.62).

However not all representations of migration are hostile. Pupavac (2008) identifies that women and children elicit more sympathetic responses and may be less affected by hostility than other groups of refugees, especially young men (Judge 2010) . Goodman et al. (2017) highlight changes in public opinion generated by media images of Alain Kurdi (see section 2.3.1). However, they note that even where sympathetic representations exist, they can be accompanied by hostility towards other groups (for example, economic migrants), feeding into narratives of the deserving and undeserving refugee. Furthermore, sympathetic portrayals can perpetuate paternalistic approaches which limit autonomy and choice (Kirkwood 2017). Accordingly, portrayals of passive victims can also have a harmful effect on the individual. This victim stereotype is perpetuated in casting forced migrant women, as vulnerable and dependent (Moussa 1991) and may result in less empowering models of practitioner support (Moser and Clark 2001).

⁷⁰ This is because parents may fail to seek support for fear of having children removed.

Having considered the experiences of refugee parents in relation to loss and change, Home Office processes and future aspirations, attention is now drawn to aspects which support the strengths of parents, commencing with an exploration of resilience.

3.4 Resilience

Refugee parents have overcome significant challenges to bring their children to safety (Dumbrill 2009) which suggests a level of resilience. Toth's (2003) study with refugee women (n=6), highlighted how inner qualities such as perseverance and optimism helped women to survive in the face of great challenges (see also Khawaja et al. 2008). This view is shared by Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2009) who identify an ability to look to the future as an important source of resilience in the present. However, other researchers have found that resilience is not solely linked to inner resources but also heavily influenced by the support of others, and it is through encounters with challenges, opportunities, and supportive others that resilience is harnessed and grown.

For example, in a review of literature concerning the resilience of refugees, Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) argue for a move beyond narrow psychological definitions of resilience as an inner (innate) resource. They call for a consideration of broader societal influences on refugee resilience and note the contribution of practitioners to supporting resilience through anti-oppressive practice. Sleijpen et al. (2017), in a qualitative study with 16 young refugees in the Netherlands, also highlight the interactions between the individual and their social context in developing and exercising resilience. Moreover, they found that resilience strategies are dynamic rather than static and can be negatively influenced by system failures such as delayed asylum decisions. Mzayek (2019) in a study with 37 Syrian refugees noted that even in situations of seemingly interminable waiting, refugees were able to exercise resilience through focusing on their main objective of resettlement.

The importance of learning the language of the host country as a source of resilience cannot be overestimated (Nicassio 1985). Language acquisition is more than simply a means of communication but is imbued with notions of power and status (Bourdieu 1991), and often seen as a measure of one's ability to adapt and integrate to a new culture (Loewen 2004). Zhou and Bankston (2000) also relate the acquisition of host

language to parents' ability to support and advocate for their child without the difficulties of relying upon the child for translation skills.

Lenette et al. (2013) reject the binary dichotomy of resilient versus non resilient individuals and argue instead for practitioners to have a nuanced understanding of the various adaptive strategies that individuals use to cope, whilst simultaneously supporting everyday opportunities for resilience and growth. This conceptualisation does not view resilience as static and fixed, but rather a fluctuating process of "*building, learning and moving on*" (Pulvirenti and Mason 2011, p.46). Miles (2015) writing in relation to human adversity, not necessarily related to refugees, identifies a host of reasons why resilience is a helpful trait to develop, including enhanced health and longevity, improved education and employment outcomes and increased community involvement.⁷¹ This aspect of social connectedness is the focus of the next section.

3 4.1 Belonging and reciprocity

For Gergen (2000, p.202), understandings of self and identity are "*inherently rooted in community*", and relationships and interactions with others impact on identity and worth. Betancourt et al. (2015) recognise that developing strong relationships with family, peers, and practitioners can act as protective factors to offset the effect of migration- related stressors. In considering notions of belonging, Taylor et al (2020) identify that religion was reported as a significant source of psychological support, in terms of personal prayer to a numinous figure, providing a sense of identity, purpose and destiny, and the added support of belonging to a religious organisation. Conversely, Daley (2009) in a case study of refugees living in a dispersal area identified a lack of meaningful relationships between people from different backgrounds, significant prejudice, underlying tension, and few opportunities for contact with others in the community. Whilst some shared aspects of identity helped unite people, even small differences in culture and faith exacerbated differences and created divisions⁷².

Taylor et al (2020) reported evidence of post traumatic growth within the refugees in their study, noting that often this was expressed in terms of increased gratitude and

⁷¹ See also Hasse et al. 2019.

⁷² Hajdukowski et al. (2008) also highlight that refugee is only one part of a person's identity and may not be the main appellation they wish to identify with.

a desire to make a difference in their host country as a way of giving back. This idea of reciprocity was explored by Heins and Unrau (2018), who use gift theory (Mauss 1990) to explain the relationship between refugees and their host country. They recognised complex social, political, and power dynamics that underpin the giving and receiving of gifts in this context, defining gifts broadly to include services accommodation and rights. They argued for a three-step process of giving, taking, and reciprocating for refugees, using their skills, abilities, and experiences, and, crucially, underpinned by state enforced rights.

However, writing in a general social work context, Kjørstad (2017, p.638) points out the dangers of an expectation of reciprocity, whereby something is expected in return for social support. Instead, she argues, individuals need to be engaged in “an invitation to a joint search for solutions”. Similarly, Jordan and Jordan (2000) urge practitioners to be cognisant of the need to facilitate freedom and choice with their service users, avoiding all forms of coercion whether blatant or indirect, and balancing communitarian concerns whilst acknowledging autonomy. In terms of migration, this approach acknowledges the long-term nature of resettlement and the how trauma and the asylum process may make reciprocity difficult in the short term, whilst also recognising that for some individuals a desire to “give back” may be intrinsically satisfying a need for dignity.

In her book on working with asylum seekers, Crowther (2019) talks about food as a gift of love. As such, it is an expression of pride, skill, and positive identity; there is no monetary value to cause embarrassment, but it shows deep appreciation and value. Vandevoordt (2017) explored how food and hospitality amongst Syrian refugees in Belgium enhanced feelings of dignity and autonomy and changed power balances, whilst also celebrating their culture of origin. Writing in the context of foster care, Rees (2019) also explored the importance of food in developing trusting relationships. Whilst there is little academic research exploring this important aspect of practice, several high-profile projects have embedded the idea of food as sharing and reciprocity.⁷³

⁷³ A good example of this is Refugee Roots Cookbook, The Sharing Table.

In social work practice, accepting a cup of tea may enable the practitioner to build reciprocity as part of a developing a productive partnership working with clients (Drinkwater 2008). This is particularly important, since Harrell-Bond (1999, pp.136-142) notes that receiving help without an element of perceived reciprocity is “*one of the major sources of stress*” for forced migrants, and is associated with humiliation and shame, impacting negatively on their agency. The following section focuses more specifically on the interface between practitioners and parents, before turning attention to the practitioners themselves.

3.5 Working with practitioners

The previous section considered the experience of individuals as they negotiate the various emotional and material challenges of migration. The focus is now turned to the important role that practitioners can play with supporting their resettlement. The significance of professional relationships, which are valued by individuals, and can build trust and provide dependable, solution-focused support has been recognised in literature (Kohli 2007; Bee 2019). However, as Kohli (2007, p.220) points out, the work is often “*messy*” and characterised by “*trial and error, intuition and muddling through*”. Within the complex world of migration, the practitioners’ values, beliefs and working practices are paramount.

Rah et al. (2009) acknowledge the significance of practitioner/ parent relationships, arguing that they are often asymmetrical and embedded in a discourse of helping (see also Cooke 2003), which whilst well-meaning, can be damaging to the individual (Valenzuela 1999; Wu 2002). In Robinson’s (2013) study practitioner participants described how they felt like a life support to the families, helping to bridge the gap between the forced migrant and the wider community. Whilst such descriptions may adversely affect the symmetry of the relationship, placing the parent in an inappropriate position of gratitude to the practitioner, what it does demonstrate is the importance of the practitioner/ parent interface, and the invaluable support that they provide (Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani 2011). The next section explores the roles, understandings, and experiences of practitioners.

3.6 The practitioner landscape

The workforce supporting forced migrant families includes staff from a range of statutory and non-statutory organisations, and practitioners from generic and

specialist services. Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011) recognise that whilst there are many studies that consider the complexities of working with refugee families, most do so from within the context of narrowly defined professions (notably, teaching, health, and social work). Wallace et al. (2019) researching from a health and wellbeing perspective, conducted semi-structured interviews with 35 key respondents. They identified the potential for using community connector roles to span socio- cultural relationships and engage individuals. Such roles were deemed to work better when located at arm's length from statutory services, to engage those considered "hard to reach"⁷⁴ with services. Although their study was not concerned primarily with refugees, Morken and Skop (2017) also recognise the potential use of community connector roles to enhance refugee integration. In a mixed methods study with 12 participants from various professional disciplines, the researchers explored the challenges and rewards of working with forced migrant families. They reported significant impacts on the practitioners' lives outside work, and limited opportunities for supervision and reflecting collectively on practice.

Robinson (2014) also noted a dearth of research into the experiences of front-line workers supporting refugees. In a study involving 30 practitioners⁷⁵ in Australia and the UK, Robinson highlighted the multi-faceted demands of their roles and the organisational imperative of ensuring that practitioner wellbeing was prioritised. It is also worth noting that the practitioners working with refugee families may not always have extensive research knowledge of refugee issues (Kohli 2007, p.90-91), will rely heavily on their own experiential learning, draw upon professional networks, and become adept at "*muddling through*" the messy realities that characterise their work.

For Saleebey (1996) "*practice is an intersection where the meanings of the worker (theories), the client (stories and narratives) and culture (themes, myths and rituals) meet*". It is important to recognise that culture will relate to the client, the worker, and the organisation (see section 3.8.1). The following sections, explore that intersection, considering practitioner experiences of supporting refugee families, of working with others and of self-care.

⁷⁴ The term "hard to reach" is contended with some scholars (for example Flanagan and Hancock 2008) arguing that it is the services themselves which are hard to reach not the individuals

⁷⁵ The sample was made up mainly of social workers, but also youth workers, support workers and nurses

3.7 Supporting refugee parents

It is important to recognise that few terms generate such individual, powerful, and often conflicting emotions, and connotations as “family” and “parent” (McKie and Callan 2012). Sociology has long been concerned with the characteristics, structures, meanings, and functioning associated with families, recognising the nuanced, socio- cultural influences present within our constructions. This is also the case for notions of parent and parenting. Hence, prior to exploring specific literature related to support for forced migrants who are also parents, it was first necessary to take a step back and consider some of the issues and tensions underpinning our understandings of parenting, including how parents are best supported, and the role of practitioners in enabling such support.

I am mindful of the somewhat nebulous societal understanding of support which Pinkerton et al. (2000 n.p.) speaks of as being “*one of those warm and fuzzy terms which by being inclusive ends up meaning nothing*”. As Dolan and Holt (2010) point out, family support is remarkably under- conceptualised. There is a lack of clarity related to the nature of family support, its policy roots, and its practice. Despite this, family support plays a significant role within welfare and community interventions, aligning effectively with The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, global agenda for children and their families (UNCRC 1989).

In a helpful typology of family support, Cutrona (2000) considers types of social support and the qualities that define, offering four types of social support:

- (i) concrete support or practical assistance;
- (ii) emotional support focusing on listening empathy and being present;
- (iii) advice support;
- (iv) and esteem support which considers how positive self-worth is supported.

The qualities of social support are defined as closeness, reciprocity, and durability ref. Of course, support may be offered in both an informal and a formal context. In other words, friends, family, and neighbours may provide aspects of support, which is organic sustainable and lacking in stigma. However, for many families such support comes in the form of professional–led assistance, delivered by paid workers or volunteers.

Dolan et al. (2006, p.9-12) highlight the connection between reflective practice and family support; arguing that family support is essentially a collaborative process. Whilst attempts can be made to define and clarify the nature and practice of family support, it is best understood by considering not just what happens, but how the people involved felt about it and what it meant. Accordingly, for Dolan et al (2006, p.12) “*doing family support requires a mixture of description and questioning informed by action*”. It is then, a form of “*professional artistry*” (Knott and Scragg 2010, p.7) whereby the practitioner combines existing knowledge with their own way of being (and active listening to understand and address needs. This approach has criticisms, particularly within a culture that demands compliance, with competency-led performance management, and an emphasis on agency procedures and protocols (Marsh and Fisher 1992), which reduces the relationship between the clients and the worker to that of service supplier and service user. However, service evaluations and research continually highlight the importance of the relationship, which is positioned as critical to the success of the intervention. Reflective practice offers a more nuanced approach to considering the bespoke and individual nature of family support (McCoyd and Kerson 2013).

It is important to note that some professionals involved in the delivery of family support have strong professional identities within their own discipline, for example, as a health visitor or an early year’s worker. For other professionals, their very *raison d’être* lies in the delivery of family support and this is even evident within their job titles. Messenger (2012) examined the professional identity of family support workers in the UK (n=28), arguing that their ability to engage families, lies within the hybridity of their roles and identities, and attempts to over- formalise definitions could introduce restrictions to the flexibility, adaptability, and ability to respond towards what is needed.

3.8 Practitioner identities, qualities, and skills

There is little written about the skills and qualities practitioners need for working with forced migrant parents. Century et al. (2007) writing in a health context, highlighted how counsellors working in primary health reported feeling out of their depth when listening to the stories of refugees, and identified a need for tools beyond their usual armoury. Wroe et al. (2019, p.19) emphasise the importance of practitioners working in solidarity with refugees and being cognisant of the ways in which care, and

welfare can be “*instruments of immigration control*”. In doing so, they need to keep their knowledge base regarding migration processes up to date and to be reflexive in their approaches, continually mindful of inadvertent collusion with hostile policies. Kohli (2007) conducted a study across four social work teams working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors in the UK. He explored the personal and professional characteristics of the staff, concluding that many of the workers could “*draw on who they were, to explain, clarify and contextualise their responses* (p.98). This study indicates that the workers had chosen to work with the asylum-seeking young people, and that in doing so, had created networks to share skills and knowledge, finding more formal training to equip them for their roles difficult to access (Kohli 2007, pp.98-99).

Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011) in a mixed method study within the UK which used grounded theory, interviewed practitioners (n=12) who emphasised the challenges associated with supporting refugees and asylum seekers. They highlighted aspects such as high caseloads, multiple needs, capacity issues and frustration with systems and referral routes, in line with findings from general social work practice (McFadden 2015; Ravalier 2018). Nonetheless, the respondents highlighted rewards and benefits, usually articulated in relation to positive outcomes for the families and feeling like their work was intrinsically valuable. However, this study did not comment directly on skills and qualities of practitioners.

Whilst most research about skills and qualities for working with forced migrant families are written from a practitioner perspective, it is crucial that parents voices are considered⁷⁶. Dumbrill (2009) in a Canadian study with forced migrant parents (n=11), designed a participatory action approach, using Photovoice. The study aimed to identify what skills and attributes the parents prioritised, and the key themes were:

1. practitioners’ ability to understand parents’ hopes and fears;
2. the ability of practitioners to understand resettlement challenges; and
3. workers’ willingness to work with parents in the development of child welfare policies/ services.

⁷⁶ Here I am mindful of Blatt’s perspective (1981) that we need to think critically about a notion of voice when working with minoritised groups, allowing opportunities for hearing silence and also for providing opportunities for expression beyond speech.

Dumbrill's study, although small scale, provides insight into the desire of the parents to engage with service providers, to ensure that systems worked effectively for their families, and their ability to articulate the approaches and practitioner dispositions that work best for them. It is important to recognise that even such aspects as preferred practitioner style and practice are socially constructed and influenced by cultural factors. Hence, the importance of practitioners being culturally aware and competent cannot be overstated.

3.8.1 Cultural competence

The importance of culturally sensitive practice in working with forced migrants is well-documented (Keyes 2000; Hilado and Lundy 2018). However, as Sharma and Hussein (2017) note, services labelled culturally sensitive have often depended on a notion of cultural values and practices that assume that individuals passively receive and internalise a fixed set of normative practices and cultural attitudes. This approach underestimates the extent to which forced migrants may be marginalised through a process of othering that labels others as different and, in doing so, creates distance from their stories (Weiss 1995). 'Othering' of refugees often results in assigning them to a passive victim role (Harrell-Bond 1999; Grove and Zwi 2006; Summerfield 2004), which denies independence and agency. Grove and Zwi (2006) discuss the importance of practitioners understanding how refugees are "othered" and the negative effects this can have on wellbeing. It is imperative for practitioners to advocate for humane and inclusive responses to migration, but also to provide opportunities to foster belonging through culturally sensitive and inclusive practice. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW undated) emphasise the practitioner's responsibility to promote social justice and equality, to challenge discrimination and to defend professional integrity.

Within this agenda, practitioners need to recognise their own bias. In considering cultural awareness, Laird (2008) highlights the dilemmas this might include for the practitioner, likening cultural competence to a balancing act between respecting the cultural origins of beliefs, whilst always maintaining one's own core values. This aspect may be particularly pertinent in relation to supporting families where there may be a history of oppressive practices towards women. For Century et al. (2007) cultural competence includes approaching the individual with as few assumptions as

possible, asking for clarification and being curious without intrusion. This, they argue, is preferable to pretending to know and understand, whilst harbouring mistaken assumptions of partly understood situations.

Recognising the complexity of cultural competence has led to calls for mandatory training (Parekh 2000; Healy and McKee 2004) to support practitioners' understanding and subsequent practice. This may be particularly pertinent in a child-rearing context where there may be differential understandings of child safety, potentially resulting in misunderstanding, and requiring appropriate intervention to help reconcile differing beliefs, values, and practices (Williams 2010).

Coker (2004) suggests that alongside cultural awareness there may be practical measures practitioners can take to promote inclusion and decrease othering, which might include the allocation of specific resources for translation and targeted programmes to address need. Sue (2001) proposed a multi-dimensional model of cultural competence, which considers removal of barriers at individual, professional, organisational, and societal levels. This socio-ecological approach to cultural competence is further explored in section 3.11.1.

3.8.2 Engagement, building rapport, and establishing trust

Crowther (2019) recognises that whilst a relationship can exist without trust, the connection is usually more productive when trust is present, and there is a mutual need for honesty and appreciation to generate positive outcomes. Building this rapport requires a focus on the unique individual and demands bespoke engagement strategies. As Anderson (2001) suggests, trustful relationships are easier to establish when the practitioner is outside the immediate systems that are tasked with testing and rejecting asylum claims. Trustful relationships develop over time (Kohli 2006b) and maintaining trustful relationships is associated with resilience and an ability to overcome adversity (Polidore 2004).

Given the importance of establishing a trustful relationship with refugee parents (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005; Robinson and Masocha 2017; Eide et al. 2020), practitioners need to understand how best to foster engagement with services. Crowther (2019, p.84) identified four stages of engagement: pre-gate, gate, queue,

and encounter⁷⁷. At each of these stages there are potential pitfalls and opportunities in engaging refugees. Crowther contends that of these stages, it is the earliest encounter of a practitioner with the refugee that is the most important because refugees may give up at this pre-gate stage if their experience is not positive.

Weine et al. (2005b, p.566) in a mixed method study of engaging refugee families in America within parenting programmes, identified four underlying concerns that needed to be addressed through engagement strategies. These concerns were about feeling overwhelmed with asylum processes and economic issues, worries over children's wellbeing and education, a fear of talking about trauma and feelings of isolation and marginalisation. Practitioners need to acknowledge these concerns and put in place multi-modal support (Droždek 2015) to address them. As Tribe et al. (2017 n.p.) note, there is a paucity of research related to evidence-based interventions, recognising a need for "*real world, multi-disciplinary psycho-social interventions which are culturally sensitive*". This requires upskilling professionals in non-specialist settings to have the confidence, knowledge, and skills to be able to address needs (Marotta 2003).

Kohli (2007, p.79) stresses the importance of practitioners' awareness of their own autobiography ("survival through adversity") which can help build relationships. This can result in "unflinching empathy" (Marotta 2003, p.122) which can assist the development of strong, productive relationships. However, practitioners must avoid permissive empathy (Pupavac 2008), which may appear inauthentic or unhelpful. Whilst empathy and understanding may be a useful starting point for engagement, it is also important to think about how best to support individuals to identify and maximise their own strengths and to feel empowered within a system that can all too often foster helplessness and passivity.

3.8.3 Strength-based working and empowerment

Berry (2019) notes that whilst usually person-centred and respectful, support work with forced migrants is too often focused on difficulties and setbacks. Berry argues that social work needs to move beyond "*problem saturated identities*" (White and Epston 1990, p.16), and encourage ownership and empowerment. This need for

⁷⁷ Pre-gate refers to being told about a service, Gate is being referred or making an enquiry, Queue relates to the period before the first meeting when there may be electronic communication, Encounter relates to the service being delivered.

social work to move beyond a deficit discourse has been identified in several studies (Butler 2005; Humpage and Marston 2005; Ross-Sheriff and Swigonski 2006). McCashen (2007, p.10) recognises the dangers of positioning practitioners as experts who may take over the responsibility for fixing problems thus denying individuals “*the opportunity to participate, take control and learn*”.

Recognising these dangers, Navarro (2006) advocates adopting a community development approach aimed to remove barriers, challenge power structures, and enable the individuals own abilities and solutions to emerge. For Nelson et al. (2017), this entails encouraging practitioners to embrace social justice and rights-based perspectives, and Kohli (2007) emphasises that this can be facilitated by the practitioner’s ability to know and use networks.

Working from a feminist perspective, Klenk (2017) conducted semi structured interviews with refugee women (n=5). Klenk found that education (particularly language classes), play an important role in empowerment⁷⁸. Engaging in language classes reduced isolation, built social support, and improved opportunities for self-advocacy. Siddiquee and Kagan (2006), in a qualitative study with six asylum seeking women and their tutor, noted similar benefits from engaging in technological learning, with positive outcomes which included the ability to create and maintain networks, improved self-esteem, enhanced skills for employment and a greater sense of belonging.

In a Dutch study of asylum-seeking parents (n=18), Berckmoes and Mazzucato (2018) considered how practitioners best work with parents to identify and build upon strengths. They identified the importance of material and emotional support, home visits and assisting in the development of local networks. Writing in a school-based context, Hughes and Beirens (2007) also recognised the importance of equipping practitioners to employ strength-based approaches and to assess strengths as well as needs. Focusing on the role of creativity, Hughes (2014) explored how parents can be supported to develop empowering stories about their lives, drawing upon cultural heritage and autobiographies. This can result in the development of “*shared, culturally congruent solutions to their problems*” (Hughes 2014). Within this context

⁷⁸ See also Boddy et al. (2008).

of empowerment, the ability to maintain hope, often in difficult circumstances is paramount.

3.8.4 Inspiring hope

Collins (2015) regards hope as an essential quality for practice, which helps to maintain practitioners' belief in the possibility of good outcomes and transformation. There are different understandings of hope, ranging from psychological and cognitive constructions (Snyder 1991, 1995, 2002) that focus on individual goals and aspirations, to humanistic constructions (Freire 1994), which view hope within a context of injustice, oppression, and emancipation.

In a conceptual article, Boddy et al. (2018) recognise the importance of hope as means of motivating others, integral to social work practice. They developed a conceptual framework to locate hope within practice, recognising the reflective, relational, and collaborative aspects of its constructions. Within these constructions, strength-based practice, values and beliefs and individual aspirations play an important role. However, they also recognised, that practitioners' ability to sustain hope can be adversely affected by stress and burnout, and hence, within their framework of hope, self-care and supervision are prioritised.

Sælør et al. (2015) identified hope as central for practitioners working in mental health to inspire others. They highlighted the importance of self-belief, recognising opportunities and intentionally employing optimism. However, when working with clients who have experienced trauma, hope cannot be rushed (McLean 2011) or artificially manufactured (Lord 2008). Rather it is a balance between recognising and acknowledging the real hurts and challenges, whilst modelling hope for a positive future (Lemma 2010).

Kallio et al. (2020) acknowledge the shifting nature of hope, recognising that there is a complexity that is not reflected in binary understandings of hope and hopelessness. They argue for the potential of radical hope which breaks the linear temporality of a traumatised past and an uncertain future by enabling refugees to find meaning in the present. Within this conception, the role of the practitioner would be to '*walk with others to revisit their context, reframe their issues, rediscover their strengths and revitalise their life with hope*' (Boddy et al. 2018 n.p.) and to do this with a focus on present realities, encouraging opportunities for choice and agency.

This is particularly important, since, as Nelson et al. (2017) recognise, practitioners working with refugees are increasingly working against a political background of *“punitive and oppressive environments which create uncertainty and undermine hope”*. The practitioner’s role is to ally with the individual to support them to recognise and resist oppression and to kindle hope. Allying can involve the practitioner in witnessing the lived experiences of refugees whilst being cognisant of the power dynamics that accompany this aspect of practice (Weine 1996).

3.8.5 Witnessing

Ellis (2000) speaks of the late twentieth century onwards as an era of witnessing, when through technology, audiences are confronted with multimedia evidence of worldwide atrocities. Ashuri and Pinchevski (2009, p.133) explore the role of the practitioner in relation to bearing witness, describing this process as *“a complex practice midway between experience and agency”*. For Peters (2001) an important aspect of witnessing is being physically present at the events of which they are bearing testimony. However, he does recognise the possibility of remote witnessing, through live broadcast. In relation to the present study, it is unlikely that practitioners will have been present at the original events, but their witnessing comes from hearing the stories of those they work with (Woods 2019). Through such stories, practitioners often *“place themselves in the position of agents for asylum seekers: they use their agency to speak on behalf of asylum-seekers, and they use the frame of their own visibility to make asylum-seekers visible”* (Tyler 2006, p. 194).⁷⁹

Gibson (2013) acknowledges that whilst there may be some pragmatic value in this witnessing approach within the context of a culture of increasing suspicion of asylum seekers and refugees, the voices of forced migrants are once again silenced and represented only by proxy, reinforcing notions of otherness. Lenette et al. (2015) also challenges the concept of vicarious witnessing, arguing that the practitioner’s responsibility is to provide the tools to enable parents to tell their own stories.⁸⁰ This approach supports agency in deciding how the story is told and how it will be used both personally and publicly.

⁷⁹ This was certainly my experience on returning from the humanitarian camp at Dunkirk (section 1.2).

⁸⁰ Examples of practice to enable parents to tell their story might include memory books, digital story telling or life journey work.

For Kohli (2007), it is critical that practitioners provide opportunities for individuals to share their experiences not simply of the asylum process but also of wider experiences of loss and change. In doing so, practitioners adopt the privilege of being “*memory holders*” (Kohli 2007, p.157). In listening to the stories of forced migrants, practitioners enhance their own understanding and ability to advocate for more equitable and humane treatment (Zaviršek 2017). Having explored some of the aspects that make for successful support work forced migrants, it is important to consider the challenges that practitioners may experience.

3.9 Challenges faced by practitioners

Century et al. (2007) suggest that many staff feel inadequately prepared and equipped for the challenging work of supporting those who have fled war and persecution. Specific challenges identified within the literature include working within professional boundaries (Misra et al. 2006), balancing client expectations with organisational dictates (Fischer 2004) and managing the distress of hearing harrowing stories (Jenkins and Baird 2002).

Robinson (2014) conducted a qualitative study with frontline staff working with UK asylum seekers (n=30), including social workers, support workers psychologists and youth workers . Robinson identified high levels of practitioner stress and issues which impact on practitioners’ ability to do their job effectively, including austerity policies, institutional racism, organisational demands which prioritise paperwork over time spent working directly with service users, rules-based decision making and inflexible eligibility criteria (see also Postle 2002). Robinson recognised that many staff working in the third sector, worked across projects, often managing unsustainable caseloads. Despite high levels of reported work-related stress, for many practitioners, supervision was sporadic, or confused with performance management. Hence, to some extent, the precarity experienced by practitioners in insecure job roles may mirror the experience of the parents (see section 3.3.3.3)

Carey and Foster (2011 pp. 588–9) identify ‘deviant’ social work as a response to these challenges. They argue that it is often seen as “radical” to support service users directly rather than spending time completing assessments for needs that are unlikely to be met within service constraints. Consequently, many practitioners may find themselves going above or beyond their job-roles to provide what they perceive

as much needed support. As well as examining the institutional barriers faced by key workers, it is important to consider the wider impacts on practitioners' health and wellbeing.

3.9.1 Vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue

The British Medical Association defines vicarious trauma as:

“a process of change resulting from empathetic engagement with trauma survivors. Anyone who engages empathetically with survivors of traumatic incidents, torture, and material relating to their trauma, is potentially affected, including doctors and other health professionals” (BMA 2020).

Inherent within this definition is the suggestion that workers can experience secondary trauma from witnessing or hearing their clients' distressing experiences. Adams et al. (2006, p.103) recognise the potential for compassion fatigue, which they define as *“the formal caregiver's reduced capacity or interest in being empathic”*. In a study of practitioners working with trauma survivors (n=274) they identified high levels of compassion fatigue, caused by secondary trauma and job burnout. They called for greater understanding of the pressures of working with survivors, and for interventions to support practitioner wellbeing and mitigate the effects of emotional distress.

Whilst there is recognition of the emotional toll of working with forced migrants (Shah et al. 2007) there is a paucity of research regarding vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue experienced by practitioners in host nations. Figley (2002) notes that staff working with survivors of atrocities may be overwhelmed by stories they hear and experience secondary trauma. Whilst there is little research which focuses on support workers in host nations, there is much written about the conditions which may result in burnout or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) amongst aid workers supporting displaced people in warzones and refugee camps (Chatzea et al. 2018; McLaughlin et al. 2018). Robinson (2014) recognises the demands on those working with refugee and asylum-seeking families within their host nations, where self-reported PTSD and vicarious trauma are prevalent, in line with findings from other areas of social work such as fostering (Ottaway and Selwyn 2016).

Van der Veer (1998) argues that supervision, support and strategies for self-care can play an important role in mitigating the risks of secondary trauma and burnout. Similarly, Wroe et al. (2019) report high levels of stress and burnout amongst staff and urge practitioners to learn to recognise limitations to their own resilience and find ways to safeguard their own wellbeing.

However, in recognising the potential for practitioner stress and distress, it is also important that we do not ignore the positive benefits. For example, Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011) report on the compassion satisfaction and vicarious resilience of front-line workers working with forced migrants, noting staff recognition that they were engaged in meaningful work which could make a real difference to individuals. Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study with front-line workers in Australia (n=26) noted high levels of job satisfaction, an ability to reinterpret personal problems using the prism of their clients' stories of survival and growth, and a newfound ability to embrace strength-based, hope-inspiring approaches. Therefore, it is important to measure compassion satisfaction as well as fatigue (Stamm 2002), recognising that this satisfaction is a motivator for staff, and considering how best to maximise this aspect, whilst also equipping practitioners for their roles.

3.10 Equipping practitioners

Adamson et al. (2014) highlight the imperative of building resilient practitioners. Training, supervision and the establishment and maintenance of professional networks can all play an important role in developing resilience.

There is much research which considers the contested nature of supervision, whereby by too often there is a tension between supervision and managerial surveillance (Davies et al. 2004; McLaughlin et al. 2019). Robinson (2014) highlighted a lack of supervision, particularly within the third sector. However, for those who did access it, there were demonstrable benefits both for the worker and for practice more widely. Similarly, Robinson noted that access to training was inconsistent and too generic to be of practical use. Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011) reported that although all participants within their study had received at least some training, most would have liked more, along with access to counselling and opportunities for collective reflective practice. Kadushin (2002) also recognises

the importance of providing reflective spaces for practitioners for supporting wellbeing and mitigating stress. Similarly, it is beneficial for staff to access collectively problem solving and benefit from guidance and expertise within their organisation (Robinson 2014) and beyond. The ability to know and use professional networks, including specialist support and expertise and multi-disciplinary perspectives (Kohli 2007) is a crucial aspect of equipping workers for their challenging roles.

3.11 Towards a theoretical framework for this study

In exploring the literature base that foregrounds this study, as presented within chapters two and three, it became evident that many of the aspects that have been considered can be related to a socio-ecological systems theory approach (Bronfenbrenner 1977,1979,2005), and that this approach would be of value in examining the findings of the study. Similarly, the use of reflective lenses (Brookfield 1995) allows for in depth exploration of the views of different actors pertinent to the study prior to synthesising the findings.

3.11.1 Applying socio-ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological systems theory provides a helpful framework for considering the varied impacts of the social, cultural, and political environments that surround the individual. The model has been widely used in research within the education, social work, and health fields (Cala and Soriano 2014; Eriksson et al. 2018; Christensen 2016). More recently, the theory has been applied to research with forced migrants (Betancourt and Khan 2008; Timshel et al. 2017; Thommessen and Todd 2018).

For Thommessen and Todd (2018), systems theory provides a way of understanding the dynamic interactions between the individual and the influences that surround them. Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that the systems most proximate to the individual, such as the family and support workers, exert the strongest and most sustained influence. However, as noted in Chapter Two, the macrosystem which comprises social norms, cultural expectations along with the broader policy and legal frameworks, is, perhaps particularly important in the case of forced migrants.

The use of a socio-ecological systems model to explore the personal, family, social and cultural experiences associated with the displaced people is widespread

(Betancourt and Khan 2008; Barry 2020; Timshel et al 2017; Thommessen and Todd 2018). However, in these studies the focus has been firmly on the child rather than the family unit. There is also evidence of the use of the socio-ecological systems theory in studies from a psycho-social perspective (Ryan et al. 2008; Miller and Rasmussen 2016).

At the heart of the socio-ecological model is the Process, Person, Context, Time model (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006). Within this approach, processes are seen as sustained interactions between the individual and their environment, whereas 'person' refers to the individual characteristics of the individual. These may include factors such as age or gender, but can also encompass experiences, skills, and resources (Tudge et al. 2009). The third and fourth elements are captured within the nested systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's model is conceptualised around five interconnected nested systems from the individual and family levels through to economic and political structures. The individual and immediate family is at the centre of the system and, in line with Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991) there is a recognition of individual and genetic factors (Boxer and Sloan-Power 2013). These nested systems that surround the individual, as applied to refugees and asylum seekers are illustrated in Figure 4.

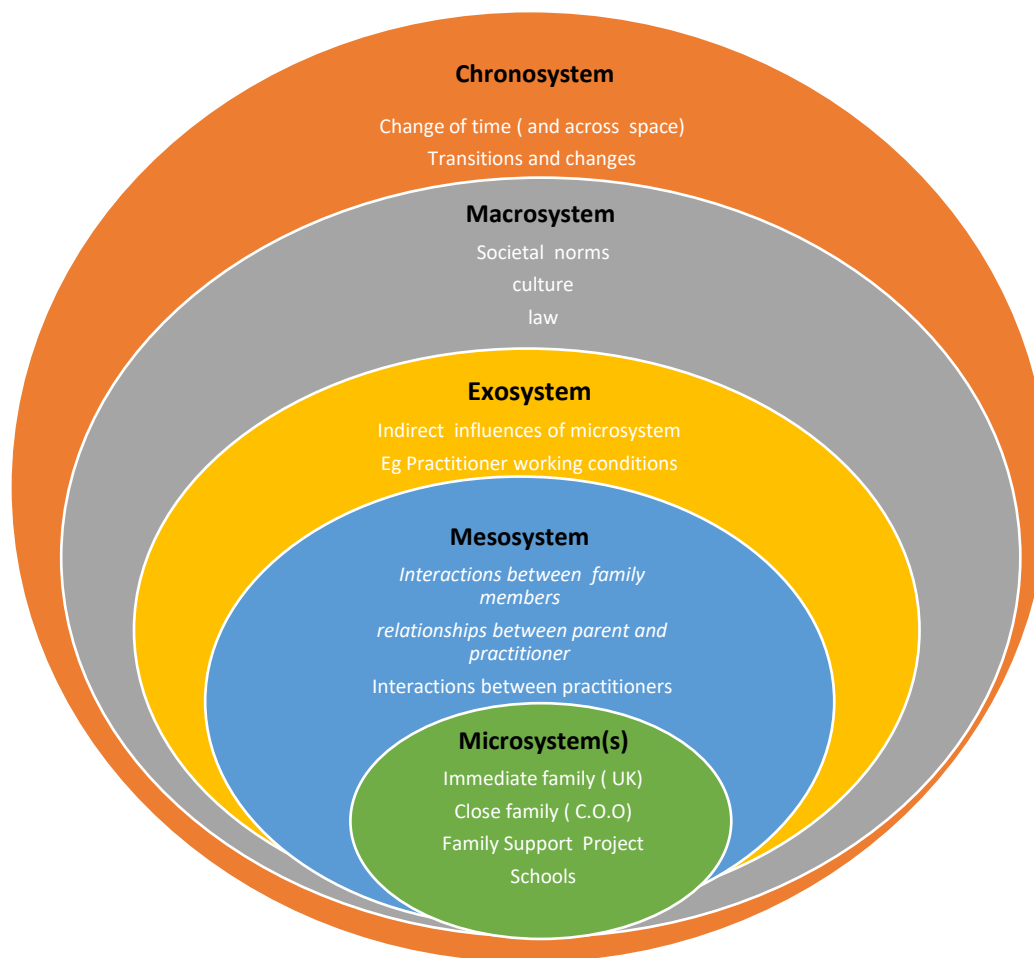


Figure 4: Socio-ecological system: Author's own representation (adapted from Bronfenbrenner 1977)

McDowell Clark (2013) reframed the ecological system as interconnected cogs, rather than as nested structures, as changes within one part of the system can have impacts for other aspects of the environment. This is important, since, as Williams (2010) observes, the journeys of forced migrant families are often characterised by frequent disruptions to the family structure and the contexts surrounding the families. However, whilst Bronfenbrenner's theory accommodates the ideas of changes across time, this is exacerbated for migrant families by spatial elements that are absent from his model; such as family left behind in their country of origin. Other criticisms of the theory include Houston's (2017) position that Bronfenbrenner underestimated the importance of power and agency for the individual's life chances and wellbeing. Houston (2017) addresses this omission by aligning the socio-

ecological system with Bourdieu's ideas of social capital⁸¹ and habitus⁸². This has the benefit of placing the socio-ecological systems surrounding the family within a wider socio-political context that offers an understanding of the ways in which privilege and disadvantage are perpetuated and thereby to engage in a '*disruptive, insistent interrogation of established truths*' (Garrett 2013, p. 43). This aspect was explored in Chapter Two and its impact on the individual is further considered in section 3.3.3.4

Drozdek, (2015) applied ecological theory to the mental health needs of refugees, placing particular emphasis on the impact of intrapersonal, peer relational and societal aspects on wellbeing and resilience. For Wells et al. (2018) it is the transactional nature of the socio-ecological system (Joyce 2002) which allows us to view individual experiences within their social and political context, which can enhance refugee agency (Altorki 2015) and enable individuals to harness resources linked to resilience (see also Cicchetti, 2010). Hasse et al. (2019) used the framework to explore experiences of welcome within the host country, arguing that the positivity of the refugees' response was determined by factors operating at all levels within the nested systems of the ecological framework, for example, at the strategic level, national policy and political rhetoric influenced the way that refugees were accepted at community level. Pejic et al. (2016) employed socio-ecological systems model to make the case for a tiered model of intervention that is cognisant both strengths inherent in the family and of the challenges and adversities that they face (see section 3.3).

The potential of using systems theory as a theoretical framework for this thesis lies in its holistic nature and its ability to make sense of the interplay between the various domains of influence impacting upon the family. The model allows for a systematic approach to considering the contexts that impact on the family. The impact of the varied factors operating within the nested layers of a tiered system, both distal and proximate, provide a useful way for organising and exploring findings.

⁸¹ Bourdieu saw social capital as a property of the individual, (rather than the collective), derived mainly from social position / status. Social capital enables a person to exert power on those who control resources (Bourdieu 1998).

⁸² Habitus refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital- the habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences (Bourdieu 1979).

3.11.2 Applying reflective lenses

Brookfield (1995) introduced the concept of reflective lenses in his work related to the teaching profession. He identified four complementary perspectives or lenses (autobiographical, service user, colleague and theoretical), which support a reflective approach. These lenses can help to develop holistic understandings and thus inform and renew practice. The lens approach has been variously applied within public services. Rosen et al. (2017) consider the virtues of adopting a lens of cultural humility when working with marginalised individuals and recognising that often our own lens as practitioners is one of privilege. Such critical reflection, they argue can support richer and more nuanced understandings which will impact on all aspects of practice. By reflexively considering and adapting approaches to meet the need, practitioners become reflective activists (Appleby et al. 2019). Similarly, Laing (2017) highlights the importance of reflecting through different lenses when working with survivors of domestic abuse with lenses that include the criminal justice system and patriarchy. For McPherson et al. (2017, p. 234) adopting a human rights lens allows the practitioner *“to recast the client as a rights holder and to assess and push back against the structural inequalities that affect the client’s life.”*

In relation to this study, a lens approach provides a holistic way to capture perspectives and synthesise meanings to identify nuanced findings. The study is born out of my personal and professional autobiography and this literature review provides a useful theoretical lens to foreground the study. Gaining rich perspectives from parents, frontline practitioners, and strategic actors will allow for inclusive and comprehensive explorations of this important area of practice (Freeman 1984). Furthermore, applying a lens approach helps to address some of the limitations of Bronfenbrenner’s model, as it allows for a socio-cultural lens (Hanson 2012) which can incorporate social aspects and recognise the importance of what is left behind, such as family who remain within the country of origin.

3.12 Conclusions and reflections

When embarking on the initial review of the literature in 2016, I was struck by the sparsity and incomplete nature of the literature relating to forced migrants and parenting, (also noted by Dumbrill 2009). Whilst there were many high quality studies from health perspectives relating to experiences of pregnancy and birth (Straus et al. 2009; Liu et al. 2014; Asif et al. 2015) and early experiences of parenting (Drennan

and Joseph 2005; Burchill and Pevalin 2014), there were few studies which considered the experiences of parents of older children and studies that did focus on this area, tended to come from an education perspective, considering home school relationships (Stevenson and Willott 2007; Hek 2005). In the few studies pertaining to parent and family support, the focus tended to be on parenting deficit with a failure to recognise inherent strengths, resilience factors and cultural differences (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005; Butler 2005; Dumbrill 2009). Therefore, it was necessary to step outside of the specific literature related to forced migrants and to explore more extensive sources relating to migration and parenthood. Revisiting the literature review in 2018-2021, it was noted that research had been published which was more closely related to the focus of this study, and which include resilience and strength-based approaches with families (Merry et al. 2017; Pejic et al. 2017). These studies were incorporated into the literature review and contributed to the theoretical underpinning of the findings considered in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

The literature reviewed within this chapter was drawn from a range of academic and professional disciplines and both national and international studies. Some studies refer to parents within a particular ethnicity, whilst other research is more generic in nature. Where relevant, the origins, methodological approach, professional discipline, and scope of the studies referred to are contextualised to explain their contribution to this review. Within this multi-faceted milieu, presenting a systematic review of the literature would be challenging. Consequently, it was more appropriate to adopt a more narrative approach, drawing out themes and ideas which reflected my interests as a researcher, resonated with my professional experience of working with parents, and were considered valuable in shaping the methodology for this study.

Reviewing the literature allowed for a range of policy discourses, empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to be considered, with the aim of situating this study where it can best contribute. The breadth of literature surveyed enabled general and specialist perspectives to be considered, from within a range of academic and practice disciplines. International perspectives have added value to the review, with the most applicable studies being those that focus on refugee resettlement experiences within high income countries. The process of completing this research project has coincided with a growing interest in migration and a burgeoning of

research in this important area. Many of the studies considered within the review are very recent and together, they are beginning to construct helpful and holistic understandings of the experiences of those seeking refuge from war and persecution, and how practitioners can best support them as they settle into their new lives within their host country. This is a strength of the literature review presented.

However, there are also many limitations to this review of literature. Many of the studies are small scale and context dependant. The literature base is still embryonic and there is little published research related to the experience of refugee families within the UK, particularly in the post- Brexit era. Moreover, there are notable gaps in the literature that explores the experiences of migration and resettlement of parents and particularly mothers both generally, and specific to Wales. On completing the review of literature, I am left with several questions, particularly related to parents' experiences and how the practitioner–parent relationship can support parents through and beyond the asylum processes into resettlement. In this way, the literature review provided a useful tool for positioning the primary research.

Adopting socio-ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework for the research has provided several opportunities for inquiry. Whilst there is a recognition that everyday interactions within and between microsystems can have very immediate impacts upon the family (Bergen 2007), it is also important to note how the more distal systems can serve to set the wider political and societal atmosphere, which can also impact on the family's experience. Similarly applying a lenses approach has allowed for a range of perspectives to be reflected within the study resulting in holistic and inclusive constructions of meaning. The specificities of the methodology, which has been shaped by this literature review, are considered within the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Methodology

4.1. Introduction: making sense of the “messiness”.

Oakeshott (1933, p.191) describes research as the “arrest of experience”; when everyday experience becomes subject to examination, challenging assumptions, and questioning perceptions. This process is a form of “radical inquiry” (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, p.24), the methodology for which provides robust justification for any subsequent claims. The methodology chapter is of critical importance, as it presents a philosophical rationale for choices made within the study, thereby providing the reader with confidence in the findings.

‘The social world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions’ (Cohen et al. 2011, p. 219). It is within such messiness that this research takes place, exploring different perspectives and experiences related to complex and nuanced issues of migration. This chapter attempts to make sense of that messiness; to impose some structure on the complexity encountered, and to provide justification of the research decisions taken.

This chapter begins by exploring theoretical and philosophical issues and present a rationale for the ontological and epistemological choices made. This is followed by an examination of my positioning as a researcher, reflecting on how this impacted on the study design and its implementation. I then reflect on ethical considerations the importance of doing no harm to participants and the compulsion to use the research to bring about good (Bogolub 2010). The chapter then explores the methods applied in the study, the selection of participants and the research settings. I then consider the approaches taken to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of findings. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the research process, highlighting the challenges encountered but also the strengths of the study.

4.2 Research philosophy

Before exploring research approaches and methods, it is important to recognise that any research is likely to be shaped by the assumptions and formal/informal

philosophies of the researcher (McNiff 2016). The next section explores ontological and epistemological considerations as they relate to the research topic.

4.2.1 Ontological considerations

This study refutes the idea of “mind- independent truth” (Tebes 2005), which views “reality” as an entirely objective truth, independent of human knowing or perceptions about it. Moreover, it rejects the assumption that our observations of reality faithfully mirror the objective truths that exist (Braun and Clarke 2013). Rather, it recognises that “realities” are multiple and subjectively constructed. Participants’ narration of their stories is inevitably influenced by cultural, social, gendered, and religious factors. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the meanings which have emerged are subjective, experiential and perception based. However, within and between the individual interpretations, common experiences and themes have emerged, hinting obliquely at more universal realities, which are helpful in aiding collective meanings and understandings. Hence, the ontological positioning of this research is within a constructivist paradigm which views reality as made up of "multiple, tangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature... and dependent for their form and context on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (Guba and Lincoln 1994, pp. 110-111).

4.2.2 Epistemological considerations

Epistemology considers the nature and extent of human knowledge; namely, what it is possible to know and how we can know it (Goldman and O’Connor 2021). This study adopts a “contextualist” approach, a hybrid position, which is defined by Tebes (2005, p. 216) as “the human act in context”. This position sees knowledge as emerging from specific social and cultural contexts; it further recognises the way that the researcher’s own beliefs, values, and interests influence knowledge production. Hence, it aligns with the ontological standpoint explored above.

In considering how knowledge claims are generated within qualitative research, the typology proposed by Creswell (2003) is particularly compelling. Creswell identifies four knowledge claims: post positivist, constructivist, advocacy/ participatory and pragmatism (see Appendix 2). I have taken the position that the process of securing knowledge arises from the multiple participant voices within the research. Hence, knowledge can be construed as both subjective and transactional, in that the realities

of participants are diverse and multiple. Knowledge generated will be context specific and meaning making ongoing and adaptive (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This research adopts a mainly constructivist approach (Crotty 1998), which recognises the importance of understanding multiple participant meanings, recognising the social and historical construction of truth, and leading to theory generation. Within this approach, meanings are created by humans as they engage in their world. Voices are important, and so questioning is open-ended. There needs to be a recognition of social, cultural, and historical context, and so researchers engage with this and produce information. Research is inductive, and the inquirer generates meaning from data generated.

However, Creswell's data typology provides a meaningful way of considering how those knowledge claims are generated, interpreted, and evaluated. In the motivation for the research and the research objectives, there is a clear alignment to the advocacy/ participatory approach to knowledge generation, recognising its roots in social justice and the aim of enabling the voices of a marginalised group. It is through the *stories* of refugee parents and those who support them that knowledge is created. The study aims to identify learning that can be used to inform policy and practice. Hence, it is real-world orientated and derives from a position of problematising current social phenomena and their associated policy and practice implications. Therefore, a degree of pragmatism is also necessary within the research motivation and design. The epistemology for the study sits within the contextual tradition with knowledge claims generated through participatory and constructivist dialogue but with the pragmatic aim of identifying usable knowledge for practical application.

4.3 Research paradigms

Kuhn (1962) identifies a research paradigm as the beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices shared by a research community. The following section, therefore, builds upon ontological and epistemological considerations to identify suitable research paradigms for the study. In line with my understanding of the messiness of research, the paradigm selected is eclectic and bespoke, drawing on elements of interpretivism, praxeology and appreciative inquiry.

4.3.1 Interpretivism

This research is located mainly within an interpretivist paradigm, recognising that the researcher's values are intrinsic to the research, that meanings are inherently subjective, and that knowledge is constructed through dialogue, and is further shaped by the social contexts in which these dialogues occur (Black 2006). However, Silverman (2016), Creswell (2003) and others have suggested that beyond our subjective human knowing, there exist real world or objective realities. Hence, despite our imperfect ability to grasp such realities, a quest for objectivity can be supported by careful research design and approaches which promote research rigour. Such approaches may include sampling, triangulation of data, prolonged engagement with stakeholders, checking out of themes and findings with participants and the use of critical friends. Hence, notions of credibility, plausibility and relevance can add to the study's validity. It was important to build these into the research design to provide a measure of objectivity and to aid meaningful analysis.

4.3.2 Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987) can be seen both as a paradigm and a system for capturing strengths in practice and promoting positive change. This aligned with my research aims which positioned improving practice as an important motivation for undertaking research in this area. Hammond (1996) articulates the basis of AI by suggesting that in every context, situation or group one can identify something that works. Hammond postulates that it is what we focus on that becomes our reality, that reality is created in the moment and that within social contexts there may be multiple realities. He further argues that the process of asking questions of an individual or group exerts some influence over the meaning making process. For Shuayb et al. (2009, p.3), "People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past". Hence, AI is about creating discourses that identify and celebrate the positive. Hammond (1996) highlights the importance of valuing differences, and the way in which the language we use contributes to the reality created.

Mohr and Watkins (2002) have reinterpreted the original fourfold approach of AI; *Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery*⁸³ defined by Cooperrider and Godwin (2011). Their adaptation involves a reframing of deficit style questions to focus on positive aspects, for example, “What has worked?” The model then involves inquiry into exceptionally positive moments, sharing of positive moments to identify possibilities creating shared images of a positive future and finding ways to create that future. Hence, Appreciative Inquiry works most effectively when adopting a collaborative action research strategy, not deemed appropriate for this study which is an independent endeavour. It must be noted that there are few existing examples of using AI within a case study approach (Waters and White 2015). However, within this study, it was felt that the appreciative nature of AI offered much potential for researching with marginalised groups.

Refugees have experienced much adversity and the research took place at a time of political upheaval and of service pressures for practitioners in public services. Within this context, a purposeful drive to identify what has gone well and what works in family support for refugee families was extremely valuable. The defining, dreaming, and designing aspects have led to a useful focus in imagining a positive future and then considering the policy and practice implications for implementing such a vision. It is important however, that the appreciative focus adopted does not detract from a full recognition of the extreme adversity encountered by the refugees and hence, these difficult experiences have been equally acknowledged, valued, and explored within the research.

This study adopted an interpretative paradigm, which values the human experiences of the research participants, and views the researcher as an integral part or “instrument” of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). It employed elements of AI to actively elicit positive messages, which provide valuable insight into what works and therefore what can be practically implanted to “make a difference” (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, p.6)

⁸³ Discovery relates to identification of aspects that work well. Dream is the ability to envision aspects that could work well in the future. Design relates to incorporating aspects that work well into planning and destiny is implementing the new design.

4.4: Researcher positioning

4.4.1: Researcher as an integral part of the research

For Burton and Bartlett (2009), researcher position inevitably influences how the research is approached. In line with McNiff (2016), I have questioned whether it is possible for the researcher to start from a position free of personal bias and suggest instead that the researcher positions themselves within the research, making it explicit how their own background has impacted on their interpretations. Clough and Nutbrown (2012) discuss the “positional” nature of social science research, suggesting that the research problem is defined from the perspective of the researcher, which is in turn, informed by the individual’s personal and professional biography. Hence, they argue, all research is to some extent value laden.

My own practitioner experiences of managing family support services and volunteering within refugee camps have resulted in a degree of positionality on many of the issues encountered within the research. I would concur with Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p.4) who consider social research to be persuasive, purposive, positional, and political. Hence, in examining my own role within the research, it was necessary to recognise these elements within my motivations and perhaps, most notably, my own political convictions related to social justice. However, Fischer (2009) suggests that researchers should “bracket” their own perspectives and experiences (by becoming aware of them and deliberately setting them aside) to enable a space for the authentic voices of the participants. Gearing (2004) describes bracketing as a *‘scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon’*. Acknowledging my own bias, using critical reflection (Berger, 2013) allowed for that bracketing of personal perspectives so that I could be open to the nuances of participants’ stories.

4.4.2 Praxeology: researcher as instrument of research

Pascal and Bertram (2012) define praxeology as research driven by values, taking place in a real-world context and in the company of others. Within this approach, the researcher is viewed as an instrument of the research. This is in opposition to what McNiff (2002) defines as a balcony approach in which the research arena sits outside the researcher, with the researcher observing dispassionately from above.

Praxeology sees the researcher as part of the world, and by extension an integral part of the study. This leads to what Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho (2012, p. 602) describe as a “reflexive attached commitment” shown by the researcher to the research. Within the context of this study, it was essential that the researcher was reflexive within the research, valuing and responding to participant perspectives (Kraus 2011), emotionally present at all times and displaying a commitment to the project, to the findings and to the participants. However, I would argue that the term attachment within the Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho definition could more usefully be depicted as ‘investment’. This would better describe the way in which participants who have allowed the researcher the privilege of hearing their stories, own the meanings. Whilst the researcher is invested in the outcomes of the research and the wellbeing of the participants, attachment might suggest a level of emotional involvement that would be unhelpful to the study and potentially unethical in relation to researcher behaviour.

4.4.3 Insider or outsider researcher?

For Dwyer and Buckle (2009), the relationship between researcher and participants within qualitative research is often intimate and direct. This has a bearing on how the researcher positions themselves within the research, as an insider or an outsider (Hellawell 2006). It is, perhaps, over-simplistic to view this as a binary and static choice. I was aware throughout the research process of subtle changes in positioning along the insider/outsider continuum, both in terms of my own subjective experience and how I was perceived by others. The more time I spent within the participating organisations, the greater my sense of being ‘invited’ in, and to an extent, the more open the responses became (Berger 2013). Hence, I was able to elicit the rich data that so often characterises insider research. This was particularly the case in the Valleys communities where my shared heritage and cultural affinity rendered me immediately accepted by the practitioner participants (see also Roberts 2018; Mannay 2010). I had experience in these settings and knowledge of the issues. In this sense, I was part of their world (see also Clift et al. 2018). This certainly gave me an insider status that was reflected in the openness of the responses. However, it was also evident within the practitioner community more generally, where my evident grasp of their job-roles, professional languages,

cultures, and the challenges they encountered allowed me to be accepted and “invited in” (see also Morris 2016).

With the parents, I was acutely aware of my outsider status. Whilst I was privileged to hear the stories being shared, I had not lived those lives or experienced those emotions. Accordingly, I could empathise, but I could not truly understand. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) reflect upon ways in which being an outsider may inhibit the research, being unfamiliar with the subtleties of participant experiences, finding it difficult to develop meaningful rapport and having only limited access within a closely defined and bounded context. Conversely, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) claim that an outsider positioning can serve to elevate the status of participants to that of ‘expert’. Approaching the parents with the humility of unknowing and viewing those as experts of their own experience proved a useful way of resolving the limitations of an outsider positioning.

Roberts (2018) helpfully explores the notion of transience to explain the fluid and shifting experience of researcher positioning. This concept encapsulates my own subjective experience of being an insider researcher, an outside researcher and often something in between. Whilst, this shifting positioning can feel uncomfortable, Hellowell (2006) suggests that it is precisely this combination that enables the researcher to engage meaningfully with participants.

4.5 Ethical considerations

In considering the importance of ethicality, Vacchelli (2018) adopts the notion of virtuous research. It could be argued that this idea goes beyond the dictate that research should “avoid harm” suggesting instead that it should aim to do well. Indeed, writing in the context of refugees, Hugman et al. (2011) contend that doing no harm is insufficient to ensuring ethical research. Rather, the rights and interests of vulnerable participants need to be actively championed.

From the outset of this research project, I continually questioned my motivations. It felt uncomfortable to think that I was pursuing a qualification (personal gain) from researching the adverse life experiences of others. I was mindful of the work of Jacobson and Landau (2003) who suggest that research into contexts of human suffering can only be justified if it contributes towards reducing that suffering. This seemed like a big ask from what was, essentially, a relatively small-scale research

project. However, Bogolub (2010, p.9) recognises the opportunities research provides “to bring about good” which McNiff (2013, p. 2) articulates as “*bringing useful knowledge into the world of everyday personal and social practices*”, and “helping us all find ways of living more peaceful and productive lives together”. Through researching with people whose voices are rarely heard; this was something I could aspire to.

Cresswell (2003) emphasises the importance of ethical considerations throughout the entire research process from stating the purpose, through the formulation of questions, selection of participants, collection of data, analysis, interpretation of data findings and finally the writing up and dissemination of the findings. This places a responsibility on the researcher to both consider ethical issues at the outset of the project, but also to revisit these reflexively as the study develops. The importance of maintaining ethicality is particularly important when researching with marginalised participants. The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) Code of Ethics (IAFSM 2018) and the Oxford University Refugee Study Centre (2007) research guidelines both provided useful good practice guidance for addressing the ethical considerations within this study.

The following section explores the ethical issues most pertinent to the study and the measures adopted to ensure ethical practice.

4.5.1 An ethical research focus

Recognising the complexities and sensitive nature of the research, it was important at the outset to address ethical considerations. This included considering my motivations for undertaking the research, exploring the potential value for participants as well as for practice, and negotiating how best to manage the power imbalances that are implicit within the research process when researching with marginalised groups. Therefore, in designing the research project, I found it helpful to engage in formative conversations with more knowledgeable others who knew the research population well and were able to support the development of bespoke and ethical approaches.

It was important to ensure that ethicality underpinned the entire research process rather than being a “hoop to jump through or a specific stage within the research” (Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 62). Hence, whilst I ensured that the correct ethical

procedures were followed to gain ethical approval, I was equally concerned to ensure that I was acting ethically throughout (Hugman et al, 2011). As well as the standard requirement to secure approval from Cardiff University (see Appendix 3), the ethics proposal was further examined by the Refugee Council and the internal ethics committee of one of the participating third sector organisations. This heightened level of ethical scrutiny was invaluable in shaping the project and building confidence with participating agencies. The ethical considerations underpinning the research were multiple and the following sections provide a summary of these considerations.

4.5.2 Avoiding harm/doing good

The IAFSM Code of Ethics (2018 n.p.) defines avoiding harm as “proactively prioritizing the dignity, safety and well-being of participants”. This proactivity involved considering the potential harm that could arise from the project as well as its capacity to deliver benefit. I was mindful of the assertion of Pittaway et al (2011, p.234) that,

“Ethically unsound research practices can exploit and disempower refugees..., promote distrust or rejection of the solutions emerging from the research, and may lead to emotional or material harm.”

My greatest concern was that the re-telling of stories with traumatic content could result in re-traumatisation (see Reason and Heinemeyer 2016)⁸⁴. Duckworth and Follette (2012, p. 2), however, take exception to a narrow definition of re-traumatisation as “*distress that occurs with the retelling of a trauma narrative*”, arguing instead that re-traumatisation are the stress-responses brought about by events themselves rather than those reactions which occur in the context of treatment, or indeed research. Even recognising this, it was incumbent upon me as an ethical researcher to provide, as far as is possible, emotionally safe approaches to support participants, whilst also recognising that the research process itself is likely to generate emotional reactions that go beyond usual research practice and which can, if acknowledged and embraced add to the reflexivity of the study (Gemignani 2011).

⁸⁴ Re-traumatization is reminder of past trauma that results in a re-experiencing of the initial trauma event. It can be triggered by a situation, or environment that remind the individual of the original trauma. Reason and Heinemeyer (2016) discuss the possibility of re-traumatisation in the retelling of stories from the individual's past.

As discussed further in section 4.7.2, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the families. The interview questions were carefully crafted to avoid, as far as possible, any participant distress in the form of re-traumatisation. They were designed to enable participants to retain control over what they chose to disclose or keep hidden. This also provided an opportunity for preparing the parents beforehand for the types of areas that would be covered. Working closely with trusted practitioners to explain the nature and purpose of the research provided an additional layer of security. Throughout the interviews, I was aware of my need to remain emotionally present and to provide an acknowledgement of the privilege the families were affording in sharing their experiences with me.

Nonetheless, with hindsight, in focusing so heavily on avoiding distress, I underestimated the cathartic value inherent in retelling, something commented on by one of the parents. Had I anticipated this, it may have been possible to provide less structured opportunities for the parents to share their stories in ways that were meaningful to them, thus promoting more ownership and autonomy.

Bloor (2010, p.18) recognises that the aim of research should be to bring about a good. My initial analysis of the potential benefits of the research focused solely on its potential to inform policy and practice. I was surprised however, at how keen the practitioners were to participate and was humbled by their generosity in sharing time, contacts, and experiences. At the heart of this commitment to the project was their desire to foster a better understanding of the needs, strengths, and aspirations of the parents, as well as highlighting aspects of good practice and awareness of the challenges they faced. It was critical, given this high level of engagement that I managed expectations about what the research could realistically achieve.

4.5.3 Researching with vulnerable/ marginalised communities.

The parent participants have often been considered vulnerable or marginalised (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2016), but it was important to recognise that I was working not simply with defined and labelled groups, but with individuals who may not self-define as vulnerable.

This potential vulnerability generates additional challenges for the researcher. Pittaway et al (2011, p, 236) note the “*deep fear of exploitation*” demonstrated by some refugees in relation to research, which may be precipitated by negative prior

experiences of research; cultural, ethnic and class mistrust; false expectations or fear of backlash. Vacchelli (2018) discusses the importance of researchers not just having values but embodying these values. Honesty, reliability, and respect shown by researchers throughout the process can help elucidate the purpose, scope and intended outcomes from the research and mitigate mistrust. In a more pragmatic sense working closely with trusted practitioners who have built positive relationships is helpful in gaining access and negotiating parameters of what is researched.

Cultural theory suggests that research, like other aspects of social interaction is not immune from a propensity to “othering” (Said 1978), or the creation of binary identities of us and other, with notions of power and hierarchy thinly concealed within them. More participatory approaches recognise that the researcher is part of the world and thereby part of the research (Varga-Dobai 2012). For Palaiologou (2016), p.52) the development of trust based on mutual respect, developed within a conversational context that “*acknowledges the need for a symmetrical relationship between researcher and participant*”. Recognising these relational aspects of the research process influenced study design, from the phrasing of the questions to the way the rooms were laid out for interview.

4.5.4 Cultural awareness and sensitivity

For Pittaway et al. (2011, p.242) “*cultural sensitivity in the research process does not equate with ethical relativism but rather it leads us to an understanding of the plurality of values in which dialogue is possible*”. They view human values and cross-cultural dialogue as essential in fostering understanding and building trust.

Relationships and reciprocity are at the heart of such an approach. Recognising this, prior to interviews with parents, I read as much as possible about the situation in their country of origin, and cultural norms and expectations. This did not negate the need to be led by the parents in relation to how they wished to be greeted, where they chose to sit, how the interview was recorded and how the interview was terminated. Using emotional intelligence (Goleman 1998) to tune in to the parent during the interview was important, as was the need for self-regulation (Goleman 2006) when hearing harrowing stories, but even more fundamental was the ability to move beyond viewing the situations described as ‘other’ into a recognition of our common humanity and an ability to relate on that level.

4.5.5 Ensuring ethical questions.

Flick (2011) suggests that research questions define not only what is studied but also what is excluded or boundaried. This was critical to ensure the specificity required for the study, but also to ensure the emotional safety of the participants. The overarching research questions were designed to avoid intrusion and to make clear the practice orientated focus of the study. This was also a driver in the design of the research tools, which used semi-structured interview questions. When undertaking interviews, it was imperative to allow participants to determine what they revealed and in how much depth. This resulted in disparate responses from the parent participants, some of which were incredibly detailed and others very brief.

4.5.6 Informed consent

Howe and Moses (1999) emphasise the importance of informed consent in respecting the rights of individuals to have control over things that affect their lives and autonomy in decision making. In considering what constitutes informed consent, Diener and Crandall (1978, p. 57) propose four features: competence, voluntarism, full information, and comprehension. This was pertinent in working with refugee and asylum-seeking families where their English may not be fluent and where cultural understandings may differ. Information posters, letters and consent sheets were devised (see Appendix 4), and where relevant interpreters were available, to clearly explain the nature and purpose of the research and check understanding, considering possible language barriers. Trusted practitioners were available to talk through any concerns with the parents, and we ensured that at least a week elapsed between being given the information and consent sheet and participating in the research to allow participants to think through the implications of their involvement. It was important to view consent not as an isolated event but rather as a process (Varga-Dobai 2012). The right to withdraw was clearly explained and throughout the interview, I was vigilant to any signs of distress and checked that informed consent was still in place at the end of the interview (Kadam 2017).

Whilst there were less ethical tensions when working with practitioners and strategic actors, the concept of bracketing was also helpful in enabling me to put aside personal assumptions and experiences and actively listen. The research process facilitated a reflective space for practitioners to self-question and explore their own

understandings, often seeking affirmation or feedback. It was important to re-emphasise that my role was inquiry and not sharing expertise. However, the need for a practitioner forum for reflection and activism was evident (see section 8.2.1)

4.5.7 Confidentiality and anonymity

Crow and Wiles (2008) make the distinction between anonymity as the identity of those taking part, whilst confidentiality relates to the attribution of comments. The latter was particularly pertinent for practitioners and strategic actors who may not wish for a particular comment to be traced back to them personally. Walford (2005) suggests that in small scale studies it is impossible to ensure complete anonymity or indeed confidentiality (Cohen 2011; Braun and Clarke 2013), especially in situations where there are small numbers of persons with their heritage living in the studied communities.

It was crucial to be transparent about this difficulty with participants and to show what efforts were made to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. In the case of the families, all names have been changed, and similarly biographical details have been obscured. This created some difficulties for at least one of the families, the given names were carefully chosen for their symbolic significance, which had resonance within their story. Similar culturally relevant names have been chosen where possible to support this aspect of the narrative. The practitioners and strategic actors within the study have also been anonymised, in the case of specialist roles this was extremely challenging.

4.5.8 Reciprocity

Trainor and Bouchard (2013) argue for a stronger emphasis on reciprocity within research. Recognising the investment participants make in the research through contributing time, energy, and experiences, they argue for an authentic reciprocation on the part of the researcher. Vacano (2019) recognises that this needs to be carefully managed as whilst it can support participant engagement, it could potentially alter the research relationship. The third sector organisation with whom I worked to recruit parent participants was keen to acknowledge and value the parents' contribution to the project. Hence, we devised small gender and ethnically

sensitive gifts, along with the provision of Welsh themed refreshments throughout the interviews. Even more important was the sharing of findings with the families via a newsletter that the organisation could, if required, get translated (Appendix 9).

4.5.9 Ethical interpretation, analysis, and researcher bias

MacNaughton et al. (2001) argue that it is not just the research subject, which is examined, but the research project itself, especially the actions and lenses of the researcher. For Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 64), “Analysis involves interpretation, which is informed by particular subjective and theoretical (and political) lenses.” Hence, the story that is told about the data, may differ from the story the participants would wish to present (Pittaway et al. 2011). Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 71) suggest that the researcher cannot eliminate bias but should demonstrate reflexivity and awareness. They advocate using a research journal which records reflections, thereby enabling “a richer, more thoughtful, complex analysis” and making transparent, the ways in which the researcher has impacted the study. The use of a research journal aided this reflection and I also found it useful to check my understandings drawn from interview accounts with practitioners, through reflective discussions with my supervisors when analysing the data.

4.5.10 Summary of ethical considerations

Ethical considerations within the research were complex and multiple. Securing ethical approval through the Cardiff School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee (Appendix 3) and ensuring that the research was conducted in line with relevant ethics codes (BERA 2018; UNHCR 2007) was only a part of what it meant to be an ethical researcher. Observing standard ethical protocols in relation to recruiting participants, securing consent, providing a right to withdraw, preserving anonymity and confidentiality, and providing feedback (Appendix 9 and 10) were important but not sufficient.

Reflecting on my own bias and researcher dispositions was crucial. Similarly seeking feedback from participants about their experience of the research informed my practice. Baarts (2009) argues that ethics needs to be “embedded in the totality of scholarly practice”. This includes all phases of the research process as well as any dissemination activities. Throughout the process I learned that ethical research is

much more than following prescribed codes and practices; rather, it is about our entire way of being within the research. Critical reflection, metacognition, and a reflexive approach enable the researcher to tune in to participants, to be alert to signs of discomfort or misunderstanding and to value the contributions of others within a context of “attached commitment” (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2012, p. 602). Thinking more ambitiously than to simply “do no harm”, and actively seeking opportunities for the research to make a positive contribution, provided a strong ethical basis for the study, embodying what Hursthouse and Pettigrove (2018) describe as a virtuous approach.

4.6 Research methodology and design

Clough and Nutbrown (2012) assert that social research is persuasive, purposive, positional, and political. They define persuasive, as seeking to make a difference in some way. In this way it is also purposive in that it seeks to bring about some change, whether that be within the researcher’s own understanding, collective understandings or in the situation that is being researched. Stenhouse (1975) suggests that research gives expression to the standpoints of the researcher, both within the choices made within the research (intents, questions methods) and in the way that findings are reported. Moreover, the policy contexts in which social research takes place are political. Considering these intrinsic features of social research in the context of a particular study, Clough and Nutbrown (2012) argue, will help determine the methodology and research methods.

This study sought to understand the varied experiences and perspectives of refugee families and the service practitioners that work with refugee families. This meant that a qualitative research methodology was appropriate. Trochim and Donnelly (2008, p. 142) highlight that qualitative research is the approach of choice in studies where it would be useful to “develop detailed stories to describe a phenomenon” and is helpful for “achieving a deep understanding” of complex human issues. Miller and Brewer (2003) highlight the extensive and intensive nature of qualitative research, seeking to build understanding by consider in depth many features of a small number of phenomena. This intensity of approach proved valuable within this study. In defending qualitative research, Braun, and Clarke (2013, p. 10) state that “it captures the complexity, mess and contradictions that characterise the real world,

yet allows us to make sense of *patterns* of meaning”. Hence, a qualitative, methodology was deemed appropriate for the research as it enabled the generation of multi-faceted, multi-perspective data and insight into the lived experiences of participants. Whilst the benefits of using qualitative research are evident, it did generate some challenges; in particular, how data was analysed, how meanings were generated and the extent to which findings are generalizable. These issues are explored in section 4.8.2.

4.6.1 Case study design

A case study can be defined as “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used*” (Yin 1984, p. 23). For Yin (2014), a case study methodology is not constrained by ontology or epistemology and can work equally well in both interpretative and positivist paradigms. Bryman and Ball (2001) agree that a case study approach lends itself to a qualitative research strategy, and that rich data can be generated by employing qualitative research methods such as unstructured or semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observation (Bryman 2001). This view is supported by Stake (1995) who suggests that case studies provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon studied, through the collection of detailed information, using a range of data collection methods.

Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p.18) suggest that case studies enable researchers to “*study things within their context and consider the subjective meanings that people bring to their situation*”. Within the context of this study, a case study approach provided a means of understanding the perspectives of refugee parents, frontline practitioners, operational managers, and strategic actors. Whilst case studies are context-specific, making it difficult to generalise from them, adopting a multiple case study model allowed for further analysis and identification of findings relating to approaches that have been successful (the case study selection is discussed in section 4.6.3). Narratives have played an important role in generating meaningful data, which is discussed in the following section.

4.6.2 Storytelling and narratives

Narratives can be defined as “*an account of events or more than one event, characterised by having some sort of structure, often temporal and other story elements*” (Braun and Clarke, 2007, p. 333). For Fisher (1987) all forms of human communication need to be seen fundamentally as stories; and this broad definition captures the potential for collecting stories within qualitative research. Silverman (2004) identifies one of the main benefits of narrative methodology as its ability to capture the gendered, socially, and ethnically stratified character of the world. Accordingly, narrative methodology has potential to provide a platform for the voices (Czarniawska 2004) of marginalised groups in a way that can acknowledge their own meanings and interpretations.

The previous section discussed the overall methodological approach adopted for this study. As highlighted, the study deploys an explorative and narrative based qualitative approach to refugee experience vis a vis family support services they receive in Wales and how these seek to meet the complex needs of refugee families. The research design comprised a comparative case study of two area- based family support services supporting refugee families. Within these case studies, documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the primary research methods.

4.6.3 Identification of case studies

Using an appreciative inquiry approach, two Local Authority⁸⁵ area-based case studies were identified to facilitate an exploration of how local partnerships have responded to the challenge of supporting refugee families. Two in-depth case studies were felt to be manageable within the time constraints for the research while providing some degree of contrast between two different local authority areas – one city based and one mixed urban/rural.

The two sites were identified through conversations with key informants at the Welsh Refugee Council and represent two potentially contrasting approaches, in relation to the way support was set up and delivered. The design of the study was adopted to

⁸⁵ Wales has 22 unitary authorities which deliver a wide range of local services. Some, (for example education, social services), they are required by law to make available; others are provided at the discretion of individual authorities.

generate rich data concerning key operational and strategic features of practice in each of the areas. The individual case studies were also chosen to reflect additional areas of challenge and possibility presented by the social contexts of the areas. The case study was also designed to explore the views of refugees with young children receiving family support services, as well as those of the service professionals who support them and strategic actors in each of the geographical areas.

- **Case study 1** is a service network and is based in an urban inner-city area in south Wales, which, as a dispersal area (see section 1.3.1) has a strong track record in welcoming refugees. Practitioners working there were likely to have prior experience and organisational capacities to draw upon, when supporting new arrivals. However, specialist services for refugees in this locality were being curtailed owing to wider service pressures but there remained a legacy effect from the wide range of services that had existed, resulting in wider awareness of issues related to migration. This study site, with its urban demography and ethnically diverse population, offered good access to generic family support services facilitated by strong local transport links.
- **Case Study 2** comprised a service network within a mixed urban/rural locality in the South Wales Valleys. The area has a strong history of welcoming incomers (specifically from Ireland, Italy, and Cornwall) but had not traditionally been home to refugees but had recently begun welcoming families from the Syrian diaspora. Typically, the families were placed in small towns where manufacturing industry, retail and public services were the main employers. The communities were largely socially homogeneous (white, working class). Owing to the very small numbers of Syrian families placed in this area (Barnes 2020), it was necessary to consider a wider geographical area than the unitary authority. Hence, this case study covered a geographical area spanning three local authorities, each adopting unique approaches but with some collaboration between the areas. Whilst this added complexity, as I needed to interface with three separate partnerships, it also provided opportunity to explore working relationships across unitary authority boundaries.

Whilst the research was not a comparative study in the traditional sense of the term (Goodrick 2014), the contrasting nature of the two contexts provided an opportunity for consideration of distinctive features and common experiences. It also afforded

diversity within the sample, capturing urban and rural areas, established, and developing services and a diversity of refugees being supported.

4.6.4 Research participants

The research participants were identified to provide multiple-perspective narratives, with the aim of producing nuanced findings. In selecting the participants, I drew on stakeholder theory, first conceptualised by Freeman (1984) who, writing in a business context, argues that multiple stakeholders have an interest and influence over policy and practice.

Stakeholder theory has subsequently been extended to other types of organisations, including public sector and third sector organisations (Maric 2013) where there are also a variety of stakeholder groups for each organisation (Freeman 1984, Chapleo and Sims 2010).

Stakeholder theory also notes that different stakeholders will probably have very different perspectives concerning the organisation under consideration. In analysing stakeholders, it is important to consider:

- The degree of interest of a stakeholder in the organisation
- The degree of power or influence the stakeholder has over the organisation

Analysing the interest/power matrix for each stakeholder group provides a more balanced and holistic description of how an organisation is perceived than just looking at the perspectives of a single group.

Stakeholder theory presented a useful tool for considering the participants in the study. I was interested in considering those stakeholders who had high interest but low power (parents, practitioners) as well as those who had high power and varying levels of interest (strategic actors). The following section identifies the participants in the study and why they were chosen.

- **Parents who were also refugees / asylum seekers living in Wales** - this comprised purposive sample of 10 parents. All the parents lived within the City case study area because it proved very difficult to recruit parents from the Valleys. Practitioners in the Valleys were rightly concerned that given the very

small numbers of refugees living in the area⁸⁶, anonymity would be almost impossible to ensure. Moreover, some of the families were newly arrived within the area and still in the process of settling in.

- **Practitioners who were currently working with refugees** - a purposive sample of 10-15 practitioners and operational managers in each site was identified through the partnerships operating in each area. The sample was designed to represent the multiple occupations and disciplines that engage directly with the families in each local authority. These included lead workers, who liaised with other professions about needs and interventions, as well as staff who provided specific support⁸⁷. Perspectives were also sought from service managers. In total, 26 practitioner participants took part in interviews (see section 6.1). Participants were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews (to gain individual data) and a focus group to explore interagency dialogues.

- **Strategic actors**

These included politicians, advocacy groups, chief executives in Local Authority / Health/ Third Sector organisations/ local strategy groups, refugee councils. A purposive sample of 15 individuals was recruited to take part in semi-structured interviews in person or by Skype or telephone (see section 5.1.) of whom six represented the Valleys area and seven were from the City case study and two had a pan Wales remit.

In total 52 participants were interviewed within the study⁸⁸.

4.7 Research methods

The following section examines the research methods chosen, providing a rationale for their selection and an evaluation of their usefulness within the study.

4.7.1 Documentary analysis

Prior to generating information with individual participants, it was important to build a picture of the context of the case study. This was undertaken using publicly available demographic data and an analysis of relevant policy and practice materials. This

⁸⁶ In some cases, numbers were as small as two families within the Borough.

⁸⁷ The range of occupations included health visitors, family support workers, teachers, interpreters, and practitioners from voluntary sector organisations

⁸⁸ Detailed information tables related to the participants are found at the beginning of the finding's chapters (Sections 5, 6 7)

included national strategy and guidance documents, local policy documentation and documentation relating to individual participating organisations. In total, 11 documents were surveyed. However, to avoid any ethical issues documentation related to individuals or families were not included.

4.7.2 Semi-structured interviews

Kvale (2007) describes an interview as a professional conversation designed to get the participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights, expressed in their own words and ideas on a pre-determined focus. For Connelly (2016), interviews are particularly useful when they are undertaken face-to-face, as they allow the researcher to establish rapport and to identify nuanced meta communication, enabling greater insight into the participant's beliefs values and understandings.

Fontana and Frey (1994) suggest that there are three types of interview techniques: which vary in terms of both formality and pre-planning; unstructured, semi- structured and structured. Unstructured interviews do not have any pre-planned questions and are based more on a general discussion of a given focus. Structured interviews conversely follow a pre-determined set of standardised questions. The hybrid position of semi-structured interviewing provides a set of guideline questions but provides flexibility to explore additional areas, which may arise within the interview.

The sensitive nature of the subject rendered it desirable that I had some structure to the interviews in the form of a set of pre-planned guideline questions (Appendix 5, 6, 7) approved in advance by the ethics committee. Moreover, these were used during discussions with gatekeepers when brokering access. However, I also recognised that the interviews needed to be reflexive, and that it would be difficult to predict at the outset all the areas of interest that may emerge during the interview. Hence, the approach adopted was one of semi-structured interviews which, whilst providing a framework for the interview, also allowed the flexibility to ask subsidiary questions and follow up on ideas and concepts that emerged within the interview (Edwards and Holland 2013; Kallio et al. 2016).

Creswell (2003) recognises the limitations of interviews which include the ways in which researcher' presence may bias responses and the fact that interviewees may

have differential abilities to express their responses⁸⁹. This study employed interviews with parents, practitioners and strategic actors with the prepared questions acting as a springboard for the less scripted conversations that followed.

Undertaking interviews with each of these participant groups generated some challenges, but also significant benefits. With the parent interviews, there were language barriers and cultural nuances which needed to be considered. However, the face-to-face context within public buildings that they were used to accessing for other purposes helped to put parents at ease and build rapport, whilst enabling me to tune into nonverbal cues and identify any misunderstandings and rephrase questions where necessary. The interviews with practitioners and strategic actors, whilst proving difficult to schedule and time consuming, allowed the opportunity to follow up on areas of interest and probe more deeply to elicit rich responses.

Having considered the above, the benefits of conducting semi- structured interviews were seen to outweigh any drawbacks. This was particularly evident for parents, where, given the sensitivities of the subject being considered, it was deemed imperative to put refugees at their ease and to build rapport.

Interviews with parents

Interviews took place with refugees/asylum seekers who were also parents with at least one child under 10 years in their care and receiving family support services in the study sites. To ensure emotional safety by avoiding experiences that were still recent and raw, I limited the sample to parents who had been resident in the UK for at least one year prior to participating in the research. This provided the additional benefit of enabling participants to reflect on their early experiences upon entering the UK and receiving family support services. Interview questions were carefully designed to explore the ways in which the refugee families perceived their own needs and constructed their recent histories and future aspirations in settling in the UK. The questions were designed to focus on how the parents participated, engaged, and perceived the impacts of the support services they had received and the extent to which these had met their expectations and needs.

⁸⁹ I was also mindful of an assertion made by Thomas (2009), namely that semi-structured interviews, clumsily employed can be like asking participants to paint you a rich picture whilst providing a paint by numbers kit.

The issue of language was also important to address at the outset. None of the parents were first language English speakers and their English language skills varied. My first choice was to avoid the use of translators, to ensure confidentiality and to avoid additional layers of interpretation, within both the question and the response (Bowlby and Day 2018). Therefore, I initially limited participation to those with a good level of spoken English, as identified by the practitioners working with them and verified by myself during a short pre- interview, the purpose of which was to check understanding of the interview process and confirm informed consent.

However, having taken advice from colleagues at the Welsh Refugee Council, I realised that restricting participation in this way could limit the sample and potentially introduce bias. Hence, I made the decision that if required I would make use of trained and experienced translators recommended to me by the Welsh Refugee Council. A briefing was provided for the translators to ensure that they understood the aims of the project and recognised the importance of translating the exact words spoken. The importance of confidentiality was also emphasised. Only three of the 10 parents interviewed required translation and one of these spoke mainly in English, just referring to the translator very occasionally to express complex or unfamiliar terms. The translator commented afterwards, expressing surprise that the parent had been so open within the interview and stating how different the whole experience had felt to a previous experience of translating for this woman in a legal context. "I think she felt valued and heard today. She goes away tired but happy." (Research Diary, September 2017). This feedback made me realise again the importance of radical listening (Clough and Nutbrown 2012) and being emotionally present throughout the interviews.

Interviews with practitioners

The main barrier to undertaking semi- structured interviews with practitioners and strategic actors related to the practical difficulties associated with scheduling at a time of mutual convenience. Accordingly, I took advice from practitioners regarding their workloads and scheduled interviews to avoid pressure points. I provided participants with a choice of dates over a period of several weeks. Recognising the busy schedules of service managers, I also provided additional opportunities for interviews to take place over the telephone or Skype. Two of the practitioners (n=33)

selected a telephone interview. Within the interviews, practitioners were asked a series of questions on service modes, staff orientations and values, occupational theories and cultures, material resources, inter-agency working, training, as well as the challenges and rewards associated with supporting families (see Appendix 5).

Two of the practitioner participants could be described as “*experts by experience*” (Preston-Shoot 2007), having previously been through the refugee experience and accessed the services for which they now worked or volunteered. Domecq et al. (2014) identify the advantages of engaging experts by experience within a research study, arguing that it can assist with recruitment of participants and feeding back findings to target groups, as well as helping to ensure that research instruments are fit for purpose. Recruiting these experts arose serendipitously rather than by design, but I was privileged to make the most of their expertise in discussing aspects of the research design and testing out emerging findings. These experts by experience gave generously of their time and knowledge, providing invaluable input that would be difficult to source from elsewhere. In turn, I am hopeful that they found the process empowering, felt like they were making a difference, and that perhaps it even allowed them to find some meaning in difficult experiences (Patterson et al. 2014; Simpson et al. 2014).

Interviews with strategic actors

Interviews were conducted with senior managers and strategic actors responsible for services for forced migrant families, offering insights into strategic decision-making, political, and pragmatic considerations.

As identified in Section 5.1, this comprised of two distinct categories of people. Firstly, those with direct responsibility for service delivery to refugee families and those who act in an advocacy role. In practice, however, five of the third sector organisations were also involved in direct delivery of services, through contracts or their own fundraising.

These stakeholders were asked about the adequacy of national and local policy in Wales regarding family support for refugees and its strategic implementation and associated challenges. The interview questions for all three categories of participants can be found in Appendix 6.

Piloting of interviews

Braun and Clarke (2007) identify the importance of testing research tools prior to use. The use of pilot studies is supported by Bloor et al. (2010) and Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) who advocate reviewing questions and approaches thoroughly after the first few interviews. This enables the researcher to identify problems that might arise such as sensitivity of questions or clarity of meanings. Charmaz (2002) emphasises the reflexive nature of qualitative research arguing that questioning should not be immutably fixed at the outset but can be revised throughout the research process in line with researcher reflections. Hence, I adopted several strategies to ensure rigour and fitness of purpose. These included piloting interview and focus group questions with informed colleagues from a university research group⁹⁰ (Baker 1994, p. 182). This piloting resulted in several refinements, particularly the tendency to ask composite questions.

When piloting the parent questions with an expert of experience, who had been in the UK six years, it became evident that the chronological focus of my questioning would not work for everyone, and a more open invitation to “tell me your story” may yield richer findings, particularly if accompanied by sensitive prompting and questions that reflect back what has already been said to enable parents to expand their idea further. The original questions for the other two respondent groups worked more effectively, and the open-ended question at the end of the interview provided interesting responses and opened up areas I had not fully considered at the outset.

Recording of interviews

Audio recording of interviews provides a range of advantages for the researcher, including an accurate record of what was said, an opportunity to revisit data and the ability to tune in completely to the interviewee without the interruptions and pressure of writing down their responses. For this reason, the interviews with operational managers and frontline practitioners were recorded.

However, it was recognised that recording itself introduces bias into the data, as some participants may not wish to verbalise negative aspects of their experience for fear of repercussions. Hence, it was essential that participants were reassured that

⁹⁰ Members of the Social Justice Research Group at the University of Worcester assisted with the piloting of research tools.

the recordings were for the purposes of the researcher only and would not be shared with others. It was also deemed likely that the parents may be reluctant to be recorded owing to previous experiences of authority, fear of repercussions or of the recordings falling into other hands. Therefore, similar reassurances were needed, with the additional offer of an unrecorded interview if this were preferable for them. Three parents chose the option of an unrecorded interview. In this case, simultaneously conducting the interview and recording responses proved challenging. I considered using a second person to record the interview, enabling me to tune in fully to the respondent, but that generated additional ethical difficulties such as ensuring confidentiality and potentially introducing an additional layer of interpretation into the recordings. Hence, I decided that on balance it would be more appropriate to record the interview myself and introduce additional measures to check the veracity of my recordings by summarising and reading back to the parent to check my understandings.

4.7.3 Focus groups

As well as generating individual narratives from the interviews, I explored collective responses and inter-agency dialogues. Buttny (1997) explores the role of the moderator within a focus group arguing that the discussion should be relatively unstructured and guided by the moderator to facilitate an authentic discussion. Hence, the focus group becomes more than a set of questions with answers, but rather a dialogue where members are encouraged to ask questions, to challenge and to express opinions. Wilkinson (2004) suggests that focus groups can be useful for gaining authentic discussions and more naturalistic responses than those generated in interviews. Underhill and Olmstead (2003) suggest that focus groups are useful for eliciting a range of responses and perspectives on an issue. Others have suggested that focus groups themselves can be a useful consciousness raising exercise for individuals and that taking part in such discussions can itself bring insights, which can act as a catalyst for social change (Morgan 1997; Braun and Clarke 2007).

A focus group within the city case study was attended by nine individuals⁹¹, which is in line with research on the optimal size (Tang and Davis 1995). I had envisaged that the membership of the group would be self-selecting with an invitation issued following the individual interviews. However, I realised that this self-selection embodied the potential drawback of not ensuring a mix of agencies. In the event, the focus group was an existing forum for workers, who decided that it was best to utilise the existing group rather than create something additional. The focus group added value as it was able to focus on issues around multi- agency working in a way that had not been prioritised within the individual interviews. However, the real value for me as a researcher, was observing the interactions between the group members (Morgan 1997). The Valleys focus group did not go ahead as it proved impossible to bring together the agencies in a timely manner across three Local Authority areas.⁹²

Whilst the limitations of focus groups could include a lack of confidentiality, difficulty in ensuring all participants get a voice and an opportunity for “group think” (Smithson 2000), the opportunity for gaining insight into interagency dialogue, narratives, and perspectives outweighed the potential limitations, many of which can be overcome by sensitive facilitation (Farquhar and Das 1999). Audio recording of the focus group would have enabled me as moderator to be “in the moment” with the group and to lead the discussion reflexively. However, one participant was uncomfortable being recorded so I took notes. Researcher reflections written up immediately following the focus group enabled me to record non-verbal elements and impressions in my research diary.

4.7.4 The research diary

If we view the researcher as an instrument within the qualitative research process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), then it is important that we have some systematic means of recording researcher perceptions, reasons for methodological decisions and burgeoning constructs. It is precisely this function that the reflective journal can fulfil (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Erlandson et al.1993). Given the emotive nature of the

⁹¹ Of these nine participants, two had already taken part in interviews. This embodied the advantage of eliciting fresh responses.

⁹² The absence of any formal mechanism for the practitioners to meet was underlined by the difficulties in convening the meeting. Whilst the participants were keen to come together for discussion, the logistical difficulties prevented it taking place. It is likely that these challenges could now be overcome by holding an online meeting which has become far more commonplace since the pandemic

research topic, the research journal also offered opportunities to explore my own emotions, particularly following parent interviews, to debrief and reflect upon what had been heard (Malacrida 2007). Messenger (2012) discusses the potential of visual journaling as a useful tool for meaning making during doctoral research. Looking back through my journal, I can see examples of this, such as when I tried to visually map out the physical journey to safety described to me by one of the parent participants. Had I been fully aware of this, prior to undertaking the primary research, I certainly would have incorporated visual journaling more fully into the research design.

4.8 Data interpretation and data analysis

The next section considers how the data was interpreted and analysed (Appendix 8 provides an overview of the data produced within the study). Robson (2002) identifies one of the challenges of qualitative research as making sense of large volumes of data generated throughout the research process. Mindful of the assertion of Weston et al. (2001, p. 381) that “*qualitative research requires a kind of rigour that independent researchers may not be aware of or need*”, I was keen to ensure that a rigorous approach to analysis was adopted to avoid reliance on anecdotal evidence (Male 2006). In considering how best to work with the extensive data from multiple case studies, I adopted a combination of thematic analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Thematic analysis (as defined by Braun and Clarke 2007) seeks to identify patterns across the different forms of data. I was alert to the importance of employing a systematic approach with an auditable decision trail (Lorelli et al. 2017), which led to consideration of Creswell’s six step process for data analysis (see Table 5). IPA (Smith et al. 2009) focuses on the meanings people attach to their own lived experiences and offers a way to identify data themes across a group of participants. Eatough and Smith (2017) emphasise that IPA allows the researcher creative ways of thinking about complex human phenomena. They argue that by using “small and situated samples, each individual can be treated ideographically” (p.198). It is then possible to look across and between participants to explore commonality and diversity (Willig 2013). This allows the researcher to understand the participants perspectives within their socio-cultural context (Hosseini and Punzi 2021).

I used the rigorous and immersive process of analysis described by Smith et al. (2009), whilst continuing to affirm the importance of the individual narratives (Larkin et al. 2006). I examined the individual stories, then looked between and across stories within each case study to identify themes, before finally looking across the case studies to explore areas of similarity and distinctiveness with the aim of generating findings. This bottom-up approach, generated codes from data, independent of a pre-existing theory (Reid et al. 2005) provided a useful framework for analysing the data.

4.8.1 Processes for data analysis.

As Spencer et al. (2003) point out, this important stage of the research requires “a mix of creativity and systematic searching, a blend of inspiration and diligent detection”. Ensuring transparency and rigour within this process was paramount. Hence, Cresswell (2003) suggests some measures, which may aid the qualitative researcher within the task of data analysis. He identifies a six-step process, which is displayed, along with its application in this study in Table 5.

	Steps in data analysis	Application within this study
1	Organise and prepare data for analysis	Interviews were transcribed, and field notes typed up. Data was organised into sections for each research method within each case study area.
2	Read through data to get a general sense	Reading through the data enabled me to identify some emerging themes and an overall impression of the quality and depth of information. Margin notes aided analysis.
3	Coding of data	Using Tesch's (1990) eight step coding process I coded all documents. This enabled me to identify themes and categories. Narrative analysis used to identify the features of the stories within the data.
4	Use coding process to generate a general description of the data. Identify connections between themes	Using a data reduction grid (Walker and Solvason, 2014) assisted the process of identifying themes and connections
5	Advance how the themes will be represented in the qualitative analysis	Relating the themes back to the original chronology for the questioning shown below provided a useful narrative structure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refugee journeys, experiences, and expectations</i> • <i>Arrivals: The first six months</i> • <i>Towards integration</i> The creation of visuals and figures further enhance meaning making within this process.
6	Interpretation of data	This stage involved a consideration of what has been learned, the meanings the researcher attributes to findings, an exploration of unexpected findings and posing further questions raised by the research.

Table 5: Data analysis process (adapted from Cresswell 2003, pp.191-195).

4.8.2 Validity, reliability, and credibility

There is a growing recognition of the importance of rigour within qualitative research (Hadi and Closs 2016). Validity, in this context, can be defined in ecological terms, namely the extent to which the research reflects the real world. Braun and Clarke (2007) refer to qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups as being close to the real world of the recipients. I was mindful of the work of Lin (2016, p. 172) who argues that within a qualitative paradigm, “*validity comes from an assessment of the less definable trustworthiness, rigour and overall quality of the process*”. I recognised that validity in qualitative research is important to determine accuracy of findings from the viewpoint of the researcher, as well as to instil confidence in the research for the participants and readers. Accordingly, qualitative research strives for trustworthiness, authenticity, or credibility (Miller and Brewer 2003). To support this aim, I employed strategies suggested by Creswell (2003) as illustrated in Table 6.

Strategy	Definition/ purpose	Application within this study
Triangulation	Examining evidence from the methods and using it to build a justification for themes	I analysed the findings from each method separately, then drew out themes across each case study, finally contrasting case studies. ⁹³
Member checking	Validating findings or specific themes with participants	Findings were presented to an expert by experience as a means of checking resonance
Rich description	To provide insight into the world of the research	The inclusion of narratives, of participants and researchers provide rich description.
Clarify researcher bias	Self-reflection to identify how researchers own beliefs values and standpoints have influenced interpretations	Recognising the importance of an autobiographical lens (Brookfield, 1995), I kept a reflective journal and provided extracts as a commentary
Present discrepant findings	To enable transparency and reliability	Unexpected findings are presented and explored
Prolonged field study	To develop in depth understanding and to build rapport	The decision to undertake each case study sequentially facilitated this aspect, enabling me to spend time in each location
Peer debriefing	To enable critical questioning as a means of enhancing accuracy	The use of a research interest group to relay findings has enabled critical challenge and an opportunity to test out findings.
External audit	To critically review processes and findings.	Supervision provided constructive criticism and to review processes.

Table 6: Approaches adopted to ensure rigour (adapted from Creswell 2003)

⁹³ The identification of themes could have resulted in a different presentation of findings (around themes rather than participant groups). However, I decided to present the findings by participant group in order to preserve the distinctiveness of each stakeholder group voice. In this way, each group provides a distinctive lens for consideration of the issues.

4.8.3 Generalisation

The extent to which one can generalise from qualitative research is contested (Guenther and Falk 2019). Limitations on generalisation are often seen as a criticism of the approach. However, I am mindful that many proponents of qualitative research (see Johnson 1997) argue that generalisation is not a useful goal for qualitative research as its meanings lie with the specific contexts of the study. This is certainly the case for this study, which provides a snapshot of the experiences of forced migrant parents and practitioners in a particular place at a defined point in time.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 264) suggest that even in situations where it is not possible to infer generalizable findings, there may be the potential for “*theoretical generalisation*” namely, the drawing out of theoretical perspectives from the study for more general application. Sandelowski (2004) takes this further arguing that by creating rich interpretative analysis from the specific context, one can contribute towards wider knowledge. A recognition of the cultural specificity of the refugee and practitioner’ narratives presented within this study limits the extent to which claims can be made regarding how the extent to which findings can be inferred to relate to other contexts and settings. However, deep analysis, and theorisation of findings, along with the rigorous research process (as explored in section 6.8.1) may result in a potential to identify a contribution towards wider knowledge and discourses related to refugee families and the practitioners who support them.

4.9 Reflections on the research process

I am keen to provide in this section more than a simplistic “retrospective” of the research process (Palaiologue et al. 2016, p.34) and instead to provide a glimpse into “*the personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing the research*” (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p.741). I was aware of undertaking this research during what seemed like a unique period in the UK’s history. Equally, the research process coincided with a challenging period in my own life. This context impacted on the research design and the way I conducted the study.

This research process began against a backdrop of Brexit (see section 1.1) with a marginal public majority to leave the European Union. The following period was characterised by binary positions leading to societal divisions. This issue and subsequent public media discourses related to the issue coloured the research

process. A racially minoritised practitioner tearfully told me that after spending her whole life in Wales, she had encountered her first experience of verbal abuse on the streets of the capital, just two weeks after the referendum vote. She was concerned that the refugees she worked with might be subject to the same treatment. A senior officer from a support agency concurred with this view “It is as if the lid has been removed from issues that we always knew were there below the surface. Things people say that would have been no-go just a few months ago, are now right out there in the open”. At the same time practitioners and strategic managers were struggling with the ongoing pressures of a period of financial austerity which surpassed anything experienced since the setting up of the post-war welfare state.

Writing this thesis three years later, we were in the middle of a global pandemic. Racially minoritized communities had been hit particularly hard and “key workers”, were in the news headlines, primarily for the role they were taking in keeping people safe, but also occasionally in relation to better working conditions⁹⁴. These contextual factors resonated strongly with my research which explores issues of race and culture as well as the tools that practitioners need to do their jobs. It is possible that had the research taken place at a different time these themes would not have emerged as strongly as they did.

Reflecting on the methodology, there are things I would do differently. An over-reliance on the spoken word as part of semi-structured interviews, provided only one way to represent meaning and for the participants to tell their stories. Incorporating visual methods (Banks 2001) may well have opened other ways of seeing and hearing the understandings that participants wished to share. The findings would certainly have been enhanced had I managed to recruit parent participants in the Valleys area, and if the Valleys focus group had gone ahead. Nonetheless, the research has generated a nuanced data set which provides insight and is valuable for informing policy and practice moving forward.

4.10 Conclusions

This chapter outlined the research philosophy underpinning the study, described the research methodology undertaken, indicated how the chosen research methods were used to generate rich data, and explored how research data was analysed and

⁹⁴ Examples might include access to Personal Protective Equipment and unsustainable workloads.

findings identified. I also discussed several other issues pertinent to the research including reliability, validity, credibility, and ethical considerations, and reflected on the research methodology, highlighting strengths of the approaches chosen, and areas where I could have made different choices. The following chapters will present the research findings.

Chapter Five

Nation of Sanctuary? A view from Strategic Actors

5.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter presents the findings from 15 semi-structured interviews with strategic actors across the two case studies areas. This participant group included elected representatives at local, Welsh and UK government, senior officers from public services and individuals from organisations with a campaigning and advocacy role. The ethical imperative to preserve participant anonymity, has been a significant challenge given the public facing nature of some of these roles. Hence, in this section I have avoided assigning pseudonyms and instead provided only generalised descriptors. Table 7 provides an overview of the participants who informed this chapter.

Five politicians including a UK Member of Parliament, two Members of Senedd (Welsh Government), two council leaders
Five senior managers in statutory services, including two local authority senior officers, two senior police officers, one health manager
Five senior officers from third sector organisations, including local projects, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and advocacy/campaigning organisations

Table 7: Strategic actor participants

Socio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) suggests that strategic decision making that takes place within the macrosystem, whilst remote and distal, can have a significant impact upon the lived experiences of the families, influencing the policy agendas which govern so many aspects of their lives. Accordingly, considering the perspectives of strategic actors, added a useful lens for analysis within the research. Using the socio-ecological model (figure four) I have started with strategic perspectives which influence the wider context, before moving to the perspectives of practitioners and finally the parents themselves⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ The rationale for this is to work inwards from the distal systems which may affect the wider context in which parents live, to the more proximate systems that exert a more immediate influence before finally and most importantly exploring the perspectives of parents themselves.

5.2 Defining the issues.

There was a consistency across all the strategic actor participants in articulating a distinctly Welsh approach to forced migration, namely a Nation of Sanctuary. The participants emphasised how this differed from a UK (or more specifically, English agenda). However, there was less consensus about whether the Welsh vision could be achieved given current devolved powers. Therefore, this chapter begins with a consideration of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary, and the extent to which this moves beyond rhetoric into reality. The case for further devolution of powers to Welsh Government is then explored. The chapter then outlines political considerations, with attention to the challenges presented by social deprivation and austerity policies. Finally, a vision for the future of migration in Wales is considered.

5.3 “This is Wales. We are different from England.”

The desire to articulate a distinctly Welsh position on migration was a theme that permeated all participant interviews. Participants variously described this as kinder, less hostile, and more welcoming than that presented by the UK Government (see section 2.3.2.1).

“I would see myself as being an advocate for a radical view of politics and a way in which we can reach out beyond our borders to look and take a more international outlook on issues facing us. So, I certainly want to play a role in developing policies and approaches which enable refugees to come to this part of the world and to Wales as a whole and to settle and to build lives here”
(Member of Senedd).

The idea of being outward looking and internationalist featured strongly in the interviews. This was frequently related to the “proud history” of Wales in welcoming people from other cultures. As discussed in section 2.3.3, this welcoming narrative noted by other writers (Giudici 2014, Williams 2015a), has been challenged (Evans 2015; Parker 2018a) as a mythology of tolerance that did not always match experiences on the ground. Strategic actors also recognised that whilst there was a strong rhetoric of Wales as a broadminded and accepting nation, and that this was indeed the lived reality for many refugees, there were also some indicators such as rise in hate crime (Home Office 2021) that suggested that this approach was not

universally embraced within Wales. Nonetheless, the participants aligned with a discourse of “welcome” and wanted to perpetuate this representation.

“We have such a strong tradition of offering sanctuary. You know, of having people from Ireland in the famines, from Somalia, people escaping from persecution, from war, whatever...This is our Welsh way” (Council Leader).

The need to emphasise divergence from the UK Hostile Environments agenda (2.3.2.1) was evident in all the interviews,

“So, I would say that we’ve been able to articulate things that they haven’t been able to do on the other side of the border. The fact that we’ve created structures in Wales that hasn’t happened elsewhere and that we have been able to articulate a political approach which hasn’t happened elsewhere has meant, we’ve been able to create a place in Wales for refugees I hope, which has been different to that elsewhere (Member of Senedd).

There was a recognition that whilst in England the policy for refugees was one of integration (Ager and Strang 2008) which required refugees and asylum seekers to fit in with British society (Oppedal and Toppelberg 2016), the approach in Wales was one of inclusion.

“From the minute you cross the Severn Bridge we are saying. You are welcome here. We want this to be a good home for you and we are going to do what it takes to make sure that you are included” (NGO manager).

In line with Bauder and Gonzalez (2018) the strategic actors suggested that this inclusive (and distinctly Welsh) approach, was best articulated using the sanctuary concept (2.3.3.1). This concept had resonance for the participants, particularly when viewed against a UK backdrop of exclusion and hostility.

“This Nation of Sanctuary umbrella is Wales saying “Look, we are different!”. ...We can to a certain extent try to shape public opinion in Wales, just mark out Wales as a different kettle of fish. We want people to receive a warm welcome in Wales and understand that we're different to England the Nation of Sanctuary has more than symbolic appeal, doesn't it? It's very important at a symbolic level in terms of symbolising what we stand for and articulating

some of our values, but it's also really practical in the way it impacts on services and the welcome that people receive” (NGO Manager).

“There are occasions when we try to be different from England for the sake of it. However, in the case of welcoming refugees and asylum seeker that difference is real and very necessary. It's about doing the right thing... It's about being on the right side of this in history” (Third sector manager).

The concept of sanctuary was helpful to the participants in articulating an ethical impetus for adopting a “*kinder and more humane*” approach. In line with Kant’s (1788) definition of a moral imperative the participants spoke of providing sanctuary as a strongly held principle which compelled individuals (and governments) to act. Rooted in beneficence, and driven by altruism, this approach dominated the interviews, with some participants confident that the ethos was shared by many Welsh citizens. The participants also stressed that the benefits of providing sanctuary were reciprocal, and that Wales had much to learn from those welcomed. This is further explored in the next section.

5.4 Sanctuary - it is in our interests too

Section 2.3.3.1 explored the importance of the concept of sanctuary within Welsh Government’s asylum policies. All the participants referred to providing sanctuary, whether at local and national level and nine also spoke of the impetus to establish Wales formally as a Nation of Sanctuary, which at the time of conducting the interviews was gaining traction politically. It is interesting to note that the term “sanctuary” was not used by any of the parents within the study, although there was a strong emphasis on notions of personal safety embodied within the term (see section 7.3). Practitioners were familiar with the term, and many mentioned the concept. For example, while discussing lengthy delays in securing support for a family practitioner Nyla, said, “*and we are supposed to be a Nation of Sanctuary!*” Tony (practitioner) viewed sanctuary as the support being provided by practitioners on the ground rather than the oratory of politicians, “*I keep hearing, we have to make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary, but that is exactly what we are providing here and now. It is not a futuristic thing!*” However, for the strategic actors, sanctuary was a central concept to which the conversation kept returning. It was conceptualised by the

strategic actors as a moral imperative, a policy intention, and an expression of national identity.

The strategic actors spoke movingly of the moral imperative for Wales to be seen to be making a positive contribution towards the refugee situation. A politician described how watching the situation unfolding on news outlets galvanised his team and his Valley community into action.

“We saw the photographs of the child who had drowned in the Mediterranean⁹⁶ and I think that shook the people here and across the UK. I launched an appeal for support for refugees, and the response was overwhelming... overwhelming! We filled this office within a matter of days with materials that people had collected” (Member of Senedd).

There was a recognition that donating items to displaced people in camps was not alone a sufficient response, and that there was an imperative to provide homes for people who had been forced to flee. However, there was also a consideration of the impact on the countries of origin of moving people across continents and in doing so depleting capacity for rebuilding society within those affected nations,

“Depending on the complexity of the situation, you are better off supporting people ...in a country close by, if possible. But when like in Syria, you have a genocidal dictator... there is no possibility of people going home and no chance of rebuilding that country... Bringing people miles and miles away from their homes ...there are significant issues and there is an ethical issue there as well which is about if everyone comes out of the region, how do you rebuild that-in terms of doctors, nurses, teachers? It also tends to be people who are more educated and more mobile that leave Syria. We need a structure in place that enables people to establish different lives, here and elsewhere” (Politician).

This view aligned with Betts' and Collier's (2017) vision for resourcing and providing in region support to refugees with a focus on rebuilding for the future. However, there was also a recognition that this may not always be possible and that there would probably always be a need to provide sanctuary for those fleeing hostility.

⁹⁶ Here the participant was referring to the image of Alain Kurdi discussed in 2.3.1

“Welsh Government needs to be plugged into international structures, international alliances, and willing to play a role in those international decisions. So, I would say Wales playing its part in the way that other countries have played their part in supporting and sustaining a human society in different places, if that means different providing sanctuary, so be it. But if it means providing supporting provide and help in different ways, then you do that as well.... I would not see that as an alternative, but as two sides of the same coin, whereby you provide support sanctuary for people, but at the same time, actively provide developmental support in different parts of the world” (Politician).

Within the strategic actor interviews there was a strong focus on working internationally to secure durable solutions (United Nations 2019) However, the participants were keen for Wales to be contributing positively to such solutions through the hosting of refugees, described by some of the participants as *“doing our share.”* This was most starkly seen in the Valleys case study, which was not a dispersal area.

“When the Syrian scheme was announced, I was immediately on the phone to key partners to start thinking about how we could offer sanctuary and homes to these people” (Council Officer).

“I realised that to meet the commitment, we need to open up areas that haven't traditionally taken refugees and sure we've got some really strong community spirit here. It's something that's seen by the community as an asset for themselves but maybe it's something they can share if further exposed to people from other cultures” (Council Leader).

Four of the participants in the Valleys case study intimated that they had been willing to go further than required by Government, and one council leader discussed a television interview where he challenged the UK government about failure to meet its commitments in relation to resettling vulnerable children.

“They put a statement out that said the Councils had refused because we didn't have the capacity. And I called around a few of my colleagues across Wales and in England as well, and none of them had said that to the DWP,

and so we challenged the DWP to say, 'give us evidence that councillors have this to you' and they couldn't come up with anything" (Council Leader).

Whilst there was an emphasis on the altruism of sanctuary, four participants were keen to conceptualise the hosting of people seeking sanctuary as something that could have benefits for Wales too.

"This is not a zero-sum game. It is more of a reciprocal relationship. We provide a welcome and a new home, but in return we can benefit from all that these families have to offer. This might be a different world view, or it might be skills that we can benefit from. These are strong and resilient people. They have a lot to offer. There is learning for us and potential gain too" (Council Officer).

This council officer, who was from the Valleys case study, discussed how some of the families she had worked with were very resourceful and entrepreneurial and how the Valleys would benefit from this energy and initiative.

Another participant with a research and advocacy role spoke about how Wales could benefit from reimagining the way it understands migration.

"I would like us to stop talking about welcoming forced migrants in deficit terms. At the UK level, there is a big emphasis on reducing the numbers of migrants coming into the UK. I'd like to see Wales moving in the same direction as Scottish Government where they want to conceive migration in different ways and think about what it means in terms of an ageing population, brain drain, losing graduates and all those kinds of things...Let's construe it as something positive from which Wales has much to gain" (Third Sector Manager).

In common with the practitioner participants, the strategic actors were committed to conceptualising the hosting of forced migrants in positive terms and to embracing reciprocity as a key part of the hosting experience. The term "sanctuary" provided a useful construction for articulating this positive and distinctly Welsh approach. Recognising the affirmative and progressive symbolism provided by the sanctuary concept is important, particularly in the way that it shapes how Wales thinks and

talks about migration. However, the participants were also keen to explore the extent to which the rhetoric of sanctuary was matched by experiences on the ground.

5.4.1 Nation of Sanctuary: rhetoric and reality.

The vision of a Nation of Sanctuary commanded widespread support⁹⁷. Amongst the third sector participants there was much emphasis on the work that had been undertaken to build this consensus. There was also a recognition that there was still much to do, to move the sanctuary concept beyond an ideal and into a reality.

“In 2015 as we were going through the Assembly elections someone had the idea of setting up coalition of organisations ahead of the election, I think there were about 15 to 17 organisations, and it was chaired by the Welsh Refugee Council. A manifesto for the elections was developed- seven steps to sanctuary. Out of this coalition has come the Nation of Sanctuary Steering Group which has taken the work forward” (Third Sector Manager).

The collective power of the coalition in driving forward the sanctuary agenda was recognised by another participant:

“The good thing about having a coalition is that a lot of the individual members had some level of government funding. As a coalition you can say things you might not ordinarily say as an individual organisation. so that's been good because it's a broad network of organisations. It's a force to be reckoned with” (Third Sector Manager).

Other participants saw Welsh Government's role in taking forward the Nation of Sanctuary approach as more proactive, emphasising the need for the agenda to be driven and coordinated at government level.

“I mean fair play to Welsh Government they can't deliver everything on their own because they're not delivery agents, but they can pull everyone together and say, “This is Wales, and this is all the different sectors of Wales working together along this journey to being a Nation of Sanctuary.” That is exactly what is happening now. This is the journey we're on. This is the vision, and

⁹⁷ The interviews took place before the publication of the Nation of Sanctuary– Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan in January 2019

these are the actions we're going to take to drive it forward" (Third Sector Manager).

Other participants were keen to stress the comprehensive and cohesive nature of the planning in relation to the Nation of Sanctuary approach.

"When I first read the action plan, I thought "Oh my, they've really thought about this. They're finally organising themselves." I feel a bit more like somebody's taking notice of what the needs are. I also felt this is something we can contribute to as a service" (Third Sector Manager).

Participants recognised that the sanctuary concept was effective in influencing the dialogue and discourse around migration to focus on refuge and safety, in direct contrast to other more hostile discourses (Hintjens and Pouri 2014). Hence, the rhetoric associated with Nation of Sanctuary was seen to have value, quite separate from what was happening on the ground. Birks (2012) recognises the importance of rhetoric in public policy, arguing that words are powerful and can be used to shape understandings and exert influence. For the participants, the rhetoric was important because it defined how issues of forced migration were considered, as articulated by a third sector manager.

"By talking about asylum differently, we begin to think about it differently and then that governs our actions and attitudes at individual and societal levels".

As well as influencing the discourses around migration, participants felt that the sanctuary agenda had a positive influence on public services for the families.

"The language of sanctuary is important because it impacts on the services and the way they are delivered. It's a great framework. It's engaging. It's supportive.... and we can feel we're aligned with it. There's a similar belief and value system across the services, that is influencing all our practice. It also helps when engaging with people and partnerships who may not yet be over that threshold of understanding and helping them to see what it is they can do or provide to local level" (Third Sector Manager).

The inclusive language of sanctuary was juxtaposed against the rhetoric of a hostile environment. As Hintjens and Pouri (2014) contend, the importance of the gentler

and more humane vocabulary of sanctuary as a much-needed antidote to more hostile constructions cannot be overstated.

The aspiration of Wales as Nation of Sanctuary provided a unifying rhetoric for discussing issues of forced migration. However, there was less agreement about the extent to which this aspiration had been achieved. Participants discussed the extent to which this rhetoric matched the lived reality of the families.

“We have good policy intentions in Wales but actually it's about the implementation on the ground and how it's interpreted isn't it?” (Third sector Manager).

One participant referred to the Birmingham Declaration Cities of Sanctuary (2014) in exploring the extent to which the five principles (see section 2.3.3) could be applied to Wales. It was quickly ascertained that:

“So many of the levers which govern the experience of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales sit outside the remit of Welsh Government” (Third Sector Manager).

This view aligned with Parker's (2018a) exploration of the impact of non-devolved Home Office functions on the lives of asylum seekers in Wales (sections 2.3.2.1).

The Home Office functions had a significant impact on the experiences of individuals and were often a source of much stress (sections 3.3.3.1).

“To an extent, our vision is hampered by UK government policy and Home Office procedures. Migration is not in Welsh Government's control, and neither is refugee support” (Council Leader).

This is explored more fully in the next section, which considers the limitations of devolution in enabling Wales to realise its vision of a Nation of Sanctuary.

5.5 Devolution and self-determination

Section 2.3.3 considered the establishment of The National Assembly for Wales in 1999. As famously stated by the then Secretary of State for Wales,

“Devolution is a process. It is not an event, and neither is it a journey with a fixed endpoint. The devolution process is enabling us to make our own

decisions and set our own priorities, that is the important point” (House of Commons Library 2022, p.4).

Since 1997, there have been incremental increases in the powers of Welsh Government, although to date that has not included asylum support. Politically, there is much impetus to promote Wales’s role as a Nation of Sanctuary. The Welsh Government response to the report published by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee “I used to be someone” (Sargeant 2017) accepted 18 out of 19 recommendations, either fully or in part, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to improve in services for refugee and asylum-seeking families in Wales. One participant pointed out that within Welsh Government there are champions for change, not just in name but also in practice. However, they went on to emphasise that politicians need to balance competing political concerns and that the real impetus for change was coming from within the refugee community and support services.

“The change is coming from the grassroots, so on social media, within communities, there’s lots of movement around promoting refugee voices, organising within BAME communities to make sure that we’re starting to look at things from a different angle, and I think that is really what will create that change” (Third Sector Manager).

Another participant stressed the cross-party agreement on Wales’s current and potential role as a Nation of Sanctuary.

“The Welsh MPs and the Welsh AMs are all at one on this, I don’t think there’s a fag paper⁹⁸ between us in terms of we all want to be more welcoming” (Politician).

A policy officer from a third sector organisation, stressed that it is important to move beyond rhetoric into concrete actions and to stop using non-devolved functions as an excuse for inaction.

“It was clear from the committee report that there are issues to do with UK government policy that need to be addressed, but there are many things that

⁹⁸ Fag is slang for cigarette. A cigarette paper is very thin. This is a British colloquial term, the meaning of which is that there is very little between their positions

the Welsh Government can do. They have power over transport, they have power over education, they have power over housing, they have power over health, and they have a responsibility to support people within Welsh communities. ...Yes, fair enough, asylum policy lies at a UK level, but there's more they could do to lobby the UK government on issues that impact on local authorities in Wales and impact on Welsh Government policy" (Third Sector Manager).

However, they were positive about some aspects of the Welsh Government's approach to integration.

"The Welsh Government strategy states that refugee inclusion begins on day one so that they recognise that the journey somebody has as an asylum seeker has a massive implication on how someone will integrate into a community once they get status" (Third Sector Manager).

This account emphasised that ensuring a positive asylum journey is essential to foster positive engagement, integration, and citizenship. Nevertheless, another participant expressed how the devolution debate was sometimes used as an excuse for inaction.

"Let's stop talking about what we don't have control over, and start thinking about where we can make changes, and what we can do. There is so much more that we could do. Small changes that we have the power to make, could make a huge difference to people's lives!" (Third Sector Manager)

These suggested improvements are further explored in section 5.8.

The strategic actors were keen to present a vision of Wales as a welcoming country which provides a positive experience of welcome and integration, as well as benefitting from their contribution.

"We can control the welcome that people receive when they get here, how they are treated and supported and included" (Third Sector Manager).

"We need to be harnessing refugee family's skills, abilities and contributions from the outset, seeing how they can enhance our country and not viewing them as those who just take" (Statutory Services Manager).

This idea of reciprocity is explored in Chapter Six. Within this conception, the “voice” of refugee asylum seeking families was crucial.

“The voice is so absolutely important isn’t it, in shaping that? Because otherwise it does take on that ‘done to’ rather than ‘done with’ and it’s seeing people as almost as recipients of services rather than citizens engaged in their own communities and self-determined in their own lives” (Third Sector Manager).

However, one Council leader from the Valleys was keen to emphasise the structures and processes that are necessary when creating a City, Valley, or indeed Nation of Sanctuary. At local level, he referred to strategic and operational groups that supported resettlement, ensuring that all key partners were informed, engaged, and equipped. He attributed the local success of the programme to effective management emphasising the importance of starting small, building solid foundations, and getting it right for those families in the first instance. Following the local success of the Syrian resettlement Programme, the Council had signed up to participate in the Vulnerable Accompanied Children scheme. This idea of creating solid foundations was supported by another participant who identified that in their area, a single agency had taken the lead but had not managed to build that supportive multi-agency partnership and were in danger of working in silos.

“If our community was engaged in supporting families as they arrived, we could have a lot more families here. But because they’re not being engaged and organisations are operating in silos, we can’t” (Third Sector).

The current limitations of Welsh devolved powers were a source of frustration for some participants.

“We can portray ourselves as a Nation of Sanctuary, but what does that mean really, when we haven’t got all the powers, we need to make that a reality?” (Statutory Service Manager).

“If you go to the Welsh Government (with an issue), they can say “it’s not devolved.” It’s a good opt out really” (Third Sector Manager).

The same manager discussed how along with decision making about who got to stay within the country, the important area of refugee support and housing⁹⁹ was located outside Welsh Government's sphere of control. Giving Wales the responsibility for these areas would, they argued, make it much easier for Wales to develop humane services that would fit with its vision of sanctuary. This aligns with consistent calls for an increase in devolved powers (Evans 2020).¹⁰⁰ The Home Office powers remain reserved by Westminster, thus limiting the influence that Welsh Government can have over these functions. For some of the participants, the solution to the situation, was seen as campaigning for additional powers for Welsh Government, or indeed for Welsh Independence. However, others felt that even within existing legislative arrangements, there was more that Welsh Government could do to influence the Home Office agenda, primarily through lobbying.

"Seriously, I think Wales could apply pressure for change more strongly"
(Third Sector Manager).

Another participant envisaged a stronger role for Welsh Government in scrutinising Westminster policy on migration.

"There hasn't been done enough by the Welsh Government to keep an eye on UK government policy and how that would impact people in Wales, particularly immigration policy. If you look at other policy areas like welfare reform changes, Welsh Government were bang on it, commissioning reports by the Institute of Fiscal Studies on what impact this will have for people in Wales. But when it comes to immigration policy generally, or refugees and asylum seekers specifically, we're still on the back foot" (Manager of statutory service).

A politician made a similar point, stressing how essential it was for Government to be challenged by an effective opposition that sought to hold it to account on issues related to migration.

⁹⁹ Housing is devolved to Welsh Government, entailing that the Senedd can legislate about housing. However, housing for asylum seekers is still controlled by the UK Government (the Home Office).

¹⁰⁰ Following the Wales Act 2017, the Senedd moved from a system of conferred powers (established under the Government of Wales Act 1998) to a model of reserved powers more akin with the Scottish Parliament model. This allows the devolved Government to legislate on any matters except those expressly reserved by UK Parliament. However, asylum housing remains a function reserved by Westminster.

“The UK government position in relation to refugees has been extremely disappointing. Even when we've made commitments, for example, under the Dubs amendment¹⁰¹, we've only ended up taking a small proportion of what we promised, which is disappointing. This also needs to be understood against a backdrop where devolved bodies in local government wrote to the government indicating they were willing to take more. There was a real desire at grassroots political level to take more refugees, but the UK government has just been intransigent on making progress” (Politician).

The same participant outlined their own commitment to apply political pressure on this issue.

“We have a history of internationalism and humanitarianism in Wales, and it is incumbent on Welsh MPs on both the back and front benches to press the UK to do more.”

Participants pointed out that as well as Home Office functions, other important public policy areas which have implications for refugees¹⁰² fall outside the province of the Welsh Government. This was seen as highly relevant in the ability to tackle issues such as destitution and no recourse to public funds (see section 2.3.2). Once again, this led some participants to lend support to burgeoning discussions around Welsh independence.

Participants noted that even where a certain public service remained the responsibility of the UK government, it was still possible to take forward a distinctly Welsh approach. This was most evident within policing and participants were aware of the efforts of Welsh police services to embrace a proactive approach to forced migrants.

“To my understanding the way that policing is delivered in Wales is quite different to England, and they have a real focus on the community engagement aspect and not being adversarial. There's been a lot of good work that's happened in Wales around engagement with the families and

¹⁰¹ The Dubs Amendment to the 2016 Immigration Act was designed to ensure that the Government would continue to allow unaccompanied and separated refugee children in Europe the opportunity to be reunited with family members here in the UK after the Brexit process was completed.

¹⁰² An example of this would be welfare benefits, a function reserved by Westminster and yet having implications for people in Wales.

communities by police, whether that's through the community cohesion agenda or just a desire to understand the communities and the issues better" (Third Sector Manager).

This was supported by a senior police officer who explained that whilst policing was not a devolved function, the services enjoyed close and productive relationships with both Welsh Government and local strategic partnerships.

"So, we are fully signed up to the sanctuary approach we have here in Wales and eager to play our role within that agenda. And we do have an important role to play..." (Senior Police Officer).

This aspect of proactive policing was a finding that emerged strongly from all participants groups and is further explored in 5.6.3.

Therefore, whilst the limitations of devolution were seen as a significant barrier in taking forward the Nation of Sanctuary vision, the participants agreed that there was still scope for positive action within existing powers. However, devolution was not the only challenge that emerged and there were several other political considerations and compromises that needed to be negotiated.

5.6 Political considerations and compromises

Chapter two explored the UK political context in relation to how migration is conceptualised. A growth in populism (Tormey 2018) was noted, along with changes in public perceptions of migration linked to the Brexit debate (Cuerden and Rogers 2017). The strategic actors, especially those in elected roles, were acutely aware of the need to balance values-based policy with what would be deemed electorally palatable for the communities they served. However, the strategic actors all recognised the importance of working with communities and entering constructive dialogue as well as of listening to and engaging with concerns raised.

An example of this proactive attempt to engage communities was discussed within the Valleys case study. As already noted, prior to participating in the Syrian scheme, these communities had not traditionally hosted forced migrants¹⁰³. One of the participants described how the borough *"took great pride"* in the fact that they were

¹⁰³ Although, as Jones and Lever (2014) point out, the South Wales Valleys have traditionally and recently attracted migrant workers from diverse countries.

one of the first two authorities to sign up for the scheme and to receive families. Nonetheless, within such communities, immigration generally had been seen as contentious issue linked largely to the indigenous population and job shortages (Awan-Scully 2018). A council leader spoke of the community engagement undertaken to “prepare the ground” for families arriving.

“I personally knocked on every door on the street where the family would be based to explain what was happening and why. I was a bit apprehensive, because I thought I might get a bit of a backlash, but people were pleased to see that it was a family coming in. They were very accepting and very willing to offer a welcome” (Politician).

This notion of the participants being pleasantly surprised by the reactions of local communities was echoed across the Valleys case study.

“We can make assumptions about our populations based on stereotypes and the media and then they surprise you. When we first started discussions, we literally had offers of families taking unaccompanied children or offering meals for families. Obviously, these offers are not always practical, but it does show the willingness and good will in our communities” (Statutory Services Manager).

Similarly, a council leader recalled an incident just after the announcement that they would be taking Syrian families.

“It was a rainy day in July. Whether it was organised on social media we don't know but there were whispers of a far-right demonstration against the refugees. They didn't show in great numbers, maybe a handful, but what did happen with the counter demonstration of 70 people showing up in support of the families. I was upset for the families to think that this was going on, and for them to feel that they weren't welcome, but we've had no repeat of it and actually it's been balanced by their personal experiences of neighbours being very welcoming.”

Heartened by the community response, participants were considering further hosting opportunities.

“Using the experience of the Syrian scheme as a learning curve to see if there is more that we could offer and do to support refugees” (Politician).

Another participant explained this strategy further, suggesting an intentionality related to the small numbers of families being hosted.

“Keeping it small and managing it well was critical. One of the dangers in this is that through goodwill and intention and absolute commitment you open your arms, but you haven’t got the right infrastructure and support there. The first steps are really important and important to get them right because that will create the capacity and the community knowledge and understanding to enable a positive experience of integration, so it’s all about quality in the first instance not quantity” (Statutory Services Manager).

There was a sense that, to keep the community on board, it was necessary in the first instance to host small numbers, although there was a recognition that this approach would not build the infrastructure needed. Aligning with Kaufmann (2021), there was a recognition that the Valleys communities were likely to be socially conservative and resistant to change.

“We were very mindful that public opinion sways very quickly. When we first made the announcement, you had the front pages covered with the small boy that was washed up on that beach and a real surge of support and a want to help. It was about harnessing that support, whilst also bearing in mind the community cohesion tensions that could possibly arise from taking many families at any given point in time. So, we were very mindful of going into the programme with a ‘softly, softly’ approach, let’s look at what we can do to support one or two cases and then learn from that and build on it” (Council Leader).

This perspective recognised that communities with low geographical and social mobility or “settlers”, as defined by (Rose 2011), are strongly motivated by access to resources, which they may understand as both finite and scarce, and consequently alert to any perceived threat to these resources. The strategic actors saw part of their role as “*changing hearts and minds*” (Politician) and of counteracting negative media portrayals of immigration, which did not distinguish notions of sanctuary from economic migration.

“They see places in the North where communities are changing because of migration, and they don’t want that here... So, it helps to be able to say, here are a small number of families we can help. They are coming from Syria, and you’ve seen that on the news. Then, overwhelmingly, people want us to do our bit” (Statutory Services Manager).

“While we don’t have Trump’s rhetoric quite so badly here, I’ve seen the environment his rhetoric has created. There was a worry, when accepting the first families, that if it was done in too public a way, if it was obvious where the refugees physically were, then we would need to protect their safety. No, I don’t think it’s most people that would be negative and unwelcoming towards them, but there’s obviously a minority out there who you see on social media, and in other places, that perhaps would cause problems. So, I think the difficulty is not party political or anything like that, I think it’s to do with political management of public opinion” (Politician).

All participants noted that the Brexit debate had brought issues surrounding migration to the fore.

“I feel that since the Brexit vote some people now feel very comfortable expressing opinions that are borderline racist and saying things that would have been considered unacceptable before” (Third Sector Manager).

However, there was a difference across the two case studies relating to how the impacts of Brexit were discussed and understood. This reflected a strong Leave vote in the Valleys, whilst the city voted remain. Within the city context, discussions centred around social cohesion, whereas within the Valleys the emphasis was on social and economic deprivation. The nuances of these issues are further explored within the ensuing sections.

5.6.1 Brexit, social deprivation and left behind communities.

The Valleys’ strong leave vote in the Brexit referendum, generated much academic interest in the reasons behind the vote and how it aligned to social attitudes (Stephens 2019). This was also a focus of interest for the participants who recognised that there was a potential for Brexit to impact on how people who were

seen as different from the indigenous population were spoken about and treated (see also Ceurden and Rogers 2017).

“I feel that the Brexit issue will be with us for a number of years yet and that poses challenges for us in the public sector. We also need to recognise the world events and local events feed into public perceptions. If a million migrants and refugees are allowed into Germany and then one or two of those go on to commit acts of terrorism, the policy around accepting refugees becomes an issue...I just know the on the ground these things have such an impact on refugee families and no doubt on other visible minority communities that we have as well” (Politician).

The participants recognised that what happened at the macro level, both in terms of world events but also in relation to policy making and media discourses, could have a significant impact at local level¹⁰⁴. Community engagement and dialogue were seen as the best tools in countering such influences. However, there was a recognition that the Brexit vote also highlighted some deep-seated concerns within the Valleys communities (see section 2.3.2.6).

Scully (2016) argued that whilst on a surface level the Brexit vote in the Valleys could be seen as xenophobia, it was more closely associated with concerns about wages and ability of public services to cope. As one participant reflected:

“Yes, there was a strong leave vote here. They worry about jobs, but to a lesser extent they worry about whether public services will cope with extra people. For some people, there is no distinguishing between refugees, asylum seekers or people coming across Europe for jobs. It is all seen as a threat” (Statutory Services Manager).

There was a recognition that economic circumstances were extremely challenging for many families in Wales. This was supported by a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) that found that in 2018, almost a quarter of people in Wales were living in poverty. Some of the participants were keen to unpack how the experience of poverty was related to attitudes towards migration.

¹⁰⁴ This is in line with Bronfenbrenner's socio- ecological theory wherein the macrosystem focuses on how broader socio-cultural elements affect the individual. Hence, culture that individuals are immersed within may influence their beliefs and perceptions about events that occur.

“I’m afraid in the last several years people have been finding it tough on the ground. In this area we have a lot of unstable employment, a lot of zero-hour contracts, part time working and the like. And then they look for ready scapegoats. Parts of the right-wing media will feed into that” (Politician).

“There’s a strong feeling in some of our communities that “Charity begins at home” and we need to sort out our own problems linked to employment and poverty before accepting others in. And the issues are real. You only need to look at foodbank use locally. But hosting a small number of refugees is not going to affect that one way or the other. These are structural issues that need addressing” (Statutory Services Manager).

In line with Goodwin and Malazzo (2017), participants suggested that whilst in the minds of individuals in the community, their economic circumstances were linked to migration, this was false correlation. Several participants used the term “left behind communities” to describe the Valleys. The term embodied notions of dissatisfaction and alienation (Sensier and Devine 2017), engendered by not having benefitted from economic growth. In relation to the often-touted statistic that south Wales was a net beneficiary of EU funds, which would be lost with Brexit, one participant spoke of local attitudes.

“Yes, they can see improvements in infrastructure- roads and roundabouts but what they want is jobs. Unfortunately, this lack of jobs then translates into fear of anyone who might take those jobs or suppress local wages. So, it’s not xenophobia as such, it’s a kind of protectionism or self-preservation” (Third Sector Manager).

However, some participants were more equivocal.

“I think that discourse is as toxic here as is elsewhere. There’s been significant votes for UKIP¹⁰⁵ in these areas ...I think a lot of the votes are based on prejudice. They do express a sense of being left behind by globalization and the austerity agenda hasn’t helped. The communities are

¹⁰⁵ UK Independence Party (UKIP) was founded in 1993 on a platform of campaigning to take Britain out of the European Union.

quite inward looking and don't always take that broader perspective"
(Politician).

Three participants from the Valleys communities stressed that the Leave vote was not explicitly linked to racism. They were keen to portray the communities in a positive light.

"It is not helpful to suggest that the area is racist when it is not. We get enough bad publicity here. Our role is to talk these communities up" (Statutory Services Manager).

In line with Alabrese et al. (2016), participants strongly identified the Leave vote with economic dissatisfaction and political anger. Accordingly, they argued that for most local citizens this did not manifest itself in hostility towards migrants, except within the narrow focus of competition for jobs. There was also a suggestion that having experienced deprivation themselves, there would be more empathy towards others in difficult circumstances.

"I don't like the word deprived but these areas have got social challenges. They know what it is to experience hardship and therefore they can be sympathetic to refugees who have experienced difficulties in other ways. They've also got really strong support mechanisms in place that families can make use of" (Statutory Services Manager).

"We are not a rich local authority, but we are generous spirited we are willing to do more if the government would let us, I've been out and met with the families and it seems that the council is doing a good job. The families are enjoying living here and feel welcome in their community" (Council Leader).

The interviews within the City case study, an area that voted remain in the EU referendum was very different. The strategic actors had also noted a change in social attitudes since the Brexit vote, but in this case, their focus was on issues of social cohesion.

5.6.2 Community cohesion

Devine (2018b) highlighted a rise in hate crime as evidence for a change in social attitudes following the Brexit vote. Within the city case study, this was seen as a particular area of concern by strategic actors.

“Hate crimes are a symptom of cohesion breaking down, and if you look at in recent human history every example of genocide started with a breakdown of in cohesion and hate crimes happening. Nazi Germany as an example, the Jews or other ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, religious communities- all persecuted in the street openly. Spat at, victims of hate crime, but that went unchecked by authorities and because of this you have greater breakdown. It then becomes acceptable to assault them in the street, and then you have quote unquote “a Jewish problem” and it leads to annihilation. That sounds dramatic, but you just look at the examples in Eastern Europe” (Senior Police Officer).

Eight participants emphasised that they had heard more reports of racist comments and harassment of forced migrants since the referendum.

“There are more micro aggressions¹⁰⁶ happening for sure and maybe macro aggressions too, although fortunately that kind of overt harassment is still unusual” (Third Sector Manager).

“When constituents lobby me, it's usually in favour of supporting refugees and asylum seekers. However, during the last week of EU referendum, I had some unpleasant communications about why we wouldn't want refugees here. mainly relating to Mr. Farage's famous poster¹⁰⁷” (Politician).

The participants agreed that promoting social cohesion was a priority needing intentional and affirmative action. The important and proactive role of police in promoting social cohesion was emphasised. This seemed counter-intuitive, juxtaposed against a broader context of creeping criminalisation of migration, extensive use of asylum detention and erosion of entitlements (Webber 2014).

¹⁰⁶ A micro aggression refers to statements, actions, or incidents considered to be subtle, unintended, or indirect discrimination against members of a marginalized group (Wing, 2010)

¹⁰⁷ The poster described by the participant here was used by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and is further discussed in section 2.3.1.

Moreover, journalistic reporting and emerging research have been highly critical of police treatment of migrants in Europe, particularly in transit and in informal refugee camps (McGee and Pelham 2018). However, across all three participant groups, there was a recognition that the Police Service was integral to community cohesion and had an important role to play in building trust with forced migrants, encouraging reporting of hate crime and, innovatively, in inducting new arrivals into their host communities.

One of the foremost priorities as discussed by participants was the need to build trust with marginalised groups, including those seeking sanctuary in Wales.

“Building trust is part of establishing our legitimacy. We police by consent in this country and to have that consent you must represent the communities that you serve. Asylum seekers and refugees are part of those communities, however transient they may be, however short term that might be in the end, they are still part of our community. We also recognise, of course, that there are other communities who then interact with those minority communities and that this does have an impact on the local community tensions, so we have a responsibility to prevent crime and to protect people especially where there are elements of vulnerability. Establishing trustful relationships is key to this” (Senior Police Officer).

The officer described some of the approaches taken to establishing that trust, which included creating partnership arrangements with other agencies that already enjoyed those trustful relationships.

“We try to be proactive rather than reactive. Some of the things we do you wouldn’t normally see like an officer sitting down with families having a “cuppa with a copper”. There are lots of other agencies to deal with refugees and asylum seekers, however we recognised that we have the community cohesion agenda and identifying working with hard-to-reach groups who may feel frightened or intimidated to report crimes to the police. That’s our business, so we try to build relationships and in doing so we step into areas that we wouldn’t normally associate with police saying like being part of community activities and actually doing one to one work to build up trust” (Senior Police Officer).

This community engagement was carefully planned to avoid intimidation.

“We have had football tournaments with the police. The refugees are always pleasantly surprised at how approachable the police are here, especially those who have had negative experiences of police in France. The informal contact makes it more likely that they would feel comfortable reporting crimes, especially hate crime” (Third Sector Manager).

As well as the informal opportunities to build relationships, the police had delivered a highly successful Police English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)¹⁰⁸ course where officers had the opportunity not just to teach English but to understand the laws of the land and how the police service operated.

“The emphasis was on what the service can do for you and breaking down barriers that existed. The feedback was excellent. But it also helped us to address areas where there are cultural differences or misunderstandings that may occur. For example, many of the countries of origin have very different ages of consent, and not knowing that could lead you to break the law. Also, culturally, it is common in some countries to have large gatherings of men on the streets late at night, whilst here communities may find that intimidating, so it’s about finding ways to build mutual understanding” (Senior Police Officer).

Police officers also recognised the importance of recruitment for ensuring that they were able to deliver a consistent approach.

“When it comes to recruitment, I always make sure I put diversity question in there just to, you know, test an individual’s moral compass to see what’s in their heart in terms of the way that they work. It’s so important that we all sing from the same hymn sheet, especially about hate crime. It’s my hope that from the community engagement we do, some individuals from refugee communities will see policing as a good career for them, and then we will become more diverse and more representative” (Senior Police Officer).

Other participants were complimentary about police, both in terms of building engagement and responding to incidents where families had experienced crime.

¹⁰⁸ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is aimed at non-native English speakers, looking to take up a new language or validate their skills.

“The police make it clear that the service is for everyone. That refugee and asylum seekers will be treated fairly and that the police genuinely care about their safety and wellbeing. When individuals have contacted the police here, the response has always been swift, respectful and helpful” (Third Sector Manager).

All the participants felt that there were effective policies and procedures in place for addressing hate crime and for building trustful relationships with communities. Partnership arrangements were presented as key to this agenda, and it was felt that the proactive approach shown by police often prevented problems arising. However, a growing concern related to online hate crime.

“We are getting far more reports of hate related abuse threats online through Twitter Facebook which crosses police boundaries and that makes it difficult to police, not impossible but logistically it's a challenge. I don't know what the answer is at the moment. it's a big problem it's something we need to look at politically” (Senior Police Officer).

Similarly, where there were incidents of radicalisation affecting individuals in Wales, intelligence suggested that the radicalisation¹⁰⁹ had taken place online and not within the local community.

“We have had highly publicised incidents when males have been recruited and radicalised but there's certainly no intelligence to suggest anybody is being locally radicalised in any establishment or any area in. Our intelligence is its online that we're having the problems, but in the grand scheme of things it's relatively quiet, quite harmonious really. It's the same with far-right groups, we do have some small incidents, but they're not very well organised to be honest. They don't come too much. And there is a strong sense in our services and communities that we won't tolerate this. It is not how we see ourselves and our communities” (Senior Police Officer).

¹⁰⁹ Radicalisation refers to the action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues. In the context of Wales this could refer to both far right and here refers to both far right and Islamic radicalisation.

In contrast to Daley (2009) who found that refugees were very isolated,¹¹⁰ the City case study identified numerous opportunities for building relationships, fostering understanding, and breaking down barriers. The partnerships between support agencies and the police service were integral and participants recognised the importance of community engagement, organised initiatives, and support in creating productive community relationships.

“I don't think we're perfect. We will never be perfect, but we pick up most of what goes on through a variety of process is mainly through really good links on the ground with communities and our partners informing us” (Senior Police Officer).

However, participants were cognisant of the threats that unregulated online spaces presented to community cohesion, and the need to be ever vigilant. Moreover, there was a recognition that creating harmonious communities, fostering mutual respect, and encouraging trust, demanded intentional and focused work. This was increasingly difficult as the financial resources of organisations became ever more limited.

5.6.3 Austerity in public services

Fetzer (2019) recognises that attitudes towards migration tend to become more hostile during periods of financial constraint, and when austerity policies dominate. Strategic actors acknowledged that public funds for many key priorities were limited. Whilst the public may be concerned that migration adds pressure to already stretched resources within core services like health and education (Cohen 2011), participants were concerned about the diminishing of resources specifically targeted towards supporting forced migrants.

“It is a nonsense to talk of the high cost of refugees’ use of services like health. It is a drop in the ocean! And fortunately, our Refugee Inclusion Strategy does ensure we do have those services that are free at the point of clinical need for asylum seekers, which is not necessarily the case for

¹¹⁰ Daley (2009) found a lack of meaningful relationships between refugees and others resulting in isolation, fear, and prejudice. This is further discussed in section 3.4.1.

secondary healthcare in England. However, what we are finding is that it is harder to get funding to continue support services” (Third Sector Manager).

Strategic actors reflected that whilst it was often possible to get funds for new initiatives, securing funding to continue existing services was difficult. This meant that services were continually trying to reinvent themselves to hit changing priorities to stay afloat.

“So much of our funding comes from grants. I spend a lot of time completing grant applications and chasing funding. The rest comes from trust funds or donations. No government funding as such. It is an issue because it causes so much uncertainty. It makes it difficult to plan. We are a big provider of services for, but it feels like we're not recognised in some respects. That is frustrating. Having the money would be great but it's the official recognition in a way, that acknowledgement that what we do is valid and important. That would be good” (Third Sector Manager).

Two other managers pointed out the impacts of funding uncertainty on partnership working.

“We are partners in delivering services and we want to be collaborative, but we also recognise that we are often in competition for grant monies. There is a tension there” (Third Sector Manager).

“Partnerships work really well until you come to re-commissioning of services and sometimes suddenly you become competitors, so it's a double-edged sword” (Third Sector Manager).

This tension often resulted in a return to silo working. Statutory sector partners were aware of the funding pressures faced by the third sector, and this negatively impacted their ability to signpost effectively.

“Capacity is an issue for all of us. It always will be. I think all our services have experienced budget cuts in real terms. Also, reduction in third sector provision is a big factor as well in terms of our ability to access these community-based services. Some of that's been lost because we haven't got the services that we used previously. That has affected our partnership working, so for example, we used to hold a drop in every week but now the funding for that

service has been lost and we have had to discontinue the service” (Statutory Service Manager).

For the strategic actors, insecure funding also impacted on their ability to retain staff, who would often leave jobs for more secure contracts, in some cases leaving the sector as well as the organisation. This resulted in loss of organisational knowledge and skills.

“Staff are our greatest resource. It is such a waste when experienced staff who love their jobs and have so much to offer leave the sector in search of more secure employment. But at the same time, they have mortgages and commitments. They need to do what is best for their families” (Third Sector Manager).

There was a recognition that as funding had become tighter, certain activities had been reduced or lost, often to the detriment of the service user experience. Some examples of this included trips and community engagement activities, which were so important for building relationships and fostering social cohesion. Moreover, there was a recognition that when resources are constrained, training and development activities for staff were often the first thing to be limited. Aligning with the findings of Jewson et al. (2015), even in a time of austerity, the managers still viewed training as important. However, limited resources often resulted in tightening up eligibility for courses or reducing frequency of training offers. There was however some evidence that limited resources had caused the organisations to work more smartly, sharing training, cascading skills, and making use of networks and partnerships.

5.7 Partnerships

Across both case study areas partnership working was valued by participants and despite the numerous challenges, partnerships continued to work well at strategic and operational levels, both locally and nationally.

“It is the Coalition Partnership that I credit with driving forward the Nation of Sanctuary approach” (Third Sector Manager).

“We have developed strong partnerships locally, so we can learn from one another as we enter this new world of supporting refugees” (Statutory Service Manager, Valleys Case Study).

Positive relationships were integral to effective partnership working.

“We've got great relationships. A lot of us have been around for a long time. You walk into the room, and you know who the players are and who shares your beliefs and values and who's well and willing to put themselves forward. it's not like this everywhere. In general, I think we're really lucky” (Third Sector Manager).

Partnerships were seen as important for sharing ideas and resources, intelligence gathering, and problem solving.

“After Brexit we set up a monthly forum of partners where we could sit and discuss purely cohesion issues and incidents which affect cohesion. We found that really useful because what we've been able to do there is to bring to the table a number of agencies, we didn't originally think who were relevant who were able to play an important role” (Statutory Service Manager).

Some participants expressed the importance of including refugee and asylum seekers within partnership arrangements and there were examples of positive change to services because of the inclusion of these families.

“There is power in partnership. We have partnership meetings, and asylum seekers are at that meeting and asylum housing is at those meetings, and fire services are at those meetings. You've got asylum seekers saying, “look these are the issues”. We've then got third sector organisations saying, “you have to listen to these people and sort out these issues”, and then you've got the fire service saying, “if you don't do this in two weeks, we will prosecute you because you are putting people's lives at risk”. That power is phenomenal” (Third Sector Manager).

Accordingly, it was suggested that moving forward the vision of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary would require a pooling of expertise, energy, and resources:

“Everyone working together is important. Talking to stakeholders and promoting understanding of what this work is about and how if we're going to get integration right a local level, we need to bring in the expertise and resources of everyone. This is not just for the public sector to do, but some of

the most pioneering work in this area is delivered by the third sector and universities” (Third Sector Manager).

“So, we need to get an overview of what's currently happening in the local area where the gaps are. Identify good practice and things we want to see expanded and rolled out. Then we need to provide opportunities for the voluntary sector to source funding if there are any gaps” (Third Sector Manager).

5.8 Towards a vision for the future

As well as discussing current experience, strategic actors reflected on what needed to change in Wales, the UK and internationally.

“I think we have to recognise that a huge proportion of the world, as it were, is on the move with no fixed place to go. I think we need to see this refugee issue in terms of levels. There is a world level that we need to address, then obviously you need a coordinated response from super- international organisations like the EU on precisely what it's going to do. Then a national level which I think at UK level has been very poor. Then a Welsh Government level not to mention council levels and I think all of those bodies in different ways will have to play a part in dealing with this” (Politician).

This perspective aligned closely with the socio-ecological model discussed in Chapter Three (Bronfenbrenner 1977), recognising the interdependence of nested systems which all impact upon the experience of the individual. Change within the microsystems was perhaps easier to implement, but there were ways in which change was necessary within macrosystems to affect significant, lasting improvements.

“I was a Remainer in the referendum, but I do think the European Union as collective could have dealt in a better way with the refugee crisis. When you look at take the Syrian refugee crisis as an example, the international community could do more. But it goes wider than that- like claiming asylum in the country of first landing. So often it is Greece, and yet we know that Greece's economy is in the state it is. Surely there could have been a long-term sustainable way of managing a situation where you've got the flow of

refugees that we did into a country where the economy was in such terrible state” (Politician).

These perspectives were commonplace amongst the Strategic Actors, lending support to calls for modernising the Geneva Convention (1951). There was also support for providing safe and legal routes to asylum from outside the UK (JCWI 2019), as a means of deterring families from making hazardous journeys including channel crossings.

“We do have some safe routes, for example, the Syrian scheme and Family Reunification Scheme¹¹¹, but these are very restrictive and often quite badly implemented. It’s also worth mentioning that many of those who enter the UK by hazardous means are eventually granted asylum proving that they did have a valid claim” (Politician).

At UK level, participants called for a change in the approach to migration which they defined as:

“a kinder, more humane approach. Let’s lose the language of hostility and seeing refugees and asylum seekers as a burden” (Third Sector Manager).

“a move away from obsessing about numbers and reducing numbers of people entering the UK and seeing this whole agenda in negative terms” (Third Sector Manager).

Participants also wanted to see a streamlining of the Home Office approaches and a greater equity between the differing schemes. However, their strongest focus was on how Wales could model that more positive approach. Participants demonstrated passion and commitment related to carving out a distinctive Welsh agenda for forced migration, based around the Nation of Sanctuary concept. The interviews suggested that there was a solid basis of partnership working in place and the beginnings of a shared vision for moving forward. However, as one participant put it:

¹¹¹ The UK refugee’s family reunion provisions allow qualifying family members to be reunited with a family member who has been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK. Family members mean spouse or partner and children under the age of 18, who formed part of the family unit before their sponsor fled their country.

“I feel like we are still at the beginning of our journey to truly becoming that Nation of Sanctuary, and there is still so much to do to make it a reality” (Third Sector Manager).

Many of the participants explored what would need to happen for Wales to fully realise its vision of a Nation of Sanctuary. Some focused on small pragmatic changes to practice that would make a difference to individuals' experiences, for example, reducing barriers to employment and making language provision easier to access. Other participants argued for an extension of the Welsh Government's existing powers to include asylum support (see also Parker 2018). This would have the benefit of ensuring that the powers needed to ensure the inclusion of refugee families sat within Welsh Government jurisdiction. Chapters Six and Seven document how both practitioners and parents perceived Home Office decisions and processes as excessively bureaucratic and frequently opaque; and strategic actors had similar views.

“If asylum support was devolved, then we could bring the processes in line with our vision of sanctuary and ensure that dignity and respect are at the heart of all that we do. This would mean that we could replace systems that scream hostility for ones that speak of welcome” (Third Sector Manager).

However, there was also a recognition that whilst further devolution was desirable, there would be a lengthy process needed to achieve this. Hence, many of the strategic actors focused on things that could be achieved immediately. High on this list was support and training for the workforce, particularly those in generic services.

“My wish would be for all new entrants to have a basic awareness of refugee and asylum-seeking issues” (Statutory Services Manager).

“Core training for all services that included cultural awareness. Shared training. It wouldn't even cost much as we could use the expertise within our networks. But it does need to be Wales-wide. We need to share the understanding that there is in the dispersal areas with areas that have less experience” (Third Sector Manager).

The strategic actors also discussed further work to empower communities, including finding ways to enable refugees and asylum seekers themselves to influence the agenda.

“Not everyone wants to take part in consultations, and well when your focus is on settling into a community and getting through the Home Office processes this is the last thing on your mind. But for goodness’s sake, listen to the practitioners who are working most closely with the families. They can tell us what the issues are. We need to find a way for this expertise to influence policy making” (Third Sector Manager).

This was supported by several participants who mentioned supporting dignity, choice, and autonomy for forced migrants.

“I think it is about listening to individuals and then letting their aspirations influence the decisions that are made for them... it is about involving and doing with, not to. For example, if you have an agricultural worker and his family, why the heck would you place them in the city? Or why place a halal butcher in the valleys? These are people with skills, ambitions, hopes. Why can’t we let those hopes and preferences lead the placement? It’s not rocket science, is it?” (Third Sector Manager).

“We need to build on strengths, build on resilience because these resilient people have managed their life so successfully and have things to offer. The idea of support and protection can interface with that in a negative way that disempowers people. I mean we must question what we’re doing here- humanitarian protection is one thing people have that they’re in a place of safety, but they deserve more than that don’t they? I think that more could have been done strategically to think about where people were placed and to match that with people’s aspirations” (Third Sector Manager).

The need for a strength and resilience focused approach aligns closely with the practitioner perspectives in Chapter Six. All the participants explored the issue of employment, many seeing this as the most important area for development. This related to matching skills and aspirations to the needs of local areas, but also improving wellbeing for the families.

“If I could wave a magic wand, the first thing I would change is the prohibition on asylum seekers working. This would make so much difference to their inclusion, their dignity and their financial position” (Third Sector Manager).

Some participants also spoke about the benefits of volunteering, in the absence of the right to work.

“It’s at that language acquisition [stage] and then looking at the work experience. For me, I think it comes with those two elements because, realistically, you might find that you’re 12-24 months from eventually entering the employment market but ... it’s a multifaceted benefit from voluntary opportunities, because it looks at combating that sense of isolation and loneliness, it links you in with your community... The challenge is sometimes promoting the benefits of voluntary opportunities for refugees, having never volunteered before, because this is unpaid, of course, and that can be a bit of a hurdle to overcome” (Statutory Services Manager).

The benefits of volunteering for social inclusion are well documented (Holmes 2009). However, some of the parent participants in this study were survivors of modern-day slavery¹¹² and as such volunteering would need to be carefully navigated. Nonetheless, many of the strategic actors recognised the need for reciprocity expressed by refugees and that volunteering could also support this need.

“The people I work with bring a strong sense of community, they understand how community works and our responsibility is to one another. I think in the West is all about me, but for a lot of asylum seekers and refugees “me” is not just me, it is my community, and I’m answerable to them. So, I think that is important to provide opportunities for them to get involved as volunteers. also, they’ve taught me a lot about resilience about laughing in the face of adversity caring for each other. That is true reciprocity” (Third Sector Manager).

There was an acknowledgement that supporting refugee families was important work, and that being involved in this work was a privilege.

¹¹² Exploitation of labour is a key aspect of modern- day slavery (Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority n.d.) Hence, the concept of volunteering may be difficult for survivors to understand and notions of choice, altruism and reciprocity need to be made explicit.

“Compared to other soul-destroying aspects of these strategic jobs, the refugee work, it's good for your soul. I can feel like I've been part of something positive. Something that has helped people and made a difference for them”
(Statutory Services Manager).

Another manager pointed out that in improving our current response to forced migrants, by implementing the Nation of Sanctuary Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (Welsh Government 2019) was an excellent place to start.

“There are numerous challenges ahead, not least in relation to influencing Westminster Government, but it gives us a starting point and something to aim for. Certainly, the issues it addresses are the right ones. It shows that Government have listened. Now we need to start making those changes”
(Third Sector Manager).

5.9 Chapter summary and conclusions

This chapter has identified a strong consensus between strategic actors on the potential of Wales to radically rethink the response to people fleeing persecution and conflict. The concept of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary has garnered much support and provides a useful paradigm for shaping discourses and services alike. It offers an opportunity to adopt a distinctly Welsh and values driven approach to refuge. The rhetoric of sanctuary is important as it shapes the way the nation and its inhabitants think and talk about migration. However, it is equally important to move beyond rhetoric into concrete actions that make a positive difference to people's lives. Among the strategic actors, there was a real desire to:

“Do the right things and to get things right for the families” (Third Sector Manager).

Whilst there was a widespread call for additional devolved powers, particularly related to asylum support, there was also a recognition that more could be done within existing arrangements. In particular, making best use of joint working, addressing key gaps in provision (such as language courses with childcare), reducing barriers to employment, working with the aspirations of families, and linking people to places. The participants also identified a range of challenges related to providing a good experience for forced migrant families. These challenges included

working within financial constraints and having to do extra work to counter negative press coverage about migration.

There was a recognition that, to have the most impact, all layers of the systems that support families (Bronfenbrenner 1977) needed to be working effectively and working together. However, there was also acknowledgement that individual actions and interactions could also make a positive difference, a theme that will be explored more fully in the next two chapters.

Chapter Six

Practitioner Perspectives: Hope-inspiring Relationships in Liminal Landscapes

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings drawn from semi structured interviews and a focus group with practitioners from a range of disciplines and professional backgrounds. Through their close associations with the families, the practitioners' accounts provided rich insights into the experiences of family resettlement in Wales. Importantly, practitioners also articulated the lived experiences of their roles, outlining some of the challenges of multi-agency support to forced migrant families, whilst also exploring aspects of good practice.

The practitioners had varying levels of experience of working with forced migrant families. Approximately half worked within designated services for forced migrants, whilst others worked in generic services. Most of the practitioners were based in and around the case study city which, as a dispersal area, reflected significantly more capacity for, and experience of, supporting forced migrant families. However, the sample also included a smaller number of practitioners from the Valleys case study, where, under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme, families were being supported for the first time. The practitioner experience differed significantly across the two locations, and this is explored within the narrative of the chapter. The practitioner sample also included three volunteers, based within the community sector.

Gaining practitioners' perspectives is of utmost importance. As Brookfield (1995) writing in the context of education emphasised, practitioners can highlight tensions and challenges, bring to light hidden aspects of practice, and suggest innovative solutions to problems encountered. Furthermore, practitioner perspectives can help inform wider understandings and influence discourses. The details of the location, organisation and professional backgrounds of the practitioner participants are presented in Table 7. Pseudonyms were used to preserve anonymity.

	City Area	Valleys Area
Health Sector	1 Health Visitor (HV) (Tony)	1 Health Visitor (Emma)
Education Services	1 Headteacher (Chris) 1 Teacher (Lucy) 2 Advisory Service Workers (Andrea and Pam)	1 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutor (Kate) 1 Teacher (Tracey)
Faith Groups	1 Children and Families Worker (CFW) (Nicola)	1 Church Leader (Jake)
Third Sector Organisations	2 Women's Officers(WO) (Sonja and Rhea) 5 Family Support Workers (FSW), drawn from 4 organisations (Pippa, Jamie, Karen, Allie, Nyla) 3 Volunteers from within community groups (Maisie, Dani, Mahira) 1 Resettlement Officer (RO) (Dave)	1 Resettlement Officer (Philip) 1 Community Cohesion Officer (CCO) (Deb)
Local Authority	1 Operational Manager (Sarah)	1 Family Support Worker (Carys) 1 Operational Manager (Beth)

Table 8: Practitioner participants

Nine individuals attended the focus group, two of whom (Tony and Allie) also took part in individual interviews. The pseudonyms and professional backgrounds of the participants are noted in Table 9.

Allie	Family Support Worker (Chair of Practitioner Forum)
Tony	Specialist Health Visitor
Mary	Family Support Worker
Tom	Community Support Officer (CSO)
Samina	Community Development Officer (CDO)
Catrin	Community Outreach Worker (COW)
Mel	Community Resource Project Lead (CRPL) (Faith-led)
Sara	Church Children and Family Worker (CFW)
Ben	Refugee Project Worker (RPW)

Table 9: Focus group participants

There was commonality in the responses across the two case study areas, particularly in relation to supporting families through uncertainty and the importance of practitioner/parent relationships. However, there were also some significant differences observed in partnership working and models of practice. Where there was such divergence of opinion this is explicitly stated in the relevant sections.

Where divergence is not mentioned it is because similar findings were evident across both case study areas.

The key findings from the practitioner interviews have been presented within six inter-connected and overarching themes. The first theme is that of liminality and uncertainty impacting both upon the families they worked with and the practitioners themselves. The second theme considers the importance of creating positive, trustful and hope inspiring relationships. Thirdly, the practitioners' roles as witnesses and advocates are considered. Fourthly, strength-based working is explored, with a strong focus upon supporting wellbeing. The fifth theme considers practitioner wellbeing and self-care. Finally, within the sixth theme, the importance of partnership working is explored.

6.2 Working within liminal landscapes

The concept of liminality is prominent within the migration literature (see section 3.3). It is a term borrowed from social anthropology, which explores the sense of ambiguity and disorientation experienced by individuals as they move through a rite of passage or transition from one state to another (Horvath et al. 2009). The concept of liminality captures, albeit imperfectly, the experience of indeterminacy or "waiting" as described by the parents (see section 7.5). However, there were also significant uncertainties impacting on the practitioners themselves. Hence, the practitioners reported subjective experiences of liminality which they expressed in terms of supporting families through insecurity, whilst also contending with change and uncertainty in their own organisations and beyond.

6.2.1 Supporting parents in liminal situations; encounters with the asylum system.

All the practitioners working in the City Case Study area expressed much frustration with the asylum system. The length of time that parents were waiting for decisions, the opacity of decision making and the requests for information and documents that either did not exist or were impossible to retrieve were mentioned by many of the practitioners. This is summarised by Pippa (FSW¹¹³).

¹¹³ The abbreviations are found in Table Eight.

“I’ve been working in this field for more than ten years now, and I still don’t understand how decisions are made. Not really. I was working with two families recently and on the surface their claims and circumstances were very similar. Same ethnicity, similar journey to the UK, similar risk of persecution- one family was granted leave to remain, and the other was turned down twice and is now in the process of filing a new claim, but nothing has changed really. They want more evidence, but there is no more evidence. They have it all. They had it all for the first claim”.

Similarly, Sonja (WO) commented,

“It is so stressful for the families. So much waiting. So many delays, Requests for information they have already received. I sometimes wonder if it is because the Home Office services are stretched and under resourced or is it a deliberate attempt to deter people from applying?”

Sonja’s ambivalence reflects wider debate in the literature (see section 3.3.3.1) about the opacity of the system and the extent to which the difficulties and delays were an intentional aspect of the hostile environment policy. The practitioners spoke in Kafkaesque¹¹⁴ terms about the asylum system, expressing frustration at the bureaucratic bungling whilst also indicating distrust in a system that whilst ostensibly based on rules and principles, seemed to apply these in an inconsistent way.

As Allie (FSW) expressed,

“The system does disempower. It can completely disempower. You know they don’t know where you’re going to live. You can’t work. You have no idea how long everything is going to take. In the meantime, you are placed in completely unsuitable accommodation. And when you have all that going on you can sometimes lose your identity. You feel like you don’t matter to anyone. You are just a number not a person. It makes me so angry when I see what the system does to people!”

¹¹⁴ The term Kafkaesque (Steinhauer 1983) refers to the oppressive qualities of Franz Kafka’s fictional world as presented within his novels. His work strongly focuses on incomprehensible socio-bureaucratic powers. It explores themes of exploring themes of alienation and existential anxiety.

Rhea (WO) similarly commented:

“You know, we see people at the beginning of their journey, when they’ve travelled, such strong women, but the system disempowers them, the system takes away their money, their choice, their job, their identity. When people come to us, I never ask them about status...because it makes no difference to me., I tell them what I provide for you will not be determined by your status....it doesn’t matter. Because everything they do they come up against this, “well, what’s your status?”

Rhea raises an interesting point about eligibility for some services, which was a source of frustration for many of the practitioners. It complicated the provision map when some services were for asylum seekers only, or when the support stopped at the point of a positive decision. There was also an implicit sense, that the asylum system with its rigidity and focus on vulnerability and risk was in direct contrast to the strength-based approaches advocated by many of the practitioners and, perhaps, reduced practitioners’ ability to recognise and build on parents’ strengths.

Nicola highlighted the inflexibility of the system, referring to a pregnant lady who was newly arrived in Wales. She had not claimed asylum and was homeless.

“She didn’t speak any English; she didn’t know she had to claim asylum. But because she hadn’t claimed asylum there was no place for her. In the end [local faith leader] managed to find someone to translate and help find out her story. She was told that she needed to go to Kent to claim asylum, but you know, how do you get to Kent with no money and with no language? In the end, [church member] drove her to Kent and now she is in the system, but how would she have managed otherwise?”

The city-based practitioners agreed that one of the most difficult situations for the families was negotiating frequent accommodation moves. In many cases, very little notice was given and there was no clear rationale for the move. Jamie gave an example of a parent with a disabled child who had four house and school moves within 18 months, including being moved across the country to two separate cities in Wales.

“She was at the end of her tether. She was only given 3-days’ notice of the moves. She had a good support system in [Town], she liked her support worker, and the school were amazing, but then she was told she had to move again.”

The forced Home Office moves also featured strongly in the parent interviews (see section 7.5.2) and added to the uncertainty and sense of impermanence that the parents experienced. The disruptive nature of accommodation moves is highlighted by both Darling (2011) and Tomkow et al. (2020). There is further evidence from studies focusing on care experienced children and young people that frequent home and school moves can be extremely detrimental to children’s education (Mannay et al. 2019a) and emotional wellbeing (Singh et al. 2014; Girling 2019; Hek 2005) and to the mental health of parents (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Chris also discussed this point:

“We have a lot of children that will come in and stay with us for not very long, if they’re rehoused then in other parts of the city....in terms of education that’s quite tricky. You just get to know the child and parent. You start building that partnership and then Bam! They are moved”.

Sarah made the point that the specific Home Office scheme supporting a family,

“Determines the level of support they can get and how much financial resource there is for the team working with them. There is so much inequity”.

She reiterated that there was little resource to support spontaneous arrivals and that this proved frustrating and divisive. For the practitioners, the frustrations of the asylum system were a barrier in supporting the families. They saw first-hand the impact that waiting for decisions had on families and recognised the difficulties of living in that liminal space. Nyla (FSW) summarised her experience thus:

“When they are waiting for a decision, sometimes all we can do is be there. I cannot change anything. I don’t have the answers. It is hard for them, and I can’t help with that.”

The practitioners doubted that the bureaucratic nature of the Home Office operations provided an efficient and fair system and were all too aware of the difficulties it

generated (Meier and Donà 2021). They stressed that families experienced difficulty with access, long delays, impersonal interactions, and lack of clarity around decision making. As noted in section 7.5.2, the asylum process was a source of stress for all the parents in the study. The process was unclear to the parents and often seemed equally opaque to the practitioners supporting them. A family support worker stressed how limited her own knowledge of the asylum process was, and how this was a training need for many working in the sector,

“I think everybody having an understanding and an awareness of the asylum process and what families are facing, that would really help us and the families.”

However, not all the practitioners reported negative experiences with the asylum system. Tony (HV), whilst acknowledging the frustrations of the system commented:

“Believe it or not, I do see the help asylum seekers get from the Home Office as a supportive environment. Because a lot of the families prior to it, I mean I’m not talking about all, but prior to being in asylum accommodation, are very vulnerable.”

Even so, Tony with recognised a need for greater flexibility,

“I wish they could see beyond the red tape to the person”.

Tony (in line with Lourenço et al. 2021) recognised the need for parents to have more say in decision making that affected their lives. The frustrations with the asylum system were less evident amongst the Valleys practitioners. In all cases, practitioners in this area were working with families resettled under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme. Whilst some frustrations with the Home Office were evident, the practitioners expressed that the situation had improved since the first arrivals (a year previously) and that the Home Office had listened to concerns and made improvements. In the Valleys communities, the number of families was much smaller than in the City case study area, and the fact that they were only accepting Syrian refugees, made it easier for the practitioners to understand the cultural backgrounds and the needs of the families. This had made transitions easier, avoided the need for multiple moves and enabled the Local Authority to plan more carefully than in the case of spontaneous arrivals. Many of the practitioners highlighted that the scheme

was comparatively well resourced. Hence, the practitioners here were far more likely to speak in positive terms about their dealings with the Home Office.

Some practitioners discussed frustrations with other parts of public services, Emma (HV) recounted an experience of a father she was working with.

“He’d regularly be called for mental health interviews I think for some of his benefits, and they’d have to travel to [City], which would be two trains, they’ve have to take the baby, they’d turn up for the appointment and then there’d be 10 people waiting for the same appointment and then once they’d seen two or three people they’d come out and say, ‘We’ve seen as many people as we can today so you’re going to have to come back tomorrow or next week’, and then he’d get into trouble for losing his temper, but you could fully understand why. I’m not saying his behaviour was acceptable, but you could understand. And then they would disengage with services because they’d think that they’re not worth working with because they’re not helping, and then you lose the contact. It’s really frustrating for them.”

All the practitioners were able to identify similar experiences of delays and miscommunications, which had an adverse effect on the parents who were already living with much uncertainty. In line with the literature review findings (section 3.3.3.1) navigating their way through opaque and often disorganised services, retelling their stories countless times, and being asked for information they did not have were situations that were regularly related to their support workers often with a resigned shrug, with anger or with tears.

6.2.1.1 Liminality beyond the asylum decision.

In line with the findings of the literature review (see section 3.3.3.2), the experience of liminality did not end with a positive decision. Indeed, this was recognised by the practitioners as an extremely vulnerable time for the families. Nyla (FSW) explained how the joy of receiving a positive judgement was often complicated by a sense of bewilderment about what comes next.

“They say, “Congratulations, you’re now a refugee”, you’re not entitled to your NASS¹¹⁵ support or you’re housing but you haven’t got a National Insurance Number, so you’re effectively homeless until that’s sorted out. I’ve heard stories from clients, they say that on one hand it is the happiest day of their lives but on the other they’re like a rabbit in the headlights because now they’ve got nothing. “Where do we go, what do we do?” You know, it’s not a nice place to be.”

A particular concern expressed by those working most closely with the families, was the way financial support and access to many services, ceases at the point of a positive decision. Unless transitional support is put in place to enable the family to apply for relevant benefits and make housing arrangements, there is a very real risk of destitution at this point. The vulnerability at the point of decision was further elucidated by Karen and Allie who emphasised that the relief of a positive decision can mask the fact that this can be a very vulnerable time for the family.

“It’s great when families do get those positive decisions, but it does come as a bit of a double-edged sword, because as soon as they get those, they then have to leave the Home Office process and then go through the process of being homeless and going through British benefits, with a possible move, well a guaranteed move, but possible multiple moves” (Karen, FSW).

“When you get your status, it’s harder, so much harder. There is a big disconnect between NAS support and the benefit system, you can guarantee with every person we’ve seen go through it there’s been an eight-week delay, so there’s eight weeks where those children don’t get anything and then they are dependent on those organisations that can provide food and other support to help them through. I try to anticipate this and get things in place before the decision process is complete” (Allie, FSW).

Similarly, Karen spoke of how she tries to help the parents to think beyond the decision and get plans in place for this eventuality. *“But it’s hard, she admits “they*

¹¹⁵ The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) administers the support provided to eligible asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. Asylum seekers can apply for accommodation and financial assistance, accommodation only or financial assistance only.

can't think that far ahead when they are going through the process and it's like they don't want to jinx it!"

The risk of destitution post decision is well documented (Vervliet et al. 2014; Refugee Action 2013), but the practitioner perspectives provide a rare glimpse into how these impacts on the lived experiences of the parents and the steps that practitioners take to mitigate the risks. The practitioners recognised the effects of uncertainty, impermanence and waiting on the parents and children they worked with. They were also aware that for the parents, routines for the children helped add structure to the time, whilst also in some cases, creating additional stress.

"They have all this going on, all this worry and uncertainty but they still have to make food for the children and get them to school" (Nyla, FSW).

"Without the baby, I think she would give up" (Pippa, FSW).

Given the discussion above related to vulnerability at the point of a positive decision, the importance of a support project which can work with the family throughout the transition process cannot be underestimated. Jamie (FSW) described support on transition, following a positive decision thus:

"We've supported families by, again, understanding what area you're going to, what bus routes you need to get on if you're moving from here, so quite practical in those terms. But then, also, the emotional side of things with the children, what makes a good friend, because we know they'll have to make new friends in this new school they go to. Things like that, letting them understand the qualities they've got to be able to not feel so nervous about going to a new place again... And longer term, even once we've finished with a family as a service, we still send birthday cards to them, we still say that you can contact us, let us know how things are going, and sometimes it's even been that they contact us...So, we never completely close our doors to the family."

However, in addition to supporting parents in through liminality, the practitioners also had their own uncertainties to deal with, which will be the focus of the following section.

6.2.2 The impact of insecure funding

Another form of liminality experienced by the practitioners was related to change in their own organisations and insecure funding. Funding for their roles, or for the roles of valued service partners, was often insecure. Indeed, at the time of conducting the research one of the case study areas was going through a period of decommissioning and recommissioning services, driven by Government priorities, and reducing budgets. This caused a great deal of anxiety for the practitioners. Rhea reported that in the two years prior to the interview her organisation had lost 68% of its funding and Jamie (FSW) explained the impact of budget cuts,

“I worry about my own job of course I do. I’ve got a mortgage like most people, but I also worry about the families if this service is no longer there for them”.

When concentrating on bids for continuation funding, organisations can lose their focus on the quality of support they are providing:

“It becomes all about showing how we have met targets and not so much about the outcomes for the individuals” (Allie, FSW).

Jamie (FSW) also described how staff on short term contracts move for a permanent post (see also Ferguson et al 2020).

“...and you lose good people. You lose all that experience”.

These findings were also supported by the Strategic Actor interviews (section 6. xx) and are in line with Robinson’s (2014) work on the barriers experienced by support workers, particularly those employed in the third sector.

For those practitioners working in the statutory sector, job insecurity was not such a pertinent issue, but those in health and education discussed uncertainties caused by organisational change and shifting policy directions.

6.2.3 Ambiguous roles and professional hierarchies

A third aspect of liminality was the ambiguity of the roles occupied by many of the practitioner participants. Some identified as “family support workers”, a role explored in depth by Messenger (2012) and characterised by imprecise role descriptors and equivocal professional status.

“I often get asked what a family support worker is. The families often struggle to understand that someone would get paid to do what in their country is done by family or neighbours” (Karen, FSW).

In contrast to the findings of Messenger (2012), who noted how professional hierarchies often resulted in silencing the FSW voice, the support workers reported that perspectives are sought, and suggestions enacted within multi-disciplinary meetings.

“They (the other professionals) recognise that I have the closest relationship with the family and that the trust is there. So often, I am best placed to do some work that needs doing or to have a difficult conversation with the parent” (Nyla, FSW).

Allie (FSW) described how other professionals genuinely valued her input and treated her as an equal partner.

“I’ve never felt talked down to in a meeting, quite the opposite.”

However, three of the participants mentioned imposter syndrome¹¹⁶ (Clance and Imes 1978).

“I sit in these meetings and think there are all these people with their degrees and qualifications. Teachers. Paediatricians. What do I have to say that they will be interested in? Then I remember that I am there to champion the child’s voice. Then I am able to say what I think needs to happen” (Pippa, FSW).

In the Valleys case study, the family support workers experienced being cast into the role of expert within the professional networks.

“...working with refugee families is quite new for all of us. I’ve been on some training about working with Syrian families so all of a sudden I have schools and GPs¹¹⁷ contacting me to ask for help and advice.” (Carys, FSW)

¹¹⁶ The term “impostor syndrome”, developed by psychologists Clance and Imes (1978) is used to designate an internal experience of phoniness that appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among women.... women who experience the impostor phenomenon persist in believing that they are not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise.

¹¹⁷ GP stands for General Practitioner, in the UK GPs are doctors based in community health centres. Everyone is encouraged to register with a GP and through the National Health Service (NHS) services are free at the point of access.

Carys described how this worried her, and how she felt that it was everyone's responsibility to become culturally aware. Her interview was inspiring as she talked about all that she had managed to put in place for the families, from social activities to volunteering and language opportunities.

"Everyone is so willing...but you do need someone to coordinate- a sort of keyworker, especially as otherwise the families would be inundated with help up here. It's lovely but overwhelming".

Even those practitioners employed within statutory services, tended to occupy specialist roles at arm's length from the generic service. Tony, a specialist health visitor, commented;

"Anything to do with asylum seekers they tend to refer to me. But actually, the whole health service needs to understand the inclusion of asylum seekers"
(Tony, HV)¹¹⁸.

This was far less the case in the Valleys where there was very little in terms of specialist provision. Emma (HV) described the importance of inclusion, showing how she had worked closely with generic services to ensure that needs were being met and particularly how community groups had been supported to welcome refugees. She recognised the need to create distinct communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998) with the shared domain of interest in supporting refugee and asylum-seeking families, to help develop understandings and reflect on practice. This is further explored in section 6.7.

The interviews raised several issues connected to professional identity. How the participants expressed their identity varied depending on the type of organisation they worked for (for example, statutory or third sector), their perceived level of autonomy within their role and their perceived status in relation to other agencies working with the family. In all cases, their deep commitment to the role, high levels of intrinsic motivation and values-based decision making were evident. This is resonant of *New Public Passion*; current thinking in public service development, which recognises the importance of harnessing the inherent motivations of public service

¹¹⁸ Fisher 2004 drew upon a survey with general practitioners to consider how well placed they felt to meet the needs of refugee patients. Like Tony, the paper recognised the importance of joined up health systems and training for staff.

staff as a means of improving services (UNDP 2016). However, there was a recognition that the Brexit debate was adding uncertainty and stress for the practitioners.

6.2.4 The Brexit debate

For practitioners, uncertainties following the Brexit vote were anxiety inducing. Uncertainties were heightened by media interest in Leave voting communities, (including the Valleys case study area), and further exacerbated by Government rhetoric about “hostile environments” for immigration (see section 2.3.2.1). Some participants reported that this had resulted in negative discourses of migration emerging within some of the geographical communities they served.

“Things have changed since the vote. It’s as if things that were no go before are now fair game. It’s what they (people in the community) see in the media. They don’t necessarily make the distinction between economic migrants and refugees” (Deb, CCW).

Deb talked about community attitudes in a ‘Leave’ voting area. She later made the point that where local people got to know refugees, they accepted them without reserve. In line with Botterill et al. (2020), though, there was a real sense that Brexit had served to magnify divisions, through over-simplifying complex arguments. There was a deeply held concern from the practitioners across both case study areas, that the Brexit debate had increased racism in their communities and that this would have a negative impact of the ability of the families to settle in their new homes.

In the City case study, both Nyla (FSW) and Mahira (Volunteer) who were of non-white British ethnicity, expressed that they had since The Brexit vote, experienced racism directed towards them¹¹⁹. Mahira put it this way:

“I was born here in Wales but a week after the Brexit vote, I was walking down the street when an adult male shouted at me to go back where I had come from. It’s crazy- this is where I come from! I had never experienced anything like this before.”

¹¹⁹ A survey by polling organisation, Opinium, reported in the Guardian newspaper (Booth 2019) stressed that 71% people from ethnic minorities report having faced racial discrimination in 2019, compared with 58% before the Brexit vote.

For Sonja, who had come to the UK from Eastern Europe to work, Brexit brought insecurity about her own position and ability to remain in the UK, mirroring the uncertainties facing the families she worked with:

“I love it here. I have been here for eight years now. But will I be able to stay? Will I even want to stay if no ‘one wants me here?’ (Sonja, WO).

This gave an insight into the perspectives of the many health and social care workers from within the European Union (Turnpenny and Hussein 2021) where Brexit had created for them that liminality, impermanence, and uncertainty expressed so often by the parents (see section 7.5.2). The impact of Brexit was also a strongly emerging theme in the strategic actor interviews as explored in section 5. 7.2

The subjective experience of liminality was something that featured across all three participant groups. The parent participants described their experiences of waiting for a decision (Section 7.5) grappling with changing identities (Section 7.2) and uncertainty about the future. For practitioners and strategic actors, the liminality was more connected to shifting societal attitudes and policy priorities. However, it is important to note that these influences within the macrosystem will themselves have an impact on the parents, both directly and indirectly (Bronfenbrenner 1979), as it is within these liminal landscapes that practitioners strive to build positive relationships with the parents.

6.3 Developing and sustaining trustful, hope- inspiring relationships

Practitioners discussed how they were passionate about their role and keen to help “make a positive difference” in the experiences of the families. Key to this was the importance of building trustful relationships (Hynes 2017) and this necessitated cultural awareness (Feize and Gonzalez 2018), as well as practitioner qualities such as empathy and a non-judgemental approach (Papouli 2019). Some important aspects of this relationship building related to home-visiting and the role of food. Furthermore, social activities, sport and play also provided unique opportunities for relationship building. Reciprocity was also recognised by the practitioners as key to establishing positive relationships with parents. The practitioners were very conscious of the need to establish and maintain professional boundaries, especially considering the ambiguous parents’ perceptions of their roles explored in the next

chapter (“My angel”, “My sister”, “My friend”.) Also important were the professional relationships developed with partner agencies.

6.3.1 Building positive relationships

From within this context of liminality emerges the second theme, which considers the importance of developing and sustaining hope–inspiring relationships. As explored in Chapter Seven, such relationships are crucially important to the family and can provide something of a lifeline amid the emotional minefield of transitioning through the asylum and resettlement process. Such relationships, built on trust, need to recognise how the experience of liminality impacts on families’ wellbeing. In supporting families, practitioners strived to develop resilience and self-efficacy, regardless of outcomes and trajectories that may be beyond the control of both the family and the practitioner. This represents an interesting challenge when considered against a system that requires vulnerability (Goodman and Kirkwood 2019).

All the practitioners within the study recognised the importance of establishing rapport and building a relationship with the family (see also Anderson 2001; Kohli 2006a). There was a recognition that this required intentionality and could be time consuming. The practitioners emphasised the importance of delivering on commitments and not over promising. This was summarised by Emma (HV):

“It is important that you do what you say you will do and don’t promise what you cannot deliver. I’ve found that being approachable and always honouring my commitments with the family helps them to engage.”

Emma described how for many parents, trust had been broken and abused, so rebuilding that trust was essential for engagement (see also Hynes 2017). This was consistent with findings from Weine et al. (2005a) who argued that to engage individuals, you first must understand and address the barriers to engagement. This was seen as particularly important in working with those who had been subject to human trafficking and modern-day slavery, where broken trust had been a significant feature of their past experiences. Consequently, the practitioner being true to their word was key to establishing a positive relationship.

More than half of the practitioners viewed home-visiting as an important aspect of this relationship building as articulated by Pippa:

“It breaks down barriers. You see the family on their own terms in their own space. They are inviting you in and they are in control”.

Allie (FSW) reflected on some of the strategies she uses to break down barriers.

“It affects everything. Even simple things like using a notebook instead of typing onto the iPad and making sure that even the notepad is not too formal but maybe flowery. Making sure I wear informal dress, taking my shoes off, accepting food”.

Like Sue (2001), Allie (FSW) recognised that engagement needed to be systematic and tailored to the needs of the individual, and that cultural competence was a key part of this process (see section 6.4). Within this quote she touched on the role of food in breaking down barriers, which is the focus of the next section.

6.3.2 The importance of food

The role food plays in building relationships were emphasised by six of the practitioners (all family support workers or women’s officers). Rees et al. (2012) writing in the context of foster care, recognised the symbolic importance of food and in particular the way that it can define acceptance and inclusion as well as providing a conducive environment for talking and sharing.

“If we have a cup of tea and a piece of cake together, you can almost guarantee that this is when I will learn most about her life. Maybe it is because we are both relaxed” (Allie, FSW).

Whilst food was seen as important in establishing a relationship with the support worker, it was also integral to building wider relationships within the community. Dani and Mahira (volunteers) emphasised the importance of cooking and sharing foods from the indigenous cultures of the parents.

“These are our best sessions, “The food is delicious, and the parents share their recipes and memories associated with them. It breaks down barriers and helps build friendships”.

Some practitioners attributed this to the culture of hospitality in their countries of origin, whilst others were keen to stress the reciprocity that giving and receiving food generates (see also Yu 2021).

Karen discussed a group visit to Barry Island, during which a parent with teenage children turned up with a buggy:

“I thought, ‘But she doesn’t have a baby?’ In the buggy was a microwave, she had two big bags of food, and she said, ‘Well you can’t have it cold, so I brought my microwave. Will there be somewhere we can plug our microwave in?’ But you see, we wouldn’t think of that, but they think of feeding you because it’s so embedded in their culture, I think we’ve lost that as a nation. I mean, I love feeding people, but it’s made me think about not being hung up about stuff, it doesn’t matter, you know, because we’re all together, we’ll all share food and then we’re all equal by sharing food, I think”.

Carys also highlighted food sharing practices:

“I’d have to have a cup of tea and some biscuits, because if I’d said no, they would have been mortified. They’d be like, ‘No, you have to stay’. But yes, often we’d all sit around the table together, they even gave me doggy bags to go away with. Even the children, if they could see my plate was empty, they would be reloading my plate, to the point where I don’t want to move.”

Carys’s manager, Beth, who was also present for the interview, was initially shocked by this revelation and then reflected on this from a social work perspective.

“I’m just thinking about, in terms of the different tiers of intervention, if that was a social worker from social services, then I would never encourage... I was just thinking about that as you were saying it. My first reaction was, oh my gosh how did you do that, initially... but then, the fact that you were sitting down and having a meal with the family, your role as a support worker ...is very different to having statutory intervention. So, I would think that you’re not blurring boundaries there because they want you to be part of it, you’re there to support them, you haven’t got any child protection issues, you’re not statutory services, so that actually isn’t wrong at all”.

Beth’s perspective highlights some interesting reflections on the ambiguity of the family support worker role (Messenger 2012) but also the way that this ambiguity offers opportunities for relationship building that is perhaps more difficult for practitioners with statutory responsibilities (Pott 2017).

Nyla (FSW) emphasised how food provides a link to the country of origin and all that has been left behind.

“Last week, a Korean lady made all these tiny, beautiful little dainty savouries from her country, like a Chinese type of savoury. So, she brought those, and I said, “We’re not meant to have any food in here!” but she was teaching people to use chopsticks... I don’t plan it. But it’s the reciprocity, the offer of something, isn’t it, it’s giving something, and it reminds her of home”.

Nyla went on to explain that despite the conflict with organisational policy she allowed the activity to go ahead as a way of honouring the parent and that she then subsequently planned food related activities as the impromptu session had proved so uplifting for the parents.

Nicola (CFW) highlighted the sacrificial nature of the families’ sharing of food.

“You say, “I can’t eat anymore”, they’re very upset about it, you know. ..., I still do home visits now and again, not all the time because of capacity, I can’t fit it in, but if I’m concerned then I’ll go and see somebody, and you’d be fed to death with that because that’s what they want to do. You know, they haven’t got anything, but you can have what they’ve got”.

In my pilot interview, a practitioner from the Midlands explained how the refusal of food felt like a rejection of the individual. Hence, for Nicola, accepting the gift of food offered trumped other values that she held:

“I am a vegan, but that day I ate lamb. It was important for me take what was offered. I didn’t hesitate and I enjoyed it because it was a gift of friendship and solidarity”.

To support this sharing of food, one organisation had set up a supper club and is planning a recipe book based on the recipes of the families attending the project. Parents were also encouraged to volunteer in the kitchen which feeds 120 people per day.

“Food is universal. A lot of the clients love to help in the kitchen, and they want to cook something from back home in the kitchen, but they don’t

understand that we don't have a budget, we haven't got any money so we can't go and buy saffron because it costs more than gold" (Allie, FSW).

Practitioners discussed how the parents' valued authenticity in their recipes, and Valleys practitioners bemoaned the lack of diversity of available ingredients locally.

"I asked what she missed most about home. I was so surprised when she said it was the bread (Syrian flatbread). We have sourced the bread, but the nearest supplier is in [City] and the cost of getting there is prohibitive. I brought some to one of our English lessons to use in a lesson and she actually cried" (Kate, ESOL tutor).

Hence, practitioners recognised that food was powerful, symbolic, and evocative. In sharing food, understandings emerged, and relationships were strengthened. Despite the difficulties associated with sourcing some foods, and the barriers of poverty, these acts of human sharing helped to build and cement relationships.

6.3.3 Reciprocity and dignity

In developing their relationship with the parents, the practitioners were aware of the needs to encourage dignity whilst avoiding a sense of dependence and excessive gratitude (see also Taylor et al. 2020). Over half of the practitioners mentioned their efforts to support the dignity and choice of the parents (see also Vandevordt 2017). Carys (FSW) suggested:

"I try to bear in mind the balance of the relationship and give the family as much ownership as possible. I want the parents to know that they are in the driving seat".

Here I was reminded of Habibah's desire¹²⁰ to drive her own bus. However, in the following example, Pippa spoke of well-meaning attempts to involve parents in decision making:

"It was largely unsuccessful. I didn't quite realise that when you are going through the asylum process it is all consuming. You don't necessarily want to

¹²⁰ One of the parent participants, Habibah, outlined her aspiration to drive a bus, describing the sense of control that she would feel in doing so. This seemed me a powerful motif for a desire to control her own destiny, further explored in section 7.6.2).

be involved in decisions related to the project. One dad just said, you pick the film, and we will come.” He didn’t have the energy for making that kind of decision”.

In promoting dignity, the notion of gratefulness was troubling to eight of the practitioners, as shown in this example:

“I remember one day, with this particular mum... she got on her knees to thank me. I found it so disturbing... getting on the floor with her and making her stand up again, and telling her, ‘You don’t do that here, don’t you ever feel that you’re beneath everybody, you’re just the same as me” but she thought ...she had to be so thankful. And I thought, no, this is how you should be treated, it shouldn’t be any different just because you are an asylum seeker ... dignity matters” (Emma, HV).

The practitioners found it particularly difficult when parents demonstrated their appreciation by speaking of them in religious terms (see also section 7.4.3).

“She calls me her angel. I tell her I am no angel; I am a very flawed human being” (Pippa, FSW).

Four of the practitioners expressed that they felt uncomfortable with the excessive gratitude of parents when “only doing my job.” Their antidote to the gratitude was often to encourage the dignity and choice of the parents (see also Nelson et al. 2016) and to employ strength-based approaches (see section 6.5).

The gratitude expressed by parents generated unease for the practitioners. However, it was important for the parents to be able to express their gratitude as a natural human response to kindness. Reframing the parents’ gratitude as part of a gift exchange (Mauss 1990), whilst being cognisant of potential power imbalances and unrealistic expectations (Heins and Unrau 2018), could enable meaningful reciprocity which acknowledged and valued the parents’ gratitude within democratic and equitable parent /practitioner relationships.

6.3.4 Keeping hope alive (but keeping it real!)

In common with the parents (see section 7.6.2), hope was seen by the practitioners as an important aspect of maintaining positivity. As in earlier studies (Umer and Elliot

2021; Boddy et al. 2018), helping parents to envisage a positive future was seen as very important. Jamie and Allie (FSWs) both discussed how they publicised and celebrated people receiving their positive decisions as it brought hope to those still waiting.

However, Tony (HV) was concerned to ensure that parents were not given a false sense of hope. Hence, an important aspect of his work focused on preparing for life post decision (see section 6.2.1.2) and the vulnerability that often exposed.

Practitioners related several situations where initial negative judgements had been overturned on appeal. Some of the participants even suggested that this was the norm and that it raised big questions about the reliability and robustness of the system.

"I sometimes wonder if that is an actual policy? Part of my role is preparing for that eventuality and helping them to stay hopeful" (Nyla, FSW).

This suggestion was consistent with 2021 statistics (Refugee Council 2022), which report an increase both in the percentage of appeals allowed and the percentage of decisions overturned at appeal.

Whilst the need to be realistic and plan for all eventualities was a theme in the interviews, supporting and inspiring hope was viewed as a crucial role for the practitioners. Quoting Emily Dickinson,¹²¹ Allie (FSW) said:

"Hope is a thing with feathers," we all need hope. My job is to help the parents find that hope even when it seems far away and impossible."

For Prowle and Hodgkins (2020, p.139), the practitioner is conceptualised as an architect of hope inspiring relationships. For those parents who are experiencing adversity or who may be isolated this focus on hope can make all the difference. The practitioner can trigger hope, presenting the possibility of positive change and building on the strengths of the parents. In turn, parents harness that hope and keep going through the challenges that beset them.

¹²¹ "Hope is the thing with feathers" is a poem by the American poet Emily Dickinson" (written around 1861). In the poem, "Hope" is metaphorically transformed into a strong-willed bird that lives within the human soul—and sings its song regardless of external challenges and disappointments.

6.4 Practitioners as witnesses and advocates

In line with Kohli (2007), Zaviršek (2017) and others (see section 3. 8.5), the practitioners in this study were aware of their role as witnesses to the experiences of the families that had led to migration. This required practitioners to speak up and to challenge views they encountered both in work and elsewhere. Here Jamie (FSW) discusses challenging health services who were insistent on following their one size fits all protocol.

“I said, “you have to make an appointment for her now. She cannot just ring back like everyone else. She needs to be seen today. If you knew what she has been through, you wouldn’t think that this is an okay response. You are dismissing her and making life more difficult. Just make her an appointment now please”.

Lucy (Teacher) mentioned how she often felt the need to educate those around her:

“I usually avoid conflict, but I find that when people are talking rubbish about asylum seekers, I cannot hold my tongue, knowing what I do. I have to challenge those incorrect views”.

Within the focus group, the idea of practitioners using their own position to raise awareness was also evident.

“I make sure that my organisation is thinking and talking about forced migration. When I can do it ethically, I share the stories I’ve heard, because it’s those stories that change hearts and minds” (Catrin, COW).

Ben (PO) agreed.

“If we as workers are not going to change the conversation about migration, then I don’t know who will. There is a lot of ignorance out there, a lot of fear too. We’ve seen the impact of trauma. We’ve heard those stories and that gives us a responsibility”.

In line with Blackwell (2005), the practitioners felt the need to bear testimony to the stories they had heard and to help raise awareness regarding issues of forced migration (see also Tyler 2006).

The quotes above were consistent with Smajlovic and Murphy (2020) who envision an important role for practitioners in advocating for forced migrants at micro, mezzo and macro levels (Bronfenbrenner 1979) from advocating with services to support resettlement, as Jamie did, through developing links and common approaches between services (a key function of the practitioner forum) to influencing and challenging policy at National level. In common with Healy (2017), the practitioners saw part of their role as advocating for truth and fairness in an intentional way, both individually and collectively.

“We use our social media to share articles and news stories and then I retweet them on my personal accounts. It all helps raise awareness” (Mel, CRPL).

However, like Pittaway et al. (2011)¹²², some of the practitioners saw dangers in second hand relating of forced migrant stories.

“They are not our stories to tell. How can we ever really understand something we didn’t live through? There are dangers that it becomes like poverty porn” (Tom, CSO).

The practitioners believed that their role as witnesses and advocates needed to be held in balance with other core values like empowerment, strength perspectives and promoting dignity and choice (see also Monahan et al. 2010). These aspects are considered in the next section.

6.5 Meeting needs and building on strengths.

A further theme to emerge was how the practitioners understood and responded to the needs of the family and how they attempted to build on family strengths. This section culminates with an exploration of how practitioners negotiated the end of their support to the family and enabled transition.

Maslow (1943) within his theory of hierarchy of human needs recognised the importance of being and indeed feeling safe. Maslow identified that meeting psychological safety needs were second only to addressing basic physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter. However, as discussed in Chapter Seven,

¹²² See also Pittaway et al. (2010, p.229) where researchers are urged to “stop stealing our stories”

the parents within this study placed even more emphasis on physical and psychological safety needs, than they did on basic physical needs. This was recognised by some of the practitioners.

“You need food, you need a house, you need to be able to support yourself, but mostly you need someone to understand. Someone to remind you, you are safe now” (Maisie, Volunteer).

In line with the parents’ accounts (see section 7.3), the practitioners prioritised psychological safety. Nyla (FSW) described how she initially worked with the parent to build trust and to encourage them to open up about things that were troubling them. She explained that supporting that psychological safety preceded the other work that she needed to do in helping identify and meet the families’ needs. Riggs et al. (2017) in a study of refugee women accessing maternity services in Australia, highlighted this same point, arguing that attending support groups can help enhance psychological safety, through peer support, reducing isolation and the telling of the parents’ accounts suggested that rather than presenting, hierarchically (Maslow 1943) needs are present simultaneously across all the levels from basic to self-actualisation.

However, many of the practitioners used the notion of a needs hierarchy to prioritise their support to the families. Several of the practitioners identified how they prioritise living conditions, health needs, housing, and nutrition, before thinking about access to education, language acquisition or building social networks. Their decision making was pragmatic, prioritising a secure home base so that local networks and educational courses could then be accessed. This finding is in line with a previous study (Drennan and Joseph 2005) which identified that health visitors working with asylum seeking families framed their work largely according to Maslow’s hierarchy, and, whilst fully recognising the emotional and psychological needs of families, these were only addressed in more settled circumstances. In all cases, there was recognition that the asylum process was a priority, and that other aspirations were on hold until that was resolved

This prioritisation of asylum status was also recognised by parents (see section 7.2.1) However, the practitioners appreciated that as part of their support, they did need to help parents to see beyond the asylum decision and plan for a positive

future. The length of the asylum process was a source of frustration to families and practitioners alike. Lengthy waiting times with limited information can lead to depression and disaffection.

“They ask a question, and they don’t hear from somebody for weeks and weeks. They have no idea what is happening” (Rhea, WO).

Rhea went on to describe the feelings of powerlessness described to her by the families, and how this can reverse progress made in other areas of their support plan. Supporting families within this uncertainty was seen as a key part of their role.

The practitioners reported that parents were often confused about wider support systems and how they are accessed. There was much uncertainty about the interface between primary and secondary health. Practitioners explained how developing this understanding was an important part of their role in supporting the families.

“It’s part of our role to tell them the processes. Or you know, like a lot of people, not just asylum seekers, will attend UHW with dental needs. It is about understanding how the different parts of the NHS work and what they do” (Pippa, FSW).

Pippa explained how language barriers can inhibit understanding, and how difficult it can be for parents to use the telephone to make GP appointments. This was supported by other practitioners who also saw part of their role as helping families navigate their way around support systems and services.

Tony (HV) identified that psychological and emotional health needs were prevalent within the families he worked with. He stressed the importance of upskilling front-line workers to support these needs rather than referring people on to highly specialised services which may not exist or if they do may have long waiting lists.

“I had an email from a partner agency requesting a referral to a psychiatrist who specialised in PTSD for Syrian people. I sent an email back identifying ten agencies that provide emotional support, which could be accessed straight away!”

However, alongside a recognition of the importance of meeting needs, the practitioners, especially those in the City case study, talked about the importance of identifying and building on strengths (see also Navarro 2006). There was much mention of the resilience and resourcefulness of the parents and of building on interests to create positive experiences (see also 6.5.1).

Emma (HV) identified strengths in the bonds she observed among the families.

“They had so much loss really, yet actually sometimes because they come down to those essentials, actually sometimes their love and response for one another is stronger than some families who live in our areas and have all the trappings of being in a western world”.

The practitioners in the study were aware that best practise was to use enabling models of support to bolster self- efficacy and independence. Much of this work involved encouraging the parents to form sustainable relationships with others as part of their resettlement.

6.5.1 The importance of wellbeing

Both the interviews and the focus group highlighted the importance of supporting wellbeing, particularly during the uncertain and stressful experience of the asylum process.

“We can’t change the situation so sometimes all we can do is provide opportunities for meaning and joy in the moment.” (Dani, Volunteer)

The practitioners saw the value of activities that provided respite from the stresses of life and asylum processes:

In the focus group, Mary (FSW) mentioned visits to parks and outdoor spaces:

“Just getting somewhere green, with trees, like away from the city. It is so powerful – you can see the parents visibly relax”.

Pippa (FSW) also noted benefits from outdoor for one of the parents she supports.

“Going for a walk in the park, you can almost see her slow down her mind. She even speaks more slowly... and the children have space to run and play

and just be children.... Or when we are working together on a project like journaling. She gets absorbed in the task... in the creativity.... It helps."

The role of activities that allowed creativity and involvement, were also seen as useful by the practitioners.

"Just something that you have to concentrate on, that keeps you occupied can be helpful. We've done crochet, knitting, pottery, kintsugi¹²³. It helps you forget just for a moment" (Maisie, Volunteer).

Pippa and Maisie touch here on the idea of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) a psychological state characterised by complete concentration on an intrinsically satisfying task. The importance of flow is emphasised within positive psychology¹²⁴ which pursues human wellbeing as its primary goal. Achieving flow, has been associated with a reduction in rumination (Dietrich 2003). Ley et al. (2017) in a study with survivors of war and torture, identified several benefits of a flow state created by engagement in sports¹²⁵. These benefits included a greater ability to stay in present, distraction from physical and emotional pain and an enhanced ability to experience joy. In a meta study of body-based interventions¹²⁶ for forced migrants, Schaeffer and Cornelius-White (2021) highlighted those therapeutic activities which help forced migrants achieve flow can make a useful and culturally sensitive contribution to supporting mental health and wellbeing. Drawing on a study by Verreault (2017), they argue that benefits of flow can be generated outside of clinical counselling settings and that when undertaken in a group context, can also result in an enhanced experience of social connection and belonging. Hence, those activities which are often seen by organisations as "*nice to have extras*" (Beth, Manager) but not as core provision may have significant beneficial effects.

This focus on wellbeing advocated by practitioners is in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (Welsh Government 2014), a pioneering piece of legislation designed to reform the provision of social care in Wales, the reforms

123 Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with powdered gold, as a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. Maisie saw this as a helpful metaphor for understanding adverse life experiences.

124 Positive Psychology (Csikszentmihalyi and Seligman 2000) is the study of what makes life most worth living, focusing on wellbeing (of individuals and societies).

¹²⁵ See also Ley et al. 2018 and Ley and Barrio 2019

¹²⁶ This meta study considered 11 qualitative and case studies published since 2014 on the use of therapy approaches that involve the body and movement.

heralded by the Act are based on five themes¹²⁷ of which well-being is one. The central focus here concerns the wellbeing of both service users and service providers. There are two approaches to assessing well-being hedonic and eudemonic¹²⁸. The Welsh Government definition of well-being is strongly eudemonic, assessing well-being through a set of criteria based on health, contribution to society and access to rights. The practitioner focusses on supporting belonging, promoting dignity and choice, and providing opportunities for connection and meaning-making are closely aligned to this eudemonic understanding of wellbeing. However, some of the practitioners highlighted that there was little time to focus on activities that supported wellbeing:

“We used to be able to do lovely things with the parents, just to support them... Visits, coffee mornings... but now there is no time...and no money either for that direct work” (Allie, FSW).

“It would be lovely to spend time doing things that you know would help and promote good mental health, but our workloads are so busy we have to prioritise” (Emma, HV).

For practitioners in the focus group, this role of providing life-enhancing activities was best undertaken by faith and community groups.

“There are lots of things the families can get involved with through the churches. Free activities and opportunities and you don’t need to be of a particular faith to get involved” (Tony, HV).

The faith leader present in the focus group was very aware of the dangers of spiritual abuse, and swift to emphasise that the faith-led provision was not seeking to convert or proselytise, recognising that the families were vulnerable.

¹²⁷ The other themes of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 are prevention; voice and control; co-production; and multi-agency working.

¹²⁸ The hedonic perspective states that increasing an individual’s pleasurable experiences, and decreasing painful ones, maximises well-being. The hedonic approach takes a ‘subjectivist’ view, in that the individual is perceived to be in the best position to determine their own level of well-being. The eudemonic perspective, on the other hand takes an ‘objectivist’ view, as well-being is considered from an outside perspective, where others can ascertain the criteria of well-being.

“Our service is for everyone...we are just acting out our faith, not trying to convert anyone. We are just following the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself”.

Pippa (FSW) saw a problem in the fact that faith communities were responsible for much of the provision locally.

“They are holding up a lot of the slack, churches and voluntary organisations, this place is voluntary, volunteers all the time... you’ve got churches doing all the food distribution, you know, where’s the government policy with all of that?”.

For Pippa, supporting wellbeing was an important part of family support and should be prioritised in workload management. Pippa’s concern was that by filling the gaps, the faith communities were effectively plugging the deficits in Government provision and whilst helpful, these services masked what she called “a *broken system*”.

“There can be great therapeutic value in doing activities around wellbeing. We should have time and resources to make these a priority”.

Interestingly, Pippa’s words echo a speech made by the UK Home Secretary (Patel 2020) where she described a broken asylum system, although as Thomas (2020) asserts the content of the speech would be unlikely to resonate with refugee organisations, who agree that the system is broken but propose radically different solutions than those put forward by the Home Secretary (see Chapter Eight).

6.5.2 Supporting resettlement

The practitioners identified supporting resettlement as a key aspect of their role. The parents needed initial support to settle into a community, to meet people and to understand how things work in the UK.,

“As soon as you say, ‘we’re here to offer support, whatever’s best for you’, letting them know it’s a personalised service, you can literally see the relief. So just knowing that somebody is there and they’re no longer alone, and they can access support and help when they need it, because they recognise that they need it. It’s more of ‘thank goodness’, a bit of relief, and really embracing the support in whatever way we can offer it” (Pippa, FSW).

Two of the practitioners talked about using their time with the family to support their social capital¹²⁹, and that this needed to be prioritised alongside meeting needs and problem solving. In line with Halpern (2005), this development of social capital involved three distinct aspects: bonding, bridging, and linking. The first aspect involved helping them create ties with people that shared their experiences and creating opportunities for peer support.

“They gain so much from each other. They share experiences, contacts, and solutions. It is effective and sustainable. These relationships will continue long after my support has ended” (Pippa, FSW).

However, Deb (CCO) cautioned against assuming that people will get along and build relationships just because they shared an ethnicity.

“I got it wrong. I assumed because both families were from Syria, they would have a lot in common and help each other to settle. Actually, they are from different areas, they have different interests and occupations. It’s like putting me with a random Welsh person and expecting us to become best buddies”.

Deb highlighted the importance of looking beyond a single dimension of ethnicity to other areas of commonality, which could include shared interests, similar beliefs, or occupations.

The bridging element would involve finding areas of commonality and creating relationships based on these. Rhea (FSW) gave examples of parent and toddler groups or interest groups that helped make these connections. Finally, the idea of linking to other agencies and networks which may be able to effect positive change. Here, the practitioners saw the value of referring families to those organisations that could offer ongoing social support and reciprocal friendship. This is further explored in the next section.

¹²⁹ According to Putnam (1995), social capital refers to connections between individuals the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." This positive conceptualisation of social capital contrasts with Bourdieu (1991) who discusses how social capital can be used by those with power and influence to reinforce inequality. The practitioners in this study viewed social capital as relational and important in fostering a sense of belonging.

6.5.3 Ending support

A further aspect of support, much discussed by the practitioners involved how to end the relationship post support. The discussion in section 7.4.3 highlights how because there is no formal model of professional family support in any of the families' countries of origin, the parents tend to describe the support worker using familial or religious terms; "my sister", "my angel", "my friend". This creates a tension for the support worker, who may need to withdraw at some stage. Negotiating and explaining this ending, is essential to a positive transition. Moreover, supporting the families to create sustainable, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships within the community is of paramount importance.

"Families just feeling welcomed to different places, and all the different faith bases do that so well. Anywhere which is welcoming to families support what we do, because they instantly feel comfortable and that it's a safe place for them to be. That's helpful for our work. Sustainable community relationships" (Rhea, FSW).

There were some examples of befriending projects that were able to support the families beyond a positive asylum decision. However, these were few and were awaiting commissioning decisions about their future direction and remit. This led Dave (RO) to wonder whether there may be merit in investigating and piloting a peer- led model of family support that would be free from some of the constraints of statutory and funded third sector projects and therefore be able to support people in the longer term. He described a generic family support project operating in Australia which offered "Family to Family Befriending" and was therefore able to be highly responsive, to support a family for an indefinite period and to help the family to build sustainable social networks. Given resource constraints and ongoing service pressures in public services, he questioned whether such a project might provide a useful model for supporting refugee families to settle within Wales. All the practitioners saw the benefit of encouraging parents to develop social relationships with others within their communities. This was in line with Cutrona (2000) who recognised the importance of sustainable social support within the wider community. Nicola (CFW) stressed the importance of the community and faith organisations in providing this longer-term support.

“Everyone is welcome regardless of their faith. There are lunch clubs, coffee mornings, one to one befriending opportunities, toddler groups, you name it. The volunteers often have time for listening that we as paid workers can’t spend. And they can be there for the long term... long after the asylum claim is settled”.

This aspect was also recognised by Andrea (Advisory teacher) who stressed that within the community and faith sector, families were welcomed and there were opportunities for help with homework and practical assistance as well as reciprocal friendship¹³⁰.

“Often, what they really need is a friend. As professionals, we can offer a lot of things, but we can’t be there like a friend can”.

Hence, recognising the time constrained nature of their professional involvement and supporting sustainable relationships was critical to the practitioners’ roles.

6.6 Putting on your own lifejacket first: the importance of practitioner self-care

For all the practitioner participants, supporting refugee families was rewarding work. As previously found by Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011), the practitioners reported much compassion satisfaction, enjoying helping parents and children to achieve positive outcomes. In line with Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015), practitioners provided many examples of job satisfaction, such as watching people move on successfully, receiving positive asylum judgements, seeing parents learn English and find paid employment, and children do well at school. They spoke with pride of all that the parents had achieved and celebrated in their every success, whether small or large. However, there were challenges, and almost all the practitioners spoke of the demanding nature of support work. Recognising the challenging nature of their roles, the practitioners were very aware of the importance of self-care, which Karen (FSW) described as, *“putting on your own life jacket first”*.

Seven of the practitioners described the emotional toll of their work.

¹³⁰ This contrasts with the culture in schools which is transactional and impersonal and often out of synch with needs of migrant parents (Schneider and Arnot. 2018)

“It is exhausting. Sometimes I feel like I have nothing left to give. I’m just done” Carys (FSW)

Chapter three (3.9.1) highlighted that worker can experience vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue (Ottaway and Selwyn 2016) and there were certainly hints of this within the practitioner accounts.

For Allie (FSW), it was important to establish professional boundaries. She described several ways in which she achieved this,

“I use subtle ways of setting boundaries, for example, saying I am getting my personal phone so I can find my work number for you. If they invite me to an Eid party, I will drop a card round in the working week but not attend. It’s important for me to acknowledge and humanise but not to step over these boundaries”.

Pippa and Carys (FSWs) also found it difficult to keep boundaries in place.

“Sometimes I have probably overstepped the mark... Supporting outside hours, going over my hours, dropping everything when there is a crisis. I know it’s not my role but what do you do when you see such need?”

Rhea (FSW) mentioned that occasionally it caused conflict in her family because she was preoccupied with work issues. Sarah (Manager) spoke of compassion fatigue impacting on her other relationships.

“I see real need here, and sometimes with my friends and family, I get impatient with their first world problems. It’s not their fault, but they haven’t got a clue really”.

None of the practitioners would go so far as to say that they had suffered secondary or vicarious trauma, but almost all the practitioners recognised the emotional toll of hearing harrowing stories (see also Plakas 2018; Shah et al. 2007). Pippa (FSW) discussed the emotional impact and the responsibility she feels towards her clients.

“To be honest, some of it can be quite upsetting. I’ve got one client, if I show you, she made me this as a thank you (shows me her scarf). She made it to say thank you because, she basically said that if it wasn’t for me and the

volunteer that I buddied her up with, she would have killed herself by now. That worries me... it really worries me".

In line with the literature review (see 3.10), supervision and support were seen as important. All the agencies seemed to have effective mechanisms in place for dealing with this, and unlike in Robinson's (2014) study, supervision was available to all staff and volunteers. However, there were examples of supervisions being cancelled or postponed. The open-door policy described by many of the participants was invaluable.

"It's not about waiting for a monthly supervision, come and find me. My door is open, let's have that conversation and talk it through" (Beth, Manager).

Rhea (FSW) highlighted the importance of support from her manager and colleagues:

"If ever we need time out because something's happened, her door is always open. If I need to talk to her about anything, it's good. The other members of staff, when I first started last year, we would go to the pub on a Friday after work, they would give me two hours where I could get out what I had to get out and then they were like, "Right, enough now", and that was it, that was the way that I would deal with it".

Rhea went on to describe her awareness that whatever was going on in her life, she was not experiencing the gravity of adversity experienced by the families.

"The way that I deal with it is I think, 'Shape up and help them out'. You know that you've got a roof over your head, you know that your boy has got a school place, you know that you're not going to be racially abused in the street, you know... And that's the way that I deal with it, I think, "Well, I'm alright, it's them that's not", so that's why no matter what, if I've had a bad night's sleep, if my boy has played me up in the morning, as soon as I walk through that door, I've got a smile on my face. I have a laugh and a joke with them" (Rhea, FSW).

The practitioners were aware of the importance of supervision and showed some investment in self-care. However, the demanding nature of the work they described suggests that without effective mechanisms in place to safeguard wellbeing there is

a real risk of stress and burnout of practitioners (Van der Veer 1998; Wroe et al. 2019) as well as a de-prioritising of their own needs:

“I need a doctor’s appointment for an issue I’ve had for a while, but I keep cancelling it because things are always coming up in work” (Jamie, FSW).

Whilst the practitioners in the study did not necessarily prioritise self-care, what they did value was the opportunity to network with others working in the same field.

6.7 Communities of practice (CoP)

The importance of networking with knowledgeable others was a strong theme within both the interviews and the focus group. Within the City case study, the practitioner network provided an invaluable opportunity for sharing ideas and practice. One of its strongest benefits was helping practitioners to

“Know what was out there” (Pam, Advisory Officer) to support families.

The practitioners also valued the opportunity to understand each other’s remits and organisational referral pathways. A further benefit was seen as joint problem solving.

The focus group gave some examples of where there had been gaps in provision but where these were met by *“thinking outside the box”* (Tony, HV) or even establishing new provision. A great example of this was a project that had been established to support pregnant mothers through pregnancy and childbirth. This project developed a model of using volunteer doulas¹³¹ to befriend and support during childbirth, a culturally sensitive model that would be both familiar and reassuring for parents (LaMancuso et al. 2016). The focus group members discussed the potential of the practitioner network for joint problem solving, for informing policy locally and beyond and for providing informed peer support to staff. There were also examples of shared training across the group.

“Offering out our cultural competence training to the practitioner network has helped us to develop common and consistent approaches” (Allie, FSW).

¹³¹ A doula is a woman, typically without formal obstetric training, who is employed to provide guidance and support to a pregnant woman during labour.

The practitioners placed a high value on shared reflective practice within their network.

“We think about what has gone well, and what could have gone better. It allows us to get other perspectives and to inform what we do moving forward”.

This was reminiscent of Wenger’s (1998) Community of Practice (CoP) where people with a shared interest and passion come together to share practice and become better at it as they continue to interact together. The motivation to come together, to share experiences (see also Ardichvilli et al. 2003) and to collectively find ways to improve practice was evident within the practitioner network:

“It’s a couple of hours out of my day... but it’s not a luxury. I learn so much. I go back better able to signpost, more aware of what’s out there to support families and reassured that I’m doing the right things”.

Hence, the practitioner network allowed practitioners the time and space to share experience, to develop adaptive expertise (Bransford et al. 2000) and to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Duguid 2005).

6.8 Chapter summary and conclusions

This chapter has considered a range of practitioner’ voices related to their experiences of supporting refugee families. The practitioners are engaged in exacting, challenging, and deeply rewarding work. The passion and commitment they show for this area of practice is inspiring. However, it is also evident that they experience many frustrations with systems and policies that are outside their control. They sometimes find themselves baffled by Home Office processes and frustrated by opaque decision making. Often, they find themselves unable to provide the level of support they would wish, owing to organisational, resource and time constraints. Moreover, they find themselves cast into the role of witnesses and advocates, feeling the need to educate those around them regarding issues of forced migration. The emotionally demanding nature of the work requires attention to their own wellbeing needs, along with regular supervision and support, and opportunities for individual and collective reflection.

The practitioners prioritised empathic listening, cultural competence, and strength-based approaches. They recognised the daily challenges the parents faced, the importance of trustful relationships and their role in inspiring hope, supporting problem

solving and helping families to develop their own sustainable social networks. These issues are further considered in the next chapter from the perspective of the parents themselves.

Chapter Seven

Perspectives from parents

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the parents interviewed as part of the research.¹³² Stahl (1989) explores the importance of personal experience narratives in developing our understandings of specific times in history. Moreover, they can be invaluable in providing personal insights into social phenomena, in this case, enriching our understandings of issues related to migration and resettlement.

The accounts of the parents varied significantly. However, by immersing myself in the data, and “noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen et al. 2011, p.461) five overarching themes were identified. The first and most salient of these themes relates to complex, highly individualised and interrelated notions of identity, place and belonging. The second theme concerns the importance of safety, both physical and psychological. The third theme relates to factors which support the resettlement process. The fourth theme considers parents’ experiences of the UK asylum system and how these impacts on family life and wellbeing. The chapter then concludes with a fifth theme, which focuses on the parents’ hopes and aspirations for their own and their children’s futures.

7.1.1 An introduction to the parents

Prior to embarking on a discussion related to these themes, it is first necessary to provide further detail about the parent participants. To preserve anonymity, names and certain identifying biographical details have been changed.

¹³² Using Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological model, I have started with wider contextual factors before moving to perspectives of practitioners (which exert a more immediate influence) and culminating with the parent perspectives themselves, reflecting their centrality and importance within the study.

Family composition	Country of origin	Time in UK	Additional details
Mother Ardita (age 30-35). Daughter Flutura (13). Son Jak (11)	Albania	4 years from 1999- 2003 Deported. Returned 2017.	Currently seeking asylum; excellent spoken English; history of domestic abuse; survivor of modern-day slavery.
Mother Luljeta (Age 30-35) Daughter Rozafati (11) Son- Zamir (9)	Albania	2 years (In Wales for 9 months).	Granted leave to remain 2018. Several accommodation and school move since arriving in UK.
Habibah single woman (aged 19) currently 8 months pregnant with first child	Tanzania	Arrived in UK 4 months ago	Was trafficked from Tanzania, spent time in Middle East in forced domestic labour. Has already learned significant amounts of English.
Mother Ranye Father Haydar (both aged 30-35) Son Adan (8) Daughter Estere (5) Son Tirej (2.5)	Iraq	9 months	From Kurdish area of Iraq. Has 5 children. 2 oldest are still in Iraq. Spent time in a refugee camp in Turkey. Both parents were participants although Haydar said very little in the interview.
Mother Orpita (aged 25-30) Daughter Chuma (4)	Bangladesh	4 years	Granted leave to remain 2017. Speaks good English. Has secured a job in retail. Aspires to study management.
Mother Sadaf (Aged 30-35) Daughter Mariam (6) Son - Jack (4)	Iran	9 years	Granted leave to remain 2014 and has British Citizenship. Children were born in the UK. Sadaf arrived in the UK with her husband but subsequently marriage has failed. Volunteers at community centre.
Mother Wahiba Daughter Fatima (13) Son Absalom (11) Son Said (aged 7) Daughter Sahar (aged 3)	Algeria	2.5 years (10 months in Wales)	Granted leave to remain 2018. Absalom has severe physical disabilities. Interview was undertaken with translator and support worker present. Separated from husband (who was originally working in an official capacity within the UK).
Mother Khorshid-banou Father Amir (both aged 25-30) Son Behni (5) Son Delir (20 months)	Iran	7 months	Excellent spoken English- learned at university in Iran. In country of origin, both mother and father had professional roles. Both parents took part in the study ¹³³ .

Table 10: Parent Participants

¹³³ The sample is made mainly of women, with a high proportion of single women. It suggests that single parents may have more agency in deciding whether to take part in research.

It is important to note at the outset that all the parents were based within the City Case Study. Here, access secured through my partnerships with the refugee services, and practitioners were helpful in making introductions. The Valleys Case Study area was working with far fewer families, and access was difficult as the families would be easily identifiable. The parents in the City Case Study were all spontaneous arrivals and therefore not attached to a specific asylum scheme such as the Syrian Resettlement Scheme. Hence, the views and experiences related in this chapter may not fully reflect the experiences of families resettled under the specific schemes, which are often better resourced and managed locally.

7.2 Identity, place and belonging.

This section examines how the parents understood and articulated their sense of their place in the world. For the parents in this study, notions of self and surroundings were continually shifting and developing (see also Burke and Stets 2009) as they came to terms with life in their host country (Lacroix 2006).

7.2.1 “*I am more than my refugee status*”: issues of identity.

Definitions of identity are multiple and varied (Angew 2006), but most encapsulate notions of self-perception, self-expression, role definition and belonging to groups (Weinreich 1986). It is now widely accepted that identity is not fixed but evolves over time, influenced by both our own perceptions and the perceptions of others as we construe them. Hence, identity is negotiated through our interactions with others. There is a recognition that identities can be multiple and hybrid (Lucey et al. 2003) although the findings from the parents would suggest that identity is far more complex than a straightforward hybridity and is also continually changing to reflect new experiences (Everett and Wagstaff 2004; Hall 2006).

On my first visit to one of the research sites, a practitioner introduced me to a father who was attending the Centre with his children. The worker asked him if there was anything he wanted to tell me about his life. After just a moment's thought, he replied, “*I am more than my asylum status*”. This was to become a recurrent theme throughout the research, with parents reporting that often they felt labelled by their home office categorisation, in a way that felt demeaning or negating of other aspects of self. This finding aligns with Goffman's construct of the stigma-spoiled self (Goffman 1963). This was poignantly expressed by one of the participants.

“In my country I was a graphic designer. I learned English at university. Here I look after the children. I come to this Centre, and I just wait” (Khorshid-banou).

For Khorshid-banou, the sense of loss related to her previous identity as a professional woman was combined with resignation about her current position. The powerlessness expressed by Khorshid-banou was common in the interviews (see also Dalgard et al. 2006). The boredom of waiting was prevalent among the parents, in line with previous studies where life was perceived as halted whilst claiming asylum (Ingvarsson et al. 2016), with individuals compelled to live a *“provisional existence with connections to ...opportunities....and services that are tenuous at best”* (Jacobsen and Fratzke 2016, p.3). Two of the mothers voiced positive ideas about belonging to a defined minority which imparted some collective identity for those seeking refuge as well as peer support¹³⁴.

“It helps to be with other refugees. They understand and can help each other” (Sadaf).

“I like coming to the Centre with others like me” (Ardita).

The women often expressed their identity in relation to others (as a mother, in some cases a wife, a daughter). Gendered role descriptors formed part of the voiced identity (Camino and Krulfeld 1994) of the parents and how others (particularly social care professionals) defined them. The parents spoke movingly about their relationships with relatives who have remained in their country of origin, and it is clear, that even when contact is irregular these relationships continue to play a significant role in their lives and to define their identities.

“I have faith I will see my mother again, to be her daughter again. In Iran we have a word that means “highest degree of faith”. I want to have that faith, but it is very hard” (Khorshid-banou).

The interviews raised issues about gender and specifically what it means to be a woman. Two of the mothers interviewed had separated from their husbands since arriving in the UK, and partly attributed their relationship breakdown to their own

¹³⁴ See also Payson 2015 who explores belonging in a Welsh context and Spicer 2008 who considers a broader UK perspective.

changes in perception about gender roles since observing how women behave and are treated within the UK.

“As a woman stay strong, stand up for yourself. Say what is not acceptable. Do not just give in. This is what I learn in the UK. Be strong as a woman”
(Sadaf).

This idea of being strong was present in all but one of the interviews and was often used in a gendered way, with the parents talking about needing to be a strong woman or to “find my strength”. Interestingly, this had not featured strongly in the literature, although Siddiquee and Kagan (2006) recognise the ways in which multiple forms of marginalisation can erode any sense of empowerment and feed into a perception of self as weak and incapable. More recently, Hibbs (2022)¹³⁵ explored the concept of empowerment of minoritised women in Wales, identifying that psychological empowerment aided women’s self-perception and their ability to thrive in relationships with others. Ardita, Luljeta and Wahiba all mentioned the importance of being strong for their children and particularly modelling strength to their daughters. Luljeta (who had found the courage to escape modern day slavery within the sex industry when she realised that her daughter was in imminent danger of the same fate) stated:

“If she sees me strong, then she will learn to be strong also”.

Also prevalent was the idea that you could think yourself strong.

“If I think I am strong, then maybe it is true” (Ardita).

For these women, thinking of their own mother was a source of strength, both in terms of imagining how she would act in each situation, and in relation to making her proud. This aspect of the mother and daughter relationship is further explored in section 7.6.2.

For some, the symbolic importance of given names to personal identity also featured within the responses, particularly in relation to the aspirations of those who named

¹³⁵ Hibbs (2022) used a case study methodology with seven female participants exploring ideas of psychological empowerment in relation to the work of an NGO. Hibbs found that the women experienced benefits in all aspects of empowerment (measured by an adapted version of Zimmerman (1995) Psychological Empowerment Framework. Interestingly the organisation subsequently closed following funding constraints, in line with the findings of my earlier chapters.

them¹³⁶. Habidah talked about missing her mother, but also of all that her mother wanted for her.

“My mother always told me to be positive. My name means happy and now I am”.

With a touch of humour, Khorshid-banou complained about the Welsh weather,

“My name it means face of the sun, but no sun here! Not really. I like the rain but sometimes it is very windy, and I don’t like that.”

Whilst the reference to the weather may seem like a trivial aspect (albeit one that all but one parent mentioned in their interview), for this mother it could symbolise something more profound, relating to the immensity of the changes associated with crossing continents and subsequently coming to terms with the embodied self, living a new life in a new culture. Palsson (2014) explores the importance of given names for understandings of self and belonging, concluding that they are important for identification and for locating the individual within cultures, social networks, and genealogies. In a migration context, people may also lose the recognition that the name would have in their country of origin (Chantler-Davis 2011) in some cases, causing the parent to try to anglicize their names *“to make it easier for people”* (Sadaf) or to fit in.

Children were not involved directly in the study and hence, their perspectives are glimpsed only obliquely through the lens of the adults who support them (both parents and practitioners). However, one aspect that emerged was the perceived fluidity of children and young people’s identities; their adaptability and ability to quickly assimilate into the culture of their host nation:

“After ten months in [City] she is now every bit the Welsh teenager. Her expressions, the way she chooses to dress and even what he chooses to eat”
(Support Worker, Wahiba nods vigorously).

Similarly, Ardita speaks of her UK born daughter.

¹³⁶ Pallson (2014) considers the way that given names embody deeper meaning arguing that this resonance can be part of what is lost during migration.

“She says, ‘I am English!’ Sometimes it makes me laugh, she doesn’t say Albanian, ‘No, English’”.

In this example, the daughter (born in England before being moved to Wales two years previously) identified as English rather than Welsh. The question of how children construct their identities and the role of place within that is explored by Scourfield et al. (2006) who recognise the complexity and multiple influences that contribute to the construction of national identity.

Elsewhere in the interviews, notions of Welshness are evident, suggesting that parents appreciated that they were living in a devolved nation with its own culture and heritage. Whilst a notion of living in Wales was discussed positively (see section 7.2.2), there was only limited mention of the Welsh language. Ardita spoke proudly of her children learning Welsh at school.

“They do Welsh and French, but they like Welsh better than French. ... it’s been so good to learn Welsh¹³⁷.”

The other parents made no mention of Welsh language¹³⁸.

Overwhelmingly, the parents in the study saw this integration in positive terms and were proud of their children’s grasp of English (see also Anderson 2017)¹³⁹, success at school and new friendships. However, whilst they spoke positively of their children’s changing identity, there was also a sense of loss in relation to who those children may have become if not forced to migrate.

“My children love UK and are like British children now” (Ranye).

Pritchard et al. (2019) highlight the ease with which children can adapt to their new environment. The neuroplasticity of the child and adolescent brain, lends itself to second language acquisition in a way that is not the case for adults (Ping et al. 2014)

¹³⁷ The positivity towards Welsh shown by Ardita’s children was consistent with Geraint (2016) who considered the views of children for whom Welsh was not their first language. Her findings, whilst encouraging, highlighted that pupils were aware of its low status as a language and this impacted on their views of Welsh language. Hayat (2019) identified similar findings.

¹³⁸ Had the research taken place in an area of Wales with a higher proportion of indigenous or learned Welsh speakers then this finding may well have been different. There are several news articles highlighting benefits for asylum seekers in learning Welsh both in Welsh speaking areas (BBC 2019) and in areas with lower levels of Welsh speakers (Nation Cymru 2021).

¹³⁹ Anderson (2017) drew on his insights of designing a family literacy programme for 500 parents in Canada from four language groups. He recognises the barriers and challenges to supporting children’s English language acquisition, but also noted parental pride in their developing proficiency and a resilient approach to undertaking home based tasks to support these skills.

and are also more adaptable (Guzder et al. 2014). However, individual factors, additional needs and trauma may impact on children's adaptability. Hence, there needs to be a recognition that *"the normal childhood tasks of growing up are greatly compounded for refugee children when they come to a new land as strangers and have already led eventful lives"* (Fantino and Colak 2001, p.587). Therefore, it is important not to take an easeful transition for children and young people into their new lives for granted, but rather to ensure that appropriate help and resources are in place to support this process.

Whilst parents applauded their children's integration, they were also keen to ensure that children maintained links to their culture of origin. Through food and other cultural symbols (see Turner 1967), the parents explained how they try to preserve aspects of their indigenous culture for their children. Ardita spoke proudly of her daughter's desire to learn traditional songs and dances:

"Always, she says to me, 'Can you teach me this dance and that dance?' Albanian traditional dance".

The role of preserving aspects of indigenous culture is often seen as the role of the mother, even when both parents are present (Bloch and Sperber 2002). The parents viewed balancing two cultures not as a tension or cause of stress (see Bornstein 2012) but rather as an accepted reality which they seemed to view as positive, enriching and enlivening.

7.2.2 "In my country...": issues of place and belonging.

The notion of belonging (see Gergen 2000; Betancourt et al. 2015) emerged strongly from the interviews, encapsulating narratives of place and of home, and of fitting in. Several of the refugees still referred to their country of origin as "my country". Moreover, they tended to express binary contrasts between aspects of life in the UK and in the country of origin *"In my country... but here..."* These comparisons reflected all aspects of life from living conditions to social norms. Interestingly, the parents were more likely to express positive aspects of UK life:

"My room ...is amazing. It very big! In my country, 11 people in the same space, all sleep on the floor. Here I sleep on a bed" (Habibah).

Longing for home was related to people left behind, rather than for the country itself, with parents mindful of the difficulties that had caused them to flee.

The issue of British and Welsh identity surfaced in many of the interviews. Sadaf speaks proudly of her journey to British Citizenship.

“I became British citizen. I am British. Not refugee now. I have British passport”.

She went on to speak a little of Welshness, which she and the others define in relation to the openness and friendliness of the people.

“I love Wales. I would not change anything. The people are friendliest in the world”.

Although the parents in the study all lived within the City area, they were aware of the beauty of the Welsh landscape, particularly mountains and coastline, which for some of the parents offered an opportunity to relieve stress and for others was reminiscent of home.¹⁴⁰ Schama (1996) in the book *Landscape and Memory*, explores our relationship to the landscape around us, with the typography of place representing so much more than its physical contours, but rather linked to the layers of our social world¹⁴¹.

Time spent in nature can have several benefits and during my pilot interview with a practitioner working in the Midlands area of England, she talked about the success of arranging trips to the Malvern Hills, and how the relaxed atmosphere enabled the families to feel more comfortable telling their stories. Hence, a successful resettlement may need to consider more than simply the systems and services in place to support families, but also how the landscape itself can help and support healing and promote a sense of home and belonging. This is consistent with current thinking about the benefits of blue/ green spaces to promote positive mental health

¹⁴⁰ This resonated strongly with me as during my time spent at the refugee camps at Dunkirk, the Kurdish children, who were currently living in a grey-skied coastal plain continually painted pictures of soaring mountains and a bright yellow sun.

¹⁴¹ Hence, the mountains may come to represent histories, traditions, and mythologies as well as people and a life left behind. This accords with the Welsh notion of “hiraeth” which embodies notions of homesickness, nostalgia and longing for a place that no longer exists and a grief and sadness for all that has been lost. Immersing oneself in a similar landscape may bring these associations to the forefront and allow them to be experienced as part of a healing process.

and wellbeing (Pouso et al. 2020), particularly for women who have experienced trauma (Stenius and Veysey 2005).¹⁴²

Wahiba explained that though she had not previously heard of Wales, now she feels like a Welsh person.

“To me, [City] is my home, my country. They are all now my people”.

Luljeta discussed her aspiration to emanate the qualities she associates with Welshness.

“Welsh are very beautiful people. Big hearts. People help you. Nothing asks from you. Help you. In (country of origin) bad things. Here help you. I want to be like that”.

Wahiba's and Luljeta's accounts suggest that it is important to feel like you belong, that you are accepted within your community. At the heart of that sense of belonging are notions of safety and care, explored in the next section.

7.3 “Here I am safe”- issues of physical and psychological safety

Throughout the interviews personal safety emerged repeatedly. This notion of personal safety is implicit but not explicit within the principles of the Birmingham Declaration (Sanctuary Summit 2014). The families were fleeing situations where their personal safety had been severely compromised, through war, conflict, persecution, or harassment. Additionally, many families undertook hazardous journeys in their attempts to reach a place of safety. It is little wonder then, that they prioritised safety above every other aspect within their experience of resettlement (see Maslow 1943). Throughout the study, it became evident that ‘safety’ is a highly subjective concept, with the parents’ defining safety in different ways.

For Habibah, pregnant with her first child, safety was equated with personal liberty and freedom from slavery. In a moving account, Habibah recalled how political conflict caused her village to flee, scattering her friends and relatives. Alone, she

¹⁴² CPRE (2020) identified a surge in appreciation for green spaces during lockdown. For forced migrants, lockdown led to an exacerbation of isolation and vulnerability, attributable to many factors including the closure of parks and public spaces (Finlay et al. 2021)

found herself in domestic servitude in the Middle East. She describes a life that was difficult but bearable, until she began to feel unsafe.

“Problems with the gentleman of the house. I have to run. I do not trust. I do not feel safe”.

In contrast, Wales represented a safe environment for her.

“I want to stay in [City]. I am safe here- there is nobody who tries to trap me and make me do bad things. I do not want to think of before, only tomorrow”.

Even more important to her was the safety of her child.

“My baby is safe here and will go to school”.

Discussing the safety, she has found in Wales, Habibah mentioned having her own room *“My roomis amazing. I safe here”*. Even more surprising to her was the safety net provided by public service professionals.

“Here there are people who keep you safe. Support Workers and Police. They do not take money and look other way. They are good”.

This notion of corruption and bribery of those in authority or public service within their countries of origin, was also prevalent in many of the accounts of the parents in line with findings of Barrera (2011).

Luljeta, the single mother of two children and herself a survivor of enforced prostitution, discussed safety in terms that go beyond physical aspects into emotional security.

“I feel like I am safe and have good future now. Today I no longer want to kill myself, I am strong. I have my kids. I have hope.” (She contrasts this to her experiences in her country of origin) *“It was not safe for me to stay, and I need future for my kids. So, I risk our lives to get somewhere safe”*¹⁴³.

Luljeta juxtaposed the need to risk a hazardous journey with the desire to reach a place of safety. In common with all the parents interviewed, her children's safety and future life chances were of paramount importance to Luljeta. She described how the

¹⁴³ The idea of risking lives to get to safety was prevalent in the interviews. This supports the contention of Freedman (2016) that migration is fraught with gender specific dangers for women, in addition to the hazards of the journey itself.

motivation for her escape came when she realised that her daughter was at risk of sexual exploitation. Despite having experienced ongoing emotional difficulties, Luljeta described how her daughter now feels safe and is beginning to thrive.

“My daughter has seen too much but she is free, and she now needs to live her life.” She also identified the role of support services in helping families to feel safe, *“We in good hands. Not just left. Not leave me alone”*.¹⁴⁴

Sadaf, who is now a volunteer within services for refugees and asylum seekers, described the importance of safe spaces for families. She describes the importance of having somewhere to go, where you feel like your needs are understood and you are not judged. She saw female only spaces as particularly important.

“It is safe and a nice place. They can come here, eat, and enjoy and be sure they are safe. They can have a coffee and talk to other ladies. Or someone who can help them”.

Although the parents expressed that they feel safe and welcomed in Wales generally, it was evident that the refugee centres, family support projects and faith communities offered an additional layer of safety for the parents, an additional microsystem (Bronfenbrenner 1979) where their needs were comprehended and met. Orpita discussed the emotional sustenance provided by a family support project with which she has been involved.

“In my difficult time. They were there with me. I say to them they are like my angels. Because they are with me, I can go through. They were strong for me and now I am strong”.

Similarly, Luljeta articulated the safety provided within her faith community,

“Church for me is time alone. Time to be safe and talk with God.... Lots of questions but I have belief like before. I know God is with me and I am safe”.

¹⁴⁴ Luljeta’s account stands in stark contrast to the 2020 report Hear us (Sisters Not Strangers Coalition 2020) which highlighted how forced migrant women felt less safe and supported during lockdown, with many experiencing fear, financial and food insecurity, and isolation

Again, this idea of the safety provided by belonging to a faith community was evident within the research, consistent with the faith stream¹⁴⁵ of the Cities of Sanctuary movement. This also aligns with the findings of Cheung and Phillimore (2013) who reported that 63% of the refugees gave the top score of 10 for the support and sense of belonging provided by faith communities, but that interestingly, this aspect was not highly prioritised by either frontline practitioners or policy makers.

Maslow (1943) hierarchy of human needs recognised the importance of psychological safety needs, second only to addressing basic physiological needs such as food and shelter. However, within this study, the parents placed more emphasis on physical and psychological safety needs than they did upon the basic physical needs. Nonetheless, this could be because needs for food and shelter had now been met. Clark (2020, p.2) helpfully defines psychological safety as a fourfold construct; *"a condition in which human beings feel (1) included, (2) safe to learn, (3) safe to contribute, and (4) safe to challenge the status quo – all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished in some way"*. The parents in this study often aligned to the first two elements of this model. Sadaf also felt safe to contribute and to challenge.

"Now I feel that I can use my experiences to help others. Sometimes this means telling them what it should be and helping them to change it when they are given the wrong advice".

As noted in section 3.4, feeling safe was often a springboard to resilience (Toth 2003) and an ability to envision a positive future (Khawaja et al. 2008).

A further finding from the parents' interviews related to the effectiveness and proactive policing within Wales. This was a finding from all three participant groups (see sections 5.7 and 6.7). The parents contrasted this to the role and operations of police within the families' countries of origin and to the experience of policing in countries through which the families may have made transit. Habibah, as noted above, articulated those police in Wales help make her feel and stay safe¹⁴⁶, and

¹⁴⁵ The Cities of Sanctuary Movement is made up of streams related to interests which encourage professionals or practitioners and individuals to come together to embed the concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within their professions, sectors, and organisations. One of these streams relates to faith communities.

¹⁴⁶ This stands in contrast to accusations of institutional racism against South Wales police and the CPS following the death of Christopher Kapessa (July 2020).

Sadaf offered an explicit example of how the police reacted to a concern related to her safety.

“For people like me coming from another country, you see it is so good. The police act very quick here. Respond to problems... the police care about you. Three days ago, I had argument with a neighbour. He says something bad to me swearing and things like that. I have no choice -I just call police. You cannot imagine for two three days the police are calling me and asking if all okay, everything fine. I feel safe with them”.

Even Ardita, who, in her interview relates horrifying accounts of her dealings with police in her country of origin, recognised that the UK police are different. Here she describes her attempts to overcome her fear of uniforms.

“Up to today, I feel scared of them. I feel so scared of uniforms ... We talked with (support worker) about this, and I remember the police came here and I tried on his clothes just to find out if I can take out that scary thing about uniform. I mean, when I take that jacket on, it's a lot of people around but I can see in myself that I'm not ready...My body starts shaking, I feel sick, my body feels so much stress and depression, and it's very bad feelings when I see the police, until now. And if I hear the siren, my God, my heart's wanting to come out, it's so scary”.

It appears that police play a significant practical and emotional role in facilitating the personal safety of the families but must work hard to gain the trust of those who have had negative prior experiences with authority and policing. This finding was consistent in the accounts of parents, practitioners, and strategic actors. The Police Service were aware of the important role they play and had made it a strategic and operational priority to engage positively with the forced migrant population.

7.4“Settling in this country”; factors that aid resettlement

This section examines factors that facilitate resettlement. Within this theme several sub themes emerged. Firstly, the parents highlighted the benefits of belonging to a community which accepted and welcomed them, where they could develop reciprocal friendships. This process of building relationships was highly contingent on being able to communicate effectively in English. Moreover, the whole process of

resettlement was supported by practitioners that were attuned to the needs of the family and able to help them navigate their way through challenging circumstances, whilst also signposting to projects and services that could support their needs.

7.4.1 “I have good friends here”, Public acceptance, friendship, and reciprocity

The fifth core principle of The Birmingham Declaration is, “We should welcome the stranger and help them to integrate” (Sanctuary Summit 2014). This embodies the idea of public acceptance which was of vital importance to the parents in this study. Although there were isolated examples within the research of lack of acceptance, particularly in the weeks following the Brexit vote (see also Graoui 2019), the overwhelming experience reported by the parents was one of positivity and tolerance¹⁴⁷. This was expressed most strongly by those who had lived in other areas of the UK:

“I love [City], especially because of the people... nice and friendly. In (another part of the UK) we only had leisure with other asylum seekers in the hostel. We did not meet people in the community. I have heard about experiences in other cities, but we were lucky here all the people ... want to talk to us- even when we don’t want to talk! We couldn’t speak English, but they made an effort to invite us and get to know us” (Sadaf).

Sadaf mentioned a friend’s experience in another part of the UK, contrasting this with her own positive experience:

“The people are friendliest in the world. I’ve been to London and other cities but not for a long time. I see how they are treating people - they do not like refugee /asylum. They do not like to live next to them. I have a friend in Newcastle- every night they have eggs on their window. I say to her “Why do you have to live there?”. She was crying so much. At the end she had to move. In [City] I have not had anything like that. Not at all. Most of them are so friendly. They have an open mind”.

¹⁴⁷ This notion of Wales as friendly and tolerant is part of a wider trope that is present in many areas of Welsh life and policy making. For example, there are strides a head to make Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation and to make Wales age- friendly. Huggins and Thompson (2017) attributed Wales lack of economic success to being too nice and friendly.

This quote demonstrates a sentiment expressed by many of the parents, namely that in the City they feel accepted and welcomed, perhaps in contrast to accounts they read in the media of refugees being vilified and of some of their acquaintances in other areas.

“In London, no one makes eye contact- forget saying Hello! They pretend to read the newspaper. I think in [City] it is different” (Ranye)¹⁴⁸.

The parents identified ‘welcome’ as being acknowledged, treated kindly and people responding positively to you. They spoke about developing friendships in their communities and how their neighbours had supported them.

“They saw how hard things were and bought a buggy for the youngest child to make things easier” (Ranye).

Ranye described how they all sit together in the garden, and she makes food for them all, suggesting a reciprocal relationship. This form of neighbourhood social capital, so beneficial for wellbeing (Tampubolon et al. 2013) may be more associated with the Welsh working-class communities in which so many of the parents were located.¹⁴⁹ The idea of reciprocity, the notion of giving back or contributing to the host nation, evident in Ranye’s account, was also present in other parents’ interviews, as well as those of the practitioners. The findings of this study concurred with previous research (Vandevoordt 2017; Crowther 2019) that sharing hospitality helped to create more equal and balanced relationships, which was important for maintaining dignity. This is exemplified by the words of Wahiba, speaking of her children, she said,

“I want them to all do well here and give back to this country which has been so good for us”.

Luljeta also noted of the positive impact that being accepted and having something to offer has on her wellbeing, resilience, and sense of self-efficacy.

¹⁴⁸ Netto (2011) explores the experiences of asylum seekers located under no choice dispersal arrangements, arguing that experiences of welcome and inclusion differ widely.

¹⁴⁹ See also Guma et al. (2019) who identified hospitality and solidarity as civic society responses to supporting forced migrants in Wales.

“Before, I have had doors closed in my face, but here I belong. I am helped. I am made strong”.

This public acceptance enabled Luljeta to envision a future in the City, a good life which she views as restorative to what has gone before,

“I love [City]. I love Wales. I love this place. Good future here for my kids. Calm city. Not too much noise. It helps calm my heart. And learn good things. I meet people. I go to church. I have good friends”.

The notion of reciprocity also featured in Luljeta’s interview,

“Here I feel like am a good person, not useless. I can help others like I have had help here. It is good for me”.

The idea of mutual benefit and paying forward within giving and receiving help resonated strongly with the theory of gift exchange (Mauss 1990; Heins and Unrau 2018). However, this recognition of the importance of reciprocity was less prevalent among the strategic actors, although reciprocity could potentially align to many of the other concepts evident in the thinking of the strategic actors (such as equity, dignity, choice, and inclusion). Hence, there is scope for a distinctly Welsh application of the gift theory as part of the Nation of Sanctuary agenda.

Wahiba described how Wales has now become her family home, so much so that she longs for it when she leaves for short trips. She is the only parent to go so far as to refer to Wales as “my country”.

“I get to know people around me. My language it is getting better. It is all more positive. To me, [City] is ...my country. They are all now my people. I even took my children to London for a holiday for one week. But after three days we want to come home. It was too busy, and Absalom did not have all his things and was not feeling well. When we come home, we are all so happy to be back”.

This idea of making Wales a home was more evident in those families who had been granted leave to remain. For those awaiting decisions, their attachment to Wales was expressed less passionately and was, for those who had arrived recently tainted by the difficulties of settling into a new city. Orpita expressed some of the difficulties

adapting to a different culture and stressed the importance of having support to acclimatise, to meet people and to become familiarised with their new environment.

“When I come here first it was new place to me, new people. It so tough. (Family Support project) helped me feel at home. Helped me understand how things work here. They worked with me until I settle down. It’s much better now. I do not change anything about the city”.

All the parents in this study spoke positively about living in Wales and painted a picture of Wales as a very tolerant and hospitable nation. However, it is important to acknowledge the contrasting discourse within the academic literature which challenges the racial tolerance within Wales (Williams 2015b; Parker 2018a). Indeed, Mannay (2016 p.292) cautions against “*an imagining of Wales as a tolerant nation where any ideas of xenophobia are defined through the Welsh/English dichotomy*” and the rhetoric of empathy towards marginal groups is taken as a given. This, she argues, can fail to acknowledge the well-documented discrimination and mistreatment to which individuals may be subjected. It is not uncommon for refugees to give positive accounts of their host nations and it would be unethical to do anything other than accept these as the perceptions of the individuals at that time in their journey. However, these do need to be balanced with other sources which suggest that there is still some way to go before the rhetoric of Wales as a tolerant nation is fully realised.

Many of the parents valued the friendships they had made at projects specifically for forced migrants. The ability to share with people who had experienced similar things was a great source of support. Habibah, spoke about her friend who was from a very different culture but had some similar experiences, said:

“I like that she understands what it is like. No one else can understand if they have not had it”.

This is in line with the findings of Drozdek (2015), who emphasised the importance of peer support to refugee resettlement.

For almost all the parents in the study, learning English was an important aspect of settling into their host country and building relationships with those around them. For Sachdev and Bourhis (2005) language can be a very salient aspect of our identity,

and this was certainly the case for the parents in this study, as considered in the next section.

7.4.2 “I am so proud that I speak English”: the importance of language for resettlement

Parents refereed to learning English as a key to settling in the community. For many, this included attending English classes. For others, it was more about spending time in places where English was spoken and practising daily.

Ardita discussed using every opportunity to practice English and trying each day to learn new words

“When I go in church or the Refugee Council, if I say something, everybody tries to help you. Even little things, they try to help you say them. When I go in a church, they have a lot of English people, Welsh people... They help you without anything, without interest, just wanting to make you happy”.

Luljeta related the acquisition of English to her ability to work and provide a future for her children, but also to help others in her situation.

“I would like to learn more English and have one job and help people”.

Again, linking back to the recurring theme of reciprocity, language was seen as a key enabler to integration and contribution.

Sadaf also noted the importance of English for communicating and connecting with others. She discussed how learning English helped her to overcome isolation and ultimately to integrate into Welsh society. Sadaf described her own experiences and offered advice to others seeking asylum:

“It helped me fit into the community. Because if you cannot speak English, you cannot connect, talk to anyone. You cannot say your feelings. You cannot get help and you slowly, slowly become depressed. You feel lonely and you don’t have no one. You can only have Iranian friends. And sometimes these friends are not good for you. So that is the problem but if you know English you can talk to anyone. You can take help. That is the best thing for anyone coming to UK. First, first, first thing- Learn English, because you are living here”.

I was interested to probe the idea here of friends from her country of origin “not being good” for her. It appeared that for Sadaf, coming to the UK was a new chapter in her life. Her beliefs and values had changed, and she was fearful of not fitting in with her compatriots unless she conformed to more traditional patterns of thinking and being, and particularly to the female gender stereotypes that she associated with her indigenous culture.

Ardita communicated her pride in learning the language and hearing her children speak it.

“I speak English because it’s one very good language. I feel like, even if I don’t speak better, it’s my language and I like the accent and I like to speak English more than my language. Even in the house, I always try to speak English with my kids”.

Ardita pointed out that neither her nor the children need interpreters, which helped her to feel like she belongs. However, echoing a point made repeatedly by the practitioner participants, Ranye noted the difficulties of attending English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for those who have small children. She explained how she finds that attending projects where she meets others, and the children are entertained is the most effective way of learning English in a relaxed setting.

The positivity of the parents towards learning English addresses what Zimmermann (2016) perceives as one of the barriers of migration and as a protective factor to Asfar’s (2011) assertion that inability to access support to learn the host country language can result in isolation for many refugee women. For Ranye who was unable to attend ESOL lessons as her husband’s language acquisition was prioritised (due to the need to secure employment following a positive judgement) this was certainly the case. She admitted that she often felt lonely and longed for home, even though coming to the UK had been seen as necessary for the safety of her family. However, this longing was exacerbated by the fact that her oldest children were still in her country of origin, so it was difficult to unpack the role that language played in their difficulties settling.

When analysing the data from the parents, I made this entry in my reflective research journal:

“Listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts I am struck with the impression that all the parents (but especially those who have received a positive judgement) are so positive. I wonder if this is just an initial relief and euphoria following a drawn-out asylum process, and will this positivity change in the long term as they settle into the routines of everyday life? Will the enormity of all that has been left behind then affect them more than it is at the moment? Or is it just that they do not feel able to share the difficulties, only the positive aspects”.

As identified in Chapter Six, although community relationships and learning English certainly had the potential to impact positively on resettlement, one of the strongest enablers for the parents interviewed appeared to be the practitioners that worked with them. This is considered in the next section.

7.4.3 “My sister”, “My friend”, “My angel”: working with practitioners and support projects

The literature review chapter highlighted the often-unequal relationships that exist between practitioners and service users (Rah et al. 2009) as well as some of the tensions that are present within a discourse of helping (Cooke 2003; Graff et al. 2014). I am also mindful that my own positioning as a researcher (see section 4.4) hailing from my own practitioner’ background and Welsh nationality may have impacted both on the parents’ perceptions of what I wanted to hear and on my own interpretation of the findings (Heath 2018). Consequently, it was important to ensure through reading and re-reading that I was “hearing participants’ voices, whilst silencing my own” (Silverio 2018, p.43). This was particularly difficult when listening to accounts which elevated the practitioner whilst portraying self as weak and incapable, in direct antipathy to my own espoused (and, I hope, enacted) philosophies of practice.

In line with Robinson’s study (2014), one of the strongest themes to emerge from the parents’ interviews was the importance of the practitioners in supporting them throughout the asylum process and beyond. This support, as described by Robinson, was seen by the parents as a lifeline, particularly in the earliest stages of the resettlement process. The parents all highlighted the important role their family

support worker had played in helping them navigate their new environment and settle in. They were grateful for the practical help and assistance.

“Lots of help from (a practitioner) food, clothes” (Habibah).

Orpita concurred that the practical support given was invaluable.

“They do lots of things to help, emotional financial whatever I need. They are there for me and for my baby. When I come here, I don’t have nothing, yeah. I only get little bit of money. It’s very little for you, whatever I need I don’t have. I got pushchair and all my babies’ needs from (the family support project)”.

There was a sense that practical needs being met creating trust and rapport, helping to create the foundations of positive relationships. Khorshid-banou further identified the role of practitioners not just in providing practical support but also in helping the families to meet others and to enjoy social activities. She described one of the community projects that she engaged with,

“I am given buggy and clothes. I have help here and talk to people who know how it is for me. We meet others in our situation. We get food and have family films with popcorn. It helps my children, and it helps me”.

Ranye also valued the movie nights and how the project offered her dignity and choice in the boutique.

“At night, free cinema with pizza, popcorn, and drinks. Children get fruit at the centre too. It is a family film – opportunity to relax and learn English. We received clothes from the boutique- it is good to be able to choose, not just be given what they think you need”.

The interviews suggest that the parents valued the environment of unconditional positive regard (Rogers 1961), as much as the practical help itself. The freedom to choose was also an important factor here, as previously noted in the literature review (see Jordan and Jordan 2000; Jordan 2012; Boddy et al. 2018). The ability to choose for oneself was valued by the parents, and in direct opposition to the “ethical fly tipping” approach to donation, which was a source of much annoyance amongst

practitioners who were striving to preserve dignity and autonomy for the families (see section 6.3.3).

Practical and financial support was greatly valued by the parents, who talked a lot about financial hardship. For example, Ranye explained that she was still breastfeeding her two-and-a-half-year-old, as she has so little money to purchase food for the family¹⁵⁰. Hence, those projects that provide practical assistance are highly valued by the parents, as are the attempts of support workers to help them secure additional resources.

However, almost invariably, the parents prioritised the emotional support given and valued most highly the personal attributes of the worker. Orpita here spoke of her support worker.

“I find sometimes people judge, but she never judges, and she makes me feel good and that I am okay person. She listens to me as if I am important one. They understand, they listen, and they don’t judge”.

In thinking about practitioner qualities, Orpita prioritised a non-judgmental approach, active listening, empathy, and affirmation. These attributes are central to effective relationship-based practice, which sees the relationship between practitioner and service user as a springboard for empowerment, agency, and connectedness (Trevithick 2003). Ardita agreed, adding that an empathetic person being with you can make all the difference at low points in the journey:

“When I came... in [City], I really had come to zero in my life. The support worker stayed so close with me, talking all the time”.

This quote, for me, emphasised the importance of culturally sensitive practice that recognises all that the parent has been through whilst also promoting agency and self-belief (Kashyap and Hussain 2018).

7.4.3.1 How the identities of practitioners are ‘framed’ by parents

Within the countries of origin of most families, support was undertaken exclusively by the family, the community, or the faith community. Hence, whilst job-roles such as

¹⁵⁰ Whilst there are identified benefits for breastfeeding beyond infancy, mineral and vitamin deficiencies in breastfed toddlers have also been identified (Biser-Rohrbaugh et al. 2001). The pertinent point here is that Ranye was breastfeeding her child not for health or attachment benefits, but out of financial necessity.

doctor or teacher were easily relatable for the parents, there was very limited understanding or experience of the role of a family support worker, social worker, or health visitor.

Goffman's frame analysis (1974) provides a useful way of considering how the parents construct the identities of practitioners in terms that are comprehensible from their prior lives and constructs. Kuypers (2009) recognises that such framing might be conscious or unconscious and that in constructing the dialogue in a particular way, certain aspects become accentuated, which then encourage others to interpret the situation in each manner. Hence, the framing becomes important in shaping wider societal perceptions and influencing discourses. This is perhaps more evident in the way the practitioners and strategic actors 'framed' their perceptions of the refugees. However, frame analysis is bi-directional and dynamic as it still has resonance for the way that the parents made sense of the practitioner role.

When discussing their support worker, the women tended to use archetypes that were familiar to them. Hence, support workers were framed in the following three ways:

- Familial framing- my sister, my daughter, my mother
- Friendship framing- my friend
- Religious framing- my angel, one sent by God/Allah

Familial Framing was the most common form observed in the interviews, whereby the parents used familial terms like sister, cousin, or mother to describe the roles of the practitioners, as Wahiba explained:

"When I met (her support worker) I found a sister here I can trust.... She did not just do her job perfectly, but she also gave emotional support, like family do. I felt I had some where to go for help. In Arabic there is a saying (quotes Arabic and then translator gives English version) it is like "Take my back. Be my backbone".

Whilst both practical and emotional support were evident within the ways mothers talked about their support worker, as already noted, it was emotional support that was prioritised.

“I feel I share with her, and she listen like my family. I don’t have family over here, but she listens like my sister. She is lovely and kind and when she goes away, I miss her, how she works with me. She helps me. She does lots of things for me” (Orpita).

Interestingly, gender was prominent within these descriptions, with all the descriptors representing female family members¹⁵¹. This aligns with the work of Hollway (2006) wherein the generally held assumption of an innate ability to care as a female capacity is critically explored. However, the parents’ perceptions did broadly reflect the gender balance of the workforce (mainly female), and the makeup of the sample of parents (8 women and 2 men)¹⁵². However, when male workers were involved with the family, they were much more likely to be described by their job title, or the generic appellation “my worker”. Perhaps for cultural reasons, some of the parents found it difficult to conceptualise women as paid workers, or to see care related professions as paid employment.¹⁵³

Friendship framing of support workers was also evident within the interviews. Habibah reflected on the pending birth of her child.

“My friend will be with me at the birth. I do everything with her. She knows what I have been through. Even though we are from different countries, she understands.”

“She is a friend to me in this country and she helps me make other friends”
(Orpita describing a volunteer befriender).

Intrinsic to friendship framing was the parents’ perception that the support worker had gone above and beyond their job role. However, this needs to be seen alongside the practitioners’ efforts to maintain professional boundaries (section 6.3) and the positive perspectives here need to be balanced against sources which suggest that forced

¹⁵¹ Interestingly, the male workers did not report the use of familial or friendship framing although Tony’s interview does include reference to parents thanking God/ Allah for him.

¹⁵² Both men, Amir, and Haydar, were less vocal within the interviews, in both cases they were keen to clarify or explain details introduced by the women, but largely left the talking to their wives. This may align with cultural norms around communicating with a female researcher.

¹⁵³ Within many of the countries of origin care and support would have been the responsibility of the family and/or community and not of paid professionals.

migrants are being let down, particularly during the pandemic (Bhatti-Sinclair 2020; Finlay et al. 2021).

Parents often described their support worker using religious imagery, as evidenced in Luljeta's interview.

"If you have a support worker you are blessed in every way. My perfect Angel. They did a beautiful job for me. I am blessed...I say she is my angel. She was sent by God to push me through the difficulties and help me. For me this is everything. It changed my life. I have [practitioner name] now".

Orpita also used this religious terminology to describe how workers helped her through challenging experiences.

"In my difficult time. They were there with me. I say to them they are like my angels. Because they are with me, I can go through. They was strong for me".

Parents suggested that support workers went beyond their job-role, and this contributed to the need to relate the practitioner roles to familial or religious constructs. In their countries of origin, such practitioner roles were unlikely to exist, so there was a need to relate them to a more culturally familiar construct. The prevalence of religious imagery was also noted by Munt (2012, p.555) who argued that it provided the women with "landmarks of recognition" for relating current experiences to ideas that were familiar and resonant. There were indeed examples of practitioners being flexible with their working hours to support the families and of helping in ways that were almost certainly not in the job description. This was acknowledged and valued by parents. Luljeta said scoldingly in the presence of her support worker.

"She works too much...She has done more than her job".

Interestingly, there was a difference in how the parents perceived the roles of practitioners from statutory and third sector organisations in line with previous findings by Robinson (2014). Wahiba illustrates this in her comparison of the support provided by the third sector organisation and that provided by other professionals she meets.

“When others come, they help me write down my story, but I don’t feel I can talk with them. They are very much professional. Very much far away. But (Support worker) she never judge. Whoever you are they treat you with kindness. She gives me comfort so we can share, everything. It gives me confidence, they never judge”.

It was interesting that Wahiba saw what she described as “professionalism” in a negative way. For her, professionalism was identified with formality and distance. As Pithouse et al. (2012) identify, sometimes there can be a difference between the service user perception of the individual (which they may like and trust) and the role (of which they may be suspicious). Hence, the statutory agencies were viewed as more remote and impersonal. The exception to this was seen to be the Health Visitor. Therefore, perhaps home visiting is what makes the difference to how the workers are perceived. Pithouse (1998) saw home visiting as part of an invisible trade, which takes place within the private domain of the family home. For MacLehose (2011) where policy agendas come from a deficit perspective and target improvements in parenting, the home visit can be intrusive. However, as Winter and Cree (2016) point out, they can also be important tools for engagement and yield insight into the lived experiences of families.

These parent perceptions of practitioners presented a challenge for practitioners and managers alike. The practitioners were very aware of the need to maintain professional boundaries and to emphasise from the outset the time-boundaried aspect of support, especially since some services could only be involved for specific periods of time (for example, one year) or whilst the family were at a particular stage in their journey (for example, prior to a Home Office judgement). Some practitioners, expressed discomfort at hearing the support workers described in friendship and religious terms (see section 6.3.3) and emphasised the importance of working with the parent in an open and transparent way, making the limitations of their involvement clear, whilst supporting the family to develop wider and more sustainable support networks in preparation for the time when they withdraw. Others mentioned how the focus of their support was on empowering the parents to feel more in control and to be able to make choices and decisions. Interestingly, despite using different metaphors, the parents seemed very aware that providing support

was their worker's job and that the time would come when the worker was no longer involved.

Luljeta acknowledged the empowering aspect of support which ultimately facilitated independence as services were slowly withdrawn but with a safety net remaining.

"I have to be strong for my kids. They need to see me strong. [The family Support Project] have helped me become that strong person. It has helped me to move on and change my life".

She recognised that the aim of the support was to enable her to become independent and explained how well the transition was managed.

"Before [support worker] leaves me she made sure I had everything. My Daughter in CAMHS. We in good hands. Not just left. Not leave me alone. Phone call every month. Text me and invite me to things. I was explained how it would be every week, then once a month now you are ready. I can cope".

Here, the importance of an appropriate exit strategy from the support is highlighted. This was also recognised by many of the practitioner participants (see section 6.5.3).

Crowther (2019) emphasises the importance of establishing longer term relationships with families as a means of engagement and empowerment. However, surprisingly little is written about how to end these relationships ethically and practically, especially when the parent may be invested in the relationship. Although the parents clearly relied heavily on support from their worker, and despite the familial terms with which they described them, none of the parents had difficulty recognising that the support was finite. They did appreciate the invitation to keep in touch and many were keen to take this offer up. The role of the support worker was seen as particularly important in the seemingly interminable experience of claiming asylum, a process which for many was fraught with difficulties, uncertainties, and delays. The next section considers these experiences.

7.5 Liminality and Longing

The foregoing sections considered those factors that help the families to settle into their new environment. The experiences related were overwhelmingly positive. However, the process and experience of resettlement is not without challenges. The

liminal experiences of refugees are well documented within the literature review (see section 3.3). The asylum process places individuals in a suspended reality between all that has gone before and what is yet to come (Horvath et al. 2009). This experience of the in between phase of the major transition that is migration is something that was present within all the parent interviews. As Turner (1977) conceptualised, this experience of liminality incorporated aspects of looking back and looking forward (see also Gold 2019).

7.5.1 “So much left behind”

Papadopoulos (2003) suggests that the loss of home is the single experience that all displaced people have in common. This was certainly the case for the parents in this study, all of whom had left behind their homes and the lives they knew. All the parents spoke of their distress in leaving behind relatives, and for Ranye and Haydar (a couple) this included leaving behind the older children. For some families, (including Ranye and Haydar), there was an aspiration to reunite the family when they had settled status, but none were sure how realistic this was. The words “hope” and “pray” were often used in this context, but my research notes also recognised that these utterances were often accompanied by sighs of resignation and signs of distress. Where relatives had been left behind, the reasons for the decision ranged from cost (implying use of costly people smuggling routes), ability of relatives to travel (age and illness) or the difficulties of migrating in larger groups.

Both Luljeta and Ardita had thought they were coming to the UK for legitimate employment reasons. They had not had any opportunity to properly say goodbye, and such was the hold of fear that their traffickers had over them, that they were too fearful to contact family left behind. Jalonen and La Corte (2017) identify that this inability to say goodbye was a source of distress for refugees and, especially where there is no contact, feelings of loss are compounded by ongoing worry about the circumstances and health of those left behind.

“Will I ever see her again?” asked Ardita, referring to her mother “I don’t know. I pray it will be, but I don’t know. I just like to hear her voice; I wish I know she is well”.

Jalonen and La Corte (2017) stress that the experience of loss accompanies refugees throughout their journey to safety and into their new lives in the host

country, culminating in a profound and final loss at the point of a positive judgement, when they realise that the loss of what has gone before is now permanent. This perspective was borne out in this research whereby the parents described what I came to understand as macro and micro losses. As well as the loss of home and people they loved, they also spoke of losing possessions, status, lifestyles and even, in Wahiba's case, a sense of self¹⁵⁴. Whilst many of the micro losses happened incidentally, others were undoubtedly connected to the way the asylum process works, with forced moves resulting in the loss of stability, familiarity, relationships, and a burgeoning sense of belonging. In this sense the micro losses could be seen as aligned to microaggressions (Sue 2010), perpetuated by the State against marginalised individuals. This aligned with the practitioner perspective that forced moves create a seam of losses, an inability to gain traction anywhere, like a deliberate and strategic, cynical plan, consistent with a policy of hostile environments (see sections 2.3.2.1). The parents' experiences of and frustrations with the asylum system are explored in the next section.

7.5.2 "I wait. So much waiting": frustrations with the system

Many of the families related the sense of loss of leaving behind a country and those you love and living with past trauma whilst adapting to a whole new culture, language, and way of life. However, one of the strongest themes from both parents and practitioners was a frustration with the asylum process, which whilst compliant with the Rule of Law, was not delivered in a particularly timely, responsive, or well considered manner. In the UK there is a growing concern about lengthy incarcerations of asylum seekers (Bhatia 2019). This was not the case for the families in this study. However, several families reported that they spent a long period in initial accommodation, with only limited access to services, such as education. Frequent moves were also a source of disruption with significant impacts for parents and children alike. Of the parents interviewed nearly all had experienced moves which had disrupted relationships and caused additional stress. Wahiba had moved three times, on all occasions she was given very little notice of the move, and despite having a seriously disabled child, provision for his need had not been made.

¹⁵⁴ Wahiba on separating from her husband lost contact with all her family members and left behind her previous life and status. within her interview she spoke openly of losing her sense of herself and of the depression that followed.

" The appointments were not just weeks they were months. I had no idea what was happening... I thought that when I moved from [X city] to [Y city] and then to [City]. I would be helped and they would know our situation, but not at all. We didn't have food for days after each move. Only one sofa. The bed was uncomfortable for my disabled child. I had to carry him upstairs every night. I didn't have a cooker and I couldn't feed my children. The house was not suitable for a wheelchair. I couldn't even get over the step without help. This was all even though we were in England three years. My child had a file in [X city] with all his needs on it. The social worker sent it to Home Office when we were moved and gave me a copy. But I had to start all over when we came to [Y city] as it the file never existed. Even though in [X city] the doctors had written and said it was difficult for moving with my son and the little ones, but even with all the support letters they still moved me, and it was very, very difficult for me. Even now my son does not have all the support he needs, but eventually we will get there. In the meantime, it is so hard".

Wahiba's experience of moving with a disabled child was unique among the parents interviewed. However, there were numerous examples of difficult moves with limited support, disruption to the family and loss of supportive relationships established prior to the moves. In many cases, the moves required school changes which were disruptive for children, consistent with studies regarding care experienced children and young people (Mannay et al. 2017). In other cases, the journey to the original school was made much more difficult, with one parent identifying how she had to take two buses to get her child to school and that had the cost not been met by a charity, she would not have managed it financially. Parents also reported a lack of information, and the sense of having no control within the process. This compounded a feeling that they were not wanted or valued and were seen as a problem or a burden. Given the strength with which this theme was reflected in this research by both parents and practitioners (see 6.2.1) it is not represented strongly within the academic literature. However, in social work more generally there is a recognition of the importance of stability of support worker for children and young people (Gaskell 2010) and the disruptive nature of insecure housing (Huang and King 2018).

The comparative Valleys case study highlighted the differences in experience according to the categorisation of the families, or indeed which Home Office scheme

they were attached to. In the Valleys communities, numbers of families were much smaller than in the area and all the families had entered the UK via the Syrian Resettlement Scheme. This had made transitions easier, avoided the need for multiple moves and enabled the Local Authority to plan more carefully than in the case of spontaneous arrivals.

The asylum process was a source of stress for all the parents in the study. The process was not always clear to the parents and often seemed equally opaque to the practitioners supporting them (see section 6.2.1). This added to frustration for parents, as even their workers were unable to help them in relation to this issue. Despite this, many of the parents stressed the importance of support from refugee councils and projects whilst going through the asylum process:

“I am happy with the benefits the refugee council helped me apply for and fill in all the forms. Without this help I had no idea of what I was able to get to support my family” (Orpita).

Orpita clarified how the project explained the process to her and enabled her to understand what was going on. This support, she felt, was invaluable. It is therefore vital that there are staff with specialist knowledge who can help guide refugees through a difficult and confusing process.

The length of the process was a source of frustration to families and practitioners alike. Lengthy waiting times and with limited information in between can lead to depression and disaffection. Khorshid-banou movingly described the seemingly interminable length of the process,

“I come to this centre, and I just wait. So much wait. I cry but try not to show my son I cry”.

Parker (2018b) explores this experience of waiting in his article ‘*Just sleeping and eating*’, describing the ways in which life contracts to these bodily functions and the days merge into one. However, for the parents in this study, the children’s needs provided a reason to keep going and added an additional layer of routine to otherwise empty days. In line with the findings of Watts et al. (2015) being a parent brought joy, a sense of purpose and a focus. As Orpita expressed in relation to her daughter,

“I live for her. All I do it is for her, to give her a good life. If she is okay, I am okay”.

However, the stress of parenting alongside the stress of the asylum process had an impact on the parents. Two of the parents spoke of frequent headaches and sleep disturbances (see 3.3). Another parent mentioned the stress of trying to pretend she was happy in front of her children to protect them from her stress and worry. Yet, despite parents' experiences of adversity and constraint, their resilience was evident in their desire to:

“Keep going for my children” (Ardita)

Regardless of the challenges they had faced (and were still facing) the interviews showed positivity, determination resilience (see also Fazel et al. 2005) and even an ability to look forwards with hope.

7.6 Looking to the future.

This section considers how parents envisage their future within the UK. There are two aspects to this: gaining a positive Home Office judgement and creating a positive future for their children.

7.6.1 A positive judgement

For the parents in the study, being granted settled status was a cause for celebration and a turning point from which life could move forward.

“Now I have my papers. It is good news for me. I have house” (Luljeta).

“Things are easier since we were granted leave to remain. We start to build life here now” (Ranye).

Orpita described the process of being granted leave to remain with tears running down her face:

“Now I got decision, my dreams oh God, I want to prove my own identity. I want to do something. I want my baby she grows up; I want her say “my mother she is something”.

This suggested that prior to the decision she did not feel like she was “something”, and the process of getting her status confers a meaning beyond being allowed to

stay, thus legitimizing her life and life-choices. Wahiba also spoke of the relief that accompanied a positive judgement.

“Now we have decision I can relax. They believe me. They believe my story.”

This idea of being believed and having your story listened to and accepted as true was prevalent in the interviews, and for Wahiba, a positive judgement allowed her to put the fear of being labelled as a liar aside and relax.

However, even positive judgement is not without its challenges as the practitioners identified (section 6.2.1.1), as at this point, many services stop and there is often a hiatus in support. The importance of those services which were able to continue working with the family beyond decision cannot be underestimated. Orpita described bewilderment at all she had to do in the weeks after getting her positive decision. Orpita referred to the invaluable practical and emotional help from the third sector organisation providing her family support.

“Without them... I just don’t know....” (Here, Orpita became a little upset. I gently affirmed what she had said, and she continued), *“in my difficult time. They were there with me”*.

The post decision period was potentially a time of vulnerability for parents, with ongoing support needs. However, a positive Home Office judgement did provide relief and certainty and enable the parent to begin planning for their future.

7.6.2 “A good future for me and my kids”: hopes, aspirations, and futures.

Another theme to emerge from the parents’ interviews was hope for the future and the opportunity to create meaningful, happy lives for their family. There was a real sense for those who had received their positive judgements of wanting to look forward not back. Habibah exemplified this sentiment.

“Everything is okay now. I want to stay in [City]. I do not want to think of before, only tomorrow”.

This contrasted with those who were awaiting decisions, where looking back was seen as helpful, and indeed it was often difficult to look to the future.

“I cannot think of the future” (Khorshid-banou).

Habibah asserted that following the positive judgement, everything was okay. This diverges from the literature base which suggests ongoing difficulties post-decision, including difficulties securing employment, ongoing health needs, discrimination and for some continuing financial constraint. It is important to note that Habibah's decision was very recent, and perhaps the realities of life beyond the asylum system had not yet become apparent.

However, for some of the parents, even those awaiting decision, it was the hope of a better future that kept them going. When asked the question about dreams and aspirations Ardita outlined her dreams for the future.

"I have dreams, of course, and plans for the future. I want to be a teacher, to work with kids".

At this point in her interview, I made the note in the research journal that *"she has appeared to light up and has clearly given the future much thought"*.

Ardita continued:

"I want to learn to drive a car. I would feel safe driving myself".

Expanding on the theme of safety and control, she speaks of the possibility of becoming a bus driver.

"It is good job. In my bus I am safe. I am driver so I decide where we go".

In the research journal, I mused that this quote seemed like a metaphor for so much that Ardita and the other parents had shared; so often they had felt that circumstances or others were in control and not themselves.

Orpita also spoke of receiving her positive judgement as an opportunity to take control and plan for the future. She confidently articulated her goals, relating this to her desire for her child to be proud of her, and to model those aspirations for her child's future.

"I want to study and go to university and be someone, not only housework but a job. This is my goal as in all about me. Business Management or something like that. Something she will be proud of and want to follow me".

Wahiba explained how her future and happiness is directly influenced by the children's wellbeing.

"The children enjoying life in [City]. When the children are settled, I am settled. When they are happy, I am happy, sad when they are sad".

Staying with the theme of familial relationships, when discussing dreams and aspirations, three of the parents return to talk about their own mothers. Making their mothers proud is a recurrent theme as is reflecting on what their mothers would think if they could witness their lives in Wales. For two of the parents, it was about being a good mother, and thinking about what their own mother would do in certain circumstances. Interestingly, only one of the parents talked of returning to her country of origin one day, and even then, it was in the context of something temporary "if it is safe to visit".

The recurring theme of reciprocity was evident in six of the interviews, as was the need to document the events the parents had experienced.

"I love books a lot. I read and one day I would like to write my story."
(Habibah)

In common, with two other mothers, Ardita explored the possibility of becoming a support worker.

"I like to help people so much. Sometimes, I think maybe I can be a support worker, to help people that have been in my position, to help people in my situation, because I can understand more than the Home Office or English people or German people or other people from Europe who have never been like us, never can understand us. If I was a support worker, I'd just want to support ladies that have been in my situation. I really need to help them".

The theme of giving back emerged so strongly from the parent interviews and I am minded of the caution Kjørstad (2017) expresses in relation to the expectation of reciprocity. However, within the interviews, it appeared that parents did not simply want to give back out of gratitude for what they have received but rather to contribute to the problem solving that Kjørstad applauds. They believed that they had something important to offer, as experts by experience with a unique contribution to make. The esteem in which they hold social care, in wanting to join the profession is

also testament to the way that they value the support they have received. In line with Gilligan (2008) and Ford and Lowery (1986) they were embracing an Ethic of Care that prioritises empathy and compassion and is based around positive relationships.

7.7 Chapter summary and conclusions

The narratives from the parents provided an invaluable insight into the lives of refugee and asylum-seeking families in Wales. This chapter has illustrated how the parents made sense of their own identities, what support they valued and what helped them to settle into their new community. The chapter documented the fraught situations the families had left and the ongoing challenges they faced in navigating the asylum system and making their home in Wales. Moreover, it presents a picture of their incredible resilience in the face of adversity and their hopes and aspirations for the future.

It is important to note that these findings are related to a particular group of parents at a specific time in their journey. All the parents were engaged with services, all were willing to share their stories. Many were single or separated women, and some had been subject to trafficking and modern-day slavery. Hence, the findings are valuable as these parents are rarely researched and therefore, are under-represented within the literature base and often ignored in terms of policy making.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions and Reflections

8.1 Introduction

The successful resettlement of refugee and asylum seekers (including parents and children) remains a global priority. At the time of writing this conclusion, the UNHCR is projecting a slight increase in individuals needing resettlement over the next few years, with significant increases in flows from the middle East and North Africa (UNHCR 2021b). Protracted political instability in many regions, including Syria, Sudan, and Venezuela, continues to drive migration. The withdrawal of allied troops from Afghanistan and the swift rise of Taliban control within the country has led to further displacement of people both internally and internationally, with the UK Home Office announcing plans to resettle 5,000 Afghan nationals at risk in 2021, and up to 20,000 in the longer term. Within this scheme is the stated aim of prioritising women and girls, alongside religious and other minorities (Loft 2021).

Looking further ahead, climate change predictions (Stern 2006) suggest that significant areas of the world could become uninhabitable (World Economic Forum 2021), with latest reports suggesting that 1.2 billion people will need to be resettled by 2050.

Meanwhile in the UK, the news has been dominated by an increase in migrants attempting hazardous channel crossings (BBC 2021). The publication of the Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Parliament 2021) suggests a further hardening of the UK Hostile Environments policy. This Bill, has been strongly opposed by refugee advocacy groups on the grounds that it will criminalise people seeking refuge, extend large scale accommodation centres and limit family reunification rights (Refugee Council 2021). Furthermore, it will serve to consolidate the existing inequalities that exist within the UK asylum system by creating a two-tier system based on method of arrival. As Ross Sussalla Pagliuchi-Lor, the UNHCR's representative to the UK states,

“This Bill would create a discriminatory two-tier asylum system violating the 1951 Refugee Convention and target bona fide refugees. The right to seek asylum is universal and doesn't depend on the mode of arrival. Under the

Refugee Convention, states must grant asylum-seekers access to their territory and refugees' access to their rights" (UNHRC 2021a, p.1).

Against this backdrop stands the Welsh Government's ambitious agenda for Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary, a refreshing antidote to the language of hostility emanating from Westminster, but arguably, with limited power to affect real change. And of course, at the centre of these political and legislative frameworks and discussions, are real people's lives.

As the foregoing suggests, this research project is highly topical, and the thesis could not be more timely. It presents a critically descriptive insight into the lived experiences of parents with children seeking sanctuary in Wales, along with the perspectives of those practitioners who work closely with them, and the strategic actors seeking to influence the agenda.

This chapter begins with a summary of findings, aligned to the research questions. The next section considers the potential contribution of those findings to policy and practice. Then I reflect on the research journey appraising the methodological decisions made, and the limitations of the work. Finally, areas for future research are identified.

8.2 Reflecting upon the findings

This research journey began by asking the question: *What are the family support needs of refugee parents living in Wales, and how can these best be met?* The literature review documented that this was an under-researched area. Whilst there were gems of knowledge located in different disciplines, there were few studies that focused specifically on parent support for refugees and asylum seekers and few that were focused on Wales. Moreover, the literature was highly fragmented, originating from a range of different disciplines and academic traditions, and often context specific with limited scope for generalisation. My first task, then, was to make sense of this amorphous body of knowledge by identifying salient themes which could inform the design of this study. In particular, the importance of terminology was identified, in recognition that the language we use matters and often informs how individuals are supported (Pace and Severance 2016). Moreover, concepts related to liminality, constraint and loss presented a useful focus, with strength-based approaches, resilience and hope juxtaposed as a counterpoint.

Viewing the experiences of parents within a context of socio-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) influenced both the research design and the thesis production, providing a framework for the primary research, with strategic, practitioner and parent lenses employed to explore the research questions.

The following section summarises the findings, exploring the extent to which the original research questions were addressed.

8.2.1 *Summary of findings*

Prior to addressing the research questions, it was imperative to agree a set of definitions. The language we use has more than semantic significance but can influence our policy and practice (Hynes 2021); and all the possible definitions and appellations applied to migration are contested and imperfect. Whilst the terms refugee and asylum seeker embody technical meanings (accompanied by systems and rights), in common parlance, they are often used imprecisely and interchangeably, particularly within politicised discourses. Similarly, the broader term migrant, whilst inclusive, fails to recognise the nuanced (and often contested) notions of choice and voluntariness. In line with Gibney (2014) and Parker (2018a), I consider that the terms forced migrant/forced migration present the most helpful of the imperfect definitions available. These terms avoid the highly politicised and often weaponised usage of the technical and legal terms (Crawley and Skleparis 2017), whilst also locating the migration within contexts of persecution and displacement.

The term seeking sanctuary is helpful in articulating a distinctly Welsh approach to welcoming forced migrants. It distinguishes this approach from more hostile policy agendas. Its consistent use by strategic actor participants within this study serves to underline the quest for a more humane and inclusive way of thinking about forced migration. However, the sanctuary concept embodies a host of cultural and religious associations that may or may not resonate with forced migrants. Throughout the parent interviews, the term sanctuary was never used, suggesting that there is much to do to engage forced migrants with the concept of sanctuary as articulated by Welsh Government and its partners. Moreover, the term suggests an asymmetric relationship (Grabska and Mehta 2008) between the individual and the host country which underplays the importance of reciprocity in valuing all that forced migrants have to offer and contribute. Nonetheless, it was appropriate to use this term within

the thesis, in recognition of its potential beyond its current rhetorical importance. I agree with Douglas et al. (2019) that precision and clarity in the way that we use terminology related to migration can help cut through “*divisive and xenophobic political discourse*” and help us construct informed and needs-led support. Having reflected on the importance of terminology, the following sections consider findings in relation to each of the research questions.

Research question 1: How do refugee parents make sense of their experiences and perceive their support needs? How do they feel those needs are being or have been met?

For me, this was the most important research question as it considers the perspectives of those right at the centre of this research project. The idea of “giving voice” to marginalised individuals is prevalent within qualitative research (for example, De Abreu Lourenço et al. 2021). Yet it is problematic (Ashby 2011) because it suggests that providing opportunities for voice is in the gift of the researcher, with all the power imbalance that this entails. Instead, finding ways to actively listen to these voices helps to de-colonialise the prevailing discourses and dismantle hegemonic interpretations (De Souza 2004). The resultant narratives present a “*formidable knowledge*” (Indira 2020, p.15) that helps make visible the lived experiences of parents, and their own perceptions of their needs. This process of telling the story in one’s own way can support enhanced self-esteem and promote inclusion (Sinha 1998) and ultimately inform social action and social policy (Indira 2020). It is pertinent to note here, that the voices of parents in this study are predominantly mothers, voices under-represented in migration literature.

In all cases, and in line with other studies (Dumbrill 2009), the mothers had experienced much adversity before arriving in the UK. They expressed a sense of loss for all that had been left behind (Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015). However, the women also demonstrated much resilience (Toth 2003; Hutchinson and Dorsett 2012), which was expressed in terms of keeping going for the children, in the hope of providing them with a better future. One of the most pervasive findings from the parent interviews related to the importance of safety. Reaching a place of physical safety, often via hazardous journeys, was a theme that recurred strongly in the parent narratives. However, equally important was the idea of psychological safety.

It is notable that other research taking place recently has made this same distinction between physical and psychological safety (Shaw et al. 2021), arguing that physical safety is a necessary but not sufficient condition for wellbeing. For the mothers who had survived human trafficking, the need for safety was juxtaposed with notions of personal strength; of feeling and being strong.

All the parents interviewed were positive about living in Wales and were able to envision hopeful futures for themselves and their children within Wales. This emphasis on hope builds upon the findings of Ai et al. (2007) who saw hope as both a coping mechanism in the present and an opportunity for post-traumatic growth in the longer term. The parents who had lived in other areas of the UK compared their experience of living in Wales favourably to previous experiences. The friendliness of the people and ways they were welcomed into communities were strong features within the parents' accounts. However, the parents did not mention the differential policy agendas between Wales and the rest of the UK and were not aware of the Nation of Sanctuary Approach. Their sole experience of Government lay in their interactions with the non-devolved Home Office.

For the parents, the biggest challenge related to negotiating their way around the asylum system. As in previous studies both within the UK and in other European nations (Griffiths 2012; Parker 2018a; Comtesse and Rosner 2019) seemingly interminable waiting. Within this process, they spoke of feeling powerless and having little control. Frequent re-telling of their stories, repeated requests for information and documents that they did not have and inexplicable delays in decision making added to their frustrations. Often, they expressed that the system made them feel that they were not believed and therefore not trustworthy. This finding was in line with previous studies that highlight the mutual mistrust that characterises the asylum process (Griffiths 2012; Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015), which is exacerbated by opaque decision making. For the parents in this study, one of the most frustrating aspects of the asylum process were the frequent moves that were badly managed, highly disruptive, and rarely accompanied by a transparent rationale. This finding corroborates earlier studies which highlighted the disruptive nature of multiple moves for forced migrant families (Power et al. 1999; Rutter 2003) and it is disappointing to note that this situation has not improved in two decades. My findings concur with Hek (2005) who points out that for families who have already experienced

displacement, frequent moves engendered by an unresponsive asylum system, the process of resettlement seems far more difficult than is necessary.

This study also highlighted the well-documented liminality of the forced migrant experience (Turner 1969; Malkki 1995; Hynes 2011). The participants in this study conformed to the “*ontological liminality*” described by O’Reilly (2018, p.824) whereby the waiting became part of their daily experience and identity. However, whilst living through the liminality of the asylum process, the children’s needs provided a purpose, structure, and routine for the parents in this study, which other asylum-seekers may lack (Parker 2018a). Meeting the needs of the children provided an opportunity for the parents, to remain focused on the present, although undoubtedly concerns for their children’s current and future wellbeing simultaneously resulted in additional pressures on the parents.

Throughout these difficulties, practitioners were often the main source of support, frequently described by the parents as “a lifeline”. Whilst this is not a new finding, it does provide some unique insight into the value the parents placed on the relationship with and support from practitioners, of whom they invariably spoke in positive terms. The importance and intensity of the relationship was often communicated in relational or religious language. In line with previous studies (Kohli 2007; Bee 2019) the participants in this study valued having someone on their side, someone who believed their story and someone they could talk to and seek advice from. Practical help and guidance were highly valued, but practitioners were also a source of emotional support and, importantly, were often able to inspire hope during times of difficulty and challenge.

In line with Cutrona’s (2000) typology of effective family support the mothers valued the practitioner’s reliability, empathy, and friendly approach. This highlighted the importance of gender sensitive support and also demonstrated that approaches that work with a generic population can also have applicability when applied to supporting forced migrants. For many, visits with practitioners were the highlight of their week. They praised the practitioners’ commitment to helping find solutions to difficulties, encouraging them to keep going and praising their strength and resilience. Snyder (2011) recognises the valuable contribution that faith organisations can play in supporting forced migrants and recognised this as a neglected area requiring further

research. This study corroborated the importance of those services provided by faith organisations, as well as other community organisations. The study extends the existing knowledge, recognising that both the parent and practitioner participants valued faith and community organisations as particularly helpful, because they are not constrained by strict referral criteria or the need to achieve given targets, and are often less subject to reductions in funding. Moreover, such support was often flexible, adaptive, and able to work with the family beyond the Home Office decision, when many other services were withdrawn.

The notion of aspirations featured strongly in the research. Parker (2018a) recognised a need for greater emphasis on aspirations within resettlement policy and practice. As noted in previous studies, forced migrant children and parents are a diverse population with varied attitudes towards education and employment (Stevenson and Willott 2007) and it is important not to generalise. However, in line with Nigar et al. (2017), the parents in this study expressed high aspirations for their children. Depending on where they were in their journey, some of the parents also articulated dreams for their own futures, although these were often expressed in terms of providing a positive future for their children. This emphasis on parent's aspirations for themselves as a means of providing positive role models for their children appears to be a novel contribution to the field. However, in line with the findings of an earlier American study by Delgado-Gaitan (1994) the parents in this study were also aware of numerous barriers to achieving their own aspirations as well as to their children achieving theirs.

As in previous studies (Vandevoordt 2017), the notion of reciprocity featured strongly within this research, recognising that parents often want to “give something back” to their host country. Many of the practitioner participants recognised this need for reciprocity, and its links to agency, and found ways to build upon it. However, occasionally, systems and cultural expectations meant that attempts to build reciprocity were thwarted. In this sense, the findings support Schmitt (2021) who in a study of forced migrant young people recognised that attempts at reciprocity can often be rejected, thus thwarting agency.

The responses from the parents were overwhelmingly positive. This could be partly because the sample was self-selecting from those individuals who were engaged

with support services. Also, it is possible that despite the scene-setting at the outset of the interviews which made it clear that the research was in no way connected to their asylum claim, that the parents were more comfortable talking about positive aspects of their support experiences for fear of repercussions if they expressed dissatisfaction. Nonetheless, the heartfelt accounts of their interactions with support services resonated strongly, along with relief to be in a place that felt safe.

Research question 2: How do strategic actors and practitioners understand the needs and experiences of refugee families and how is this reflected in the service response?

Practitioners often enjoy a close relationship with refugee parents and feel privileged to work alongside them over a period of time, being a party to their triumphs and frustrations and hearing their stories, perhaps in a more raw and less curated form than the perspectives I was able to access. As such, the practitioners' voices within this thesis offered a valuable insight into the lived experiences of the parents, as well as the practice that has evolved to meet the families' needs.

One significant finding, which concurs with previous research (Robinson 2014) was the passion and commitment shown by the practitioners. The practitioners spoke of the intrinsic satisfaction of their roles. All the interviews with practitioners demonstrated the salience of being engaged in work that really mattered and that was able to make a difference to the lives of the families. In contrast to the findings of Pizzolati and Vacchelli (2021), many of the practitioners in this study recognised the potential for practitioner/parent relationships to be asymmetric and to embody practice that was unintentionally disempowering. Hence, there were strong examples of facilitating choice and autonomy and enabling reciprocity, particularly within the City case study.

In line with Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani (2011), the passion displayed by the practitioners was often juxtaposed against frustrations with a 'broken system' and a sense that this system was letting people down. Often these frustrations were manifested in a sense of anger or perceived impotence which often impacted on the wellbeing of the practitioners. Resource constraints exacerbated this frustration, coupled with job roles that were temporarily funded and insecure. It is noteworthy that the findings concur with studies which focus on social work generally, where

unwieldy systems, capacity issues and high caseloads are frequently reported challenges (McFadden 2015; Ravalier 2018; Diaz 2020). In line with Robinson (2013), the practitioners in this study also communicated the emotionally challenging nature of their work and recognised the importance of self-care. However, in contrast to Robinson (2013) supervision was much more effective and consistent, and there were pleasing examples of opportunities for collective reflective practice through the practitioner forum. Partnership working was highly valued by the practitioners, and the practitioner network¹⁵⁵ allowed opportunity for sharing practice, formulating joint approaches and problem solving. Within the Valleys' context, this was less evident, and the workers often expressed isolation within their roles.

All the practitioners acknowledged their importance to the parents and were diligent in offering practical and emotional support. In line with previous studies (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005; Robinson and Masocha, 2017; Eide et al. 2020) they prioritised the need to establish trust and to build positive relationships with the parents. They were committed to strength-based approaches, to supporting the resilience of the families, and to practice which promoted choice, autonomy, and independence. Their role as purveyors of hope was identified by some of the practitioners, who articulated this in similar terms to Nelson et al. (2017) as becoming allies of the parents and helping to kindle hope against a backdrop of bureaucratic challenges which create a sense of helplessness.

In line with previous studies (Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani 2011; Robinson 2014) the practitioners were aware of how much the parents valued them. In this study the practitioners often expressed embarrassment at the gratitude they were shown for "just doing my job". They were acutely aware of the importance of facilitating opportunities for the families to establish wider networks of support within their communities. Faith based and community provision offered opportunities to establish authentic and reciprocal relationships unhindered by time frames and funding cuts. The practitioners were also mindful of the importance providing opportunities to focus on something other than the asylum claim, with food, outdoor spaces and creative activities providing a much-needed respite from the uncertainty and waiting associated with the Home Office processes. This focus on wellbeing in line with the

¹⁵⁵ Facilitated by a third sector organisation.

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (Welsh Government 2014), is perhaps one of the unique contributions of this thesis; whilst there is little that practitioners can do to influence the asylum process, they can have a big impact in promoting wellbeing within the liminality of the here and now.

However, these wellbeing activities, which were life enhancing for the families, were not always prioritised within workloads. Partnering with faith and community organisations with less restrictive roles was one way that the practitioners were able to overcome this challenge. Alongside this emphasis on improving the situation for the families in the present, the practitioners were passionate about their important role in changing the public discourse around migration. They spoke of a compulsion to advocate for displaced families generally, and to contribute toward changing hearts and minds in society. In line with Obrinski et al. (2007) they envisaged their role as witnesses to the atrocities shared with them by the parents. As Kohli (2007, p.157) contends, in listening to the stories of forced migrants over a period of time, the practitioners become “memory- holders” alongside the families and in doing so, the practitioners in this study felt a moral obligation to speak up a means of increasing public understanding.

Interviews with strategic actors provided another useful lens. Whilst recognising the importance of distal systems and processes (Bronfenbrenner,1977), I was surprised to find that many of the strategic actors had met regularly with the families and were more intimately appraised of the families’ needs, than I had expected. This was especially prevalent within the Valleys Case study. Stakeholder theory (Freeman 1984) would have suggested that the strategic actors with more generic roles (for example, Council Leaders, Members of Parliament, Members of Senedd) would have been in the high influence/low to medium interest category. However, this study demonstrated a greater interest and involvement than would ordinarily have been expected. The low numbers of families admitted to the Valleys areas under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme will have facilitated this high level of involvement, and it may not be practical to routinely expect this. However, the fact that the politicians had met the families and tried hard to engage with and understand the issues is encouraging.

The strategic actors, like the practitioners, were strongly motivated by moral imperatives and the conviction that this was important work and that they had a responsibility to get it right. They articulated the vision of a Nation of Sanctuary but were realistic in their assessment of how much needed to be done to make this a lived reality rather than an aspirational policy agenda. In line with Parker (2018a), there was universal agreement amongst the strategic actors that Wales needed to pursue an inclusion agenda and that there was a need to challenge Westminster regarding its approach and track record in relation to refugee issues. There was less consensus related to how best to achieve the sanctuary approach. Some participants advocated for an increase in devolved powers, whilst others felt that there was much scope for improvement within existing powers. The strategic actors recognised significant gaps in services related to language provision (especially with childcare provided) and in support regarding employment (see also Parker 2018b). Both aspects were considered crucial to the inclusion agenda, in line with Klenk (2017) and Siddiquee and Kagan (2006).

There was a recognition that many of the communities in Wales, were challenged by poverty (IFS 2020b) and could be considered Left Behind (OCSI 2019). As such, politicians recognised that they needed to balance priorities and consider the views of indigenous communities when settling families in non-dispersal areas (see also Goodwin and Malazzo 2017). However, overwhelmingly, they had been struck by the positive welcome the families had received. “Managing the message” and engaging local communities were seen as key to this success. Within the City context too, social cohesion was seen as a high priority, with a recognition that proactive approaches were most effective.

The practitioners and strategic actors interviewed for the study showed an impressive understanding of the needs and a shared commitment to ensuring the needs were met. However, there was a recognition that there was often a gulf between policy and practice, particularly in relation to families’ experiences of the asylum system. Implementing the Nation of Sanctuary Action Plan would provide some useful first steps in bridging this gap. However, to fully realise the vision of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary, more radical action may be needed, including the possibility of constitutional change. Whilst the study confirms findings from previous studies related to the importance of trustful practitioner/parent relationships, it also

adds insight into the potential for prioritising wellbeing within the liminality of the asylum process, for embedding autonomy, choice, and social connection and for valuing reciprocity. The study also provides a unique insight into the perspectives of strategic actors in non-dispersal areas, who are welcoming forced migrant families for the first time. It highlighted the importance of recognising all that forced migrants bring and reframing these as positives, rather than continually reverting to a deficit model. In this sense, the study provides a glimpse of what a true Nation of Sanctuary could look like.

Research question 3: What approaches and/or models have been found to be effective in supporting refugee parents, recognising existing service pressures?

In exploring this research question, it became evident that there is no single model of practice that can be applied to all families. Rather, this study has documented several helpful approaches which can enhance the practice toolbox. Some of these approaches are found within previous literature, whilst others are novel insights arising from this research

In line with previous studies, (Briskman and Cemlyn 2005; Robinson and Masocha 2017; Eide et al. 2020; Kohli and Mather 2003) it was found that establishing positive and trustful relationships was key. This demanded that the practitioner engage positively and quickly establish rapport with the parents (see also Anderson 2001). This was facilitated by the reality that most of the practitioners were female, as were the parents, and so approaches could be gender sensitive. There was a recognition that trust develops over time (see also Kohli 2006b) and is enhanced by consistency, ongoing commitment and joint problem-solving with the family (Polidore 2004). As highlighted by Roberts et al. (2021) support can feature both *caring for* and *caring about* and such practitioner investment was highly valued by the parents who in other aspects of their lives reported feeling invisible. Active listening and attuned responsiveness were seen as critical to understanding the needs and aspirations of the parent, both for themselves and for their children. Empowering approaches that prioritised autonomy and choice were particularly effective in supporting resilience and building self-efficacy (see also Nelson et al. 2016).

Within the research it was evident that the needs and aspirations of the family acted as the driver for the intervention, resulting in packages of care that were bespoke, and outcome focused. On arrival, most support packages included work to help parents negotiate their way around systems, primarily the asylum system but also to understand how health and education services work. In the medium term, psycho-social approaches had a valuable role to play, in helping families adjust to the many changes that have taken place in their lives. There was also scope for approaches that promote social inclusion to provide opportunities to enhance wellbeing and enable parents and children to experience flow (Csikszentmihalyi 2002). It was recognised as important from the outset for practitioners to establish boundaries and to make it clear that their involvement is finite. However, services that were able to work with families beyond the point of decision played a crucial role as this could be an extremely vulnerable time for the parents with a tailing from support and numerous important decisions to make. There is much potential for using these findings to develop training resources for practitioners supporting forced migrant families.

At the outset of this research project, I was interested in whether specialist models of support or more generic inclusive approaches were most effective in supporting families seeking sanctuary. This study has not fully answered this question.

However, it was clear that the models of support have developed organically to meet the needs in each of the case study areas. In the City context, there was a combination of specialist refugee and asylum seeker provision and support through generic family support services and universal services. This worked well when appropriately coordinated, and families benefited from services that have much experience of supporting families seeking refuge, and fully understand their needs.

In the Valleys' context, however, the small numbers of refugee families meant that generic services needed to upskill to support the families within their caseloads. Specialist services in this context would be expensive to run and would separate the families from the community. Making use of the generic services already in place also had the benefit of promoting inclusion and allowing the families to establish positive and supportive relationships with other parents in the area, thus suggesting that effective support can be provided outside of a specialist service. The skills, experience and dispositions of the practitioners entailed that this approach seemed

to have worked well. However, a recommendation from these findings is that there is much scope for enhancing staff training within generic services (particularly in cultural awareness and trauma informed working). Opportunities could also be explored for sharing good practice and learning from the dispersal areas. Whilst there are effective all-Wales mechanisms for sharing at a strategic level, an expansion of the existing practitioner network¹⁵⁶ could enable effective sharing at practice level and enhance staff capacity.

I would argue, therefore that the model of provision adopted is less important than the principles that underpin it. Adopting a strength-based approach with a strong focus on resilience and wellbeing has proved effective in both case study areas. Similarly, listening to the needs and aspirations of parents and children and inspiring hope can prove empowering for families, enabling them to think beyond their current liminal situations and envision a positive future. Whilst it is imperative that parents are supported to navigate their way through the services around them and to understand how things work in the UK, there is also scope for activities that provide respite from their challenging circumstances and provide opportunities for enhancing wellbeing. Within prescribed job descriptions this flexibility of approach may not always be possible. Hence, there is much potential for partnering with community and faith organisations who may have more capacity for this type of work and the ability to continue to support the family beyond Home Office decisions and into the long term.

One of the surprising findings of the study related to the proactive and positive approaches of the police service in resettling forced migrants. The harsh treatment of forced migrants in Europe is well documented (Welch and Schuster 2005). Whilst there are positive examples of police building community relations with forced migrants within the UK (Coole 2002), there are more studies that highlight police failings in this area (Athwal and Bourne 2007), and that the policy intent of building community relations with marginalised communities and tackling hate crime is often undermined by a range of cultural and structural barriers (Hardy et al. 2020). This research, however, documented innovative practice such as the Welcome to Wales programme¹⁵⁷ and the Police English Language courses, which appeared to go

¹⁵⁶ To include practitioners from non- dispersal areas

¹⁵⁷ Designed and facilitated by the police service.

beyond a tokenistic nod to the community cohesion agenda. Such initiatives, along with partnering with refugee support services, offered opportunities to build trust and support the need for psychological safety discussed earlier¹⁵⁸. Moreover, the research highlighted effective partnership working between the specialist support agencies and other statutory and voluntary services particularly within the City case study.

Research question 4: What learning can be identified from the study to inform policy and practice?

At the outset of this research project, the aim was to identify learning which could inform policy and practice, and in doing so, perhaps make life just a little easier for families seeking sanctuary in Wales. There are several policy and practice implications arising from this study. In line with the socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1977), there is a recognition that all layers of the nested system have an impact on the experience of the individual. In the case of forced migrants, these nested systems include international, national, and local policy agendas, as well as local service provision and community solutions. Hence, the following sections explore implications for Government, service providers and frontline practitioners.

8.2.2 *Implications for policy*

During the review of literature, it became evident that the international policy and legislative framework for protecting those displaced is central to international cooperation. However, 70 years after its inception, it could benefit from updating and strengthening (UNHCR 2011). This is particularly pertinent considering projected future migration needs generated by climate change (Stanford University 2021).

Aspects of the new legislation contained in the UK Nationalities and Borders Bill 2021 are in contravention of the spirit of the Geneva Convention (UNHCR 2021a). This Bill represents a continuation of the hostile environment approach pursued by successive UK governments (Zetter et al. 2005). It is difficult to see how Wales, within current devolved powers, where Home Office functions are reserved by

¹⁵⁸ This could be even more important for women and especially women who had been trafficked

Westminster, can fully deliver its vision for a Nation of Sanctuary. There are notable ways in which Welsh Government has used existing powers to good effect, for example, a focus on inclusion as opposed to integration, and access to healthcare and education for asylum seekers. Accordingly, there is potential for a radically different approach from that in England, to welcoming and including refugees. This research did highlight that there is much more that could be done within existing devolved powers and that the full implementation of the Nation of Sanctuary Action Plan would provide a useful starting point to ensuring consistency of high-quality service experience for forced migrants. However, within current a legislative arrangement, there will continue to be tensions related to asylum support and housing which sit outside Welsh Government's powers. Hence, this thesis adds weight to the calls for further devolution of asylum support (Parker 2018a). Without additional powers, whilst there is much positive action that can be achieved,¹⁵⁹ the reality of a Nation of Sanctuary will remain largely aspirational.

At a Welsh Government level, it is important to continue to ensure that the voices of forced migrant parents inform the planning process as stated in the Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan (Welsh Government 2019a). For many parents in this study, the term sanctuary was unknown to them, so more work needs to be undertaken to engage forced migrants in defining and shaping understandings of sanctuary and all that it entails. Moreover, alongside the protection agenda, it would be helpful to recognise and prioritise the agency, resilience, and aspirations of individuals, an aspect which is often ignored (see also Parker 2018b). A stronger focus on reciprocity would enhance the Nation of Sanctuary policy agenda in recognition of the parents' aspiration to give something back to their host country, thereby promoting inclusion.

The strategic actor and practitioner participants identified a need for safe and legal routes to asylum within the UK for families. This echoes the many calls for safe routes by politicians and advocacy groups (Guardian 2020). This would negate the need for hazardous journeys and the associated physical and emotional stress that this generates. For women and children this would also reduce the vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking. A further policy suggestion is to ensure that all Home

¹⁵⁹ The full implementation of the Nation of Sanctuary Action Plan would provide a useful starting point.

Office policies are subject to a gender impact assessment. There is a recognition in previous studies (Ceneda and Palmer 2006; Arbel et al. 2014) that the mechanisms for verifying asylum claims linked to the existing Convention Grounds do not always serve women well). The interviews with parents and practitioners highlighted how difficult the asylum processes are for women. The reasons for this are complex and multi-faceted and may include cultural issues as well as practical difficulty of access. Moreover, as Baillot and Connelly (2018) contend, women may be particularly vulnerable within the asylum system and on exiting it (through a positive or failed claim). This study builds upon these findings by recognising the importance of psychological safety and physical? for forced migrant mothers. The importance of Interventions to build on resilience and enable mothers to feel strong physically and emotionally was a pertinent feature of this study. Moreover, there is scope for finding ways of better joint working between support services and the Home Office to ensure that parents' concerns are heard and acted upon.

8.2.3 Implications for practice

The issues identified above are strategic in nature and effecting change would require consensus and commitment at national and in some cases international levels. However, the findings also highlight implications for practice that are, perhaps, easier to implement. These findings suggest the need for a training framework to assist practitioners in the development and delivery of effective support packages. Similarly, a toolkit for practitioners working with forced migrant parents would provide opportunities to share good practice across geographical areas and enable consistent approaches and standards of care.

There was a real sense from the research that practitioners were deeply committed to their roles and were already making a positive difference to families. However, there is much scope for sharing good practice across areas and services pan-Wales, investing in staff training and prioritising staff supervision and support.

Recognition of the overarching need for psychological safety is perhaps the foremost lesson for practice that emerges from this study. As Hynes (2003) recognises, there are several reasons why forced migrants may experience mistrust. Hence, the priority of the attuned practitioner is to establish rapport and build a trustful relationship. Practitioner dispositions such as openness, empathy, reliability, and

cultural awareness are fundamental to this process of trust- building. This study suggests that practitioners are skilled in doing this, and that the families they work with really value their role. However, not all organisations recognise that relationship building is an important aspect of family support with forced migrants and may not prioritise this within workload planning and management. Moreover, there is scope to continue the development of bespoke packages of support, with strong outcomes focus and with the needs and aspirations of parents and children at their centre. A focus on individual and family strengths and resilience would support self-efficacy and a sense of control that was so important to the parents in this study.

Whilst practitioners can do little to mitigate the delays and frustrations of the asylum system, there is much that can be done to support families to enhance the experience of forced migrants whilst awaiting a decision. Ensuring that services respect dignity and offer choice is a helpful first step. Furthermore, recognising the liminality of the asylum experience and offering opportunities for experiencing joy in the moment, whether that be through outdoor activities, craft sessions or cooking and sharing food, can greatly enhance wellbeing. As Ardita so eloquently put it, *“When my hands are busy, my mind is quiet at last”*.

Whilst there is a paucity of research in faith group support for forced migrants, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2011) recognised the importance of faith communities in reaching out and providing opportunities for social engagement and practical support, a view corroborated by Ager et al. (2015). This research has highlighted the potential for developing strong professional relationships with community organisations and faith groups to offer opportunities for inclusion and reciprocity that are difficult to achieve within the constraints of statutory services. Providing opportunities for peer support and the development of reciprocal relationships is particularly powerful in enabling inclusion¹⁶⁰.

The practitioners in this study recognised that the needs of parents and children change throughout their resettlement journey. On first arriving within an area, pragmatic concerns such as housing, registering with local services (particularly health and education) take precedence. At this point, practical aspects of welcome, building trust and assisting local orientation provide useful starting points for

¹⁶⁰ This could include peer support groups, befriending projects and buddying schemes

intervention. Later in the journey, there may be opportunity for addressing psycho-social support needs, supporting self-efficacy and social inclusion and assisting parents to negotiate the challenges of the asylum system. Helping to keep hope alive and supporting parents to imagine and plan for a positive future may also provide a focus for intervention. Recognising and planning for known challenges, can also provide proactive solutions. For example, we recognise that the period beyond a positive Home Office decision can be particularly challenging for families. Preparing the families for this to be the case and ensuring that community solutions are available to support when other services need to withdraw could mitigate the vulnerability that families often experience at this point.

There needs to be a recognition that supporting families (especially those who have experienced trauma) is important and demanding work (Brown 2018). As such, it is essential to ensure that practitioner's own wellbeing needs are addressed, from the basics of sleep, good nutrition, and exercise through to finding time to connect with others and take part in activities they enjoy (Prowle and Hodgkins, 2020). Effective supervision and support from managers are crucial in providing a safe space for reflection and problem solving. However, in line with Robinson (2014) this study found that there were inconsistent approaches to supervision across the organisations represented¹⁶¹. Similarly access to training was variable, with much scope for developing joint approaches and opportunities for sharing practice across services and geographical areas.

8.3 Reflecting upon the research journey

Reflection has been a central aspect of this research project, which has been derived from principles which recognise "*the need for justice and democracy, the right of all people to speak and be heard*" (Mcniff 2013, n.p.). Throughout the research process, the quest for understanding has been balanced by "reflective activism" derived from "*a sense of professional responsibility for improving the quality of provision*" for forced migrant families (Appleby et al. 2019, p.83). The research journey never happens within a vacuum, but rather is influenced by the multiple contexts within which it takes place.

¹⁶¹ A toolkit for effective supervision and support could be developed to help address inconsistencies and promote good practice.

8.3.1 *An exploration of limitations and delimitations*

The limitations of the study are numerous. At the outset of the research project delimitations were established to narrow the scope of the study and achieve specificity. The decision to involve three participant groups (parents, participants, and strategic actors) has resulted in the child's voice being largely absent, or heard only obliquely through the other lenses, often reflecting adult interests (L'Anson 2013). This decision, driven largely by pragmatic considerations, conflicts with my own value base which sees huge value in engaging the individual and collective voices of children (Warshak 2003) in research and in practice decision making. Whilst there are excellent examples of research with unaccompanied minors (Kohli 2007), there is less research focusing on the perspectives of those children who arrive in the UK with one or both parents. This is certainly an important area for further research.

The decision made at the outset of the project to use semi-structured interviews as the primary research tool did elicit in depth and insightful responses. However, there was a missed opportunity for the use of more creative methods, in particular journey mapping and photovoice (Milne and Muir 2019). Whilst parents valued the opportunity to "tell their story", particularly when allowed to do it in their own way with minimal prompting, it is possible that the use of additional visual methods may have generated even richer responses. O'Neill et al. (2019) strongly advocate for the use of participatory arts based and performative methods in their work with mothers who are seeking asylum or have no recourse to public funds. Such approaches, they argue, can explore meaning and generate agency and activism (O'Neill 2018). This is certainly something I would seek to include in further research with forced migrant parents.

Conducting the interviews through the medium of English (albeit with translators available by prior request) may have led to an over representation of more educated and/or more confident participants (Dahinden and Efionayi-Mader 2009; Parker 2018a). The nature of my recruitment strategy (working in partnership with support agencies to identify participants) the parents who agreed to be interviewed, were invariably those who were engaged with services. Hence, their high levels of satisfaction with family support provision may not be fully representative of all forced migrant parents in the area. This issue is reflected more widely in social care

research wherein the participants are invariably those who are engaged with services or have engaged parent/carers (Abrams 2010; Mannay et al. 2017; Mannay et al. 2021). Further thought needs to be given in relation to how best to engage unreached sections of our participant groups.

It was disappointing that I was unable to interview any parents in the Valleys case study. The numbers of Syrian refugees within the Valleys were very small at the time when I was conducting interviews and it would have been difficult to ensure anonymity. The absence of the parent voice within the Valleys case study has entailed that the parent findings, Chapter Seven, relates exclusively to the City context, a dispersal area, where there is much experience of supporting forced migrants, and, despite funding issues, a more robust infrastructure for support. Despite this, the decision to include the Valleys case study was an important one. The research documented the perspectives of practitioners and strategic actors right at the beginning of their journey of welcoming forced migrant families. It shined a light on the planning and preparation that needs to take place with communities and service partners and as such may offer some useful insights to those areas welcoming Afghani families in the months and years ahead.

A further limitation of the study is perhaps also one of its strengths. When I first embarked upon the research, I was frequently told that it would be difficult to get forced migrant women to talk with me. However, it transpired that the vast majority of the participants recruited were single female parents, some of whom had been subject to trafficking and modern-day slavery. This is a much under-represented group and their insights, particularly those related to psychological safety and the need to be and to feel strong have significantly influenced the findings.

8.3.2 *Identity as a researcher*

A final area for reflection focuses on my own identity and practice as a researcher. Whilst this is more fully unpacked in the Chapter Four, it is important to emphasise here some of the learning that has been gleaned from this study. At the outset of this process, I was preoccupied with the ethical considerations about doing no harm as well as trying to use the research for good (Bogolub 2010). This, along with a view of forced migrants, which (despite my espoused theory of strength and resilience-based practice, tended to emphasise vulnerability), led to my underestimating the

cathartic value of telling your story in your own way and on your own terms that many of the parent participants expressed. I was so aware of the potential for re-traumatisation, that I miscalculated the benefits that may accrue from being listened to without judgement, and furthermore being believed. Coming alongside parents and listening to the stories shared is an immense privilege and should cause the researcher to redouble efforts to make the ensuing perspectives accessible to those who make policy and develop practice.

8.4 The contribution and originality of this research

The following section explores the original contributions of this research. The research offers significant insight into the under researched area of support for forced migrant parents.

The contribution and originality of the research can be considered under three main themes concerning methodological originality, originality of time and space and originality of findings.

8.4.1 *Methodological originality*

The research has utilised a number of original methodological approaches in relation to the use of socio-ecological theory and the case study approach. The research adopted the framework of the socio-ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner and then integrated that into the tenets of stakeholder theory developed by Freeman (1984). This alignment of theories enabled deep analysis of factors impacting at each layer of the nested system. Rather than relying on data generated with a single participant group, my approach utilised data from three distinct participant groups in the process and integrated the findings from parents, public service practitioners and strategic actors. This approach served me well within my Master's degree research which took place within a Business School where stakeholder analysis is a respected and commonly used approach. However, many of the studies with forced migrants focus strongly on the perspectives of single participant groups, for example, Parker's (2018a) research with forced migrants, and Robinson's (2014) consideration of practitioner perspectives. In this study, exploring the perspectives of parents, practitioners and strategic actors has unearthed a rich and complex picture. Additionally, there is a recognition within the research that there is significant diversity of perspective and experience within each of the participant groups. Hence,

I conceptualise this approach as a multiplicity of prism-like lenses that reflect the highly nuanced issues relating to resettlement of forced migrant families. Brookfield (1995) identified the importance of lenses (including an autobiographical lens) for reflective practice. For me, this approach also has resonance as a research method, allowing for the critical consideration of multiple perspectives and for the researcher's own choices and perceptions to be examined within a cohesive whole.

Utilising a case study approach, this research provided insight into two different research contexts. The first research setting is a diverse city context, and a dispersal area. Practitioners and strategic actors are experienced in welcoming forced migrants, including spontaneous arrivals. The Valleys context, however, is a mixed urban-rural demography with limited existing infrastructure for supporting forced migrants. These communities are welcoming forced migrants for the first time with families arriving under the UK Government's resettlement scheme. Whilst the circumstances of families arriving spontaneously may be comparable to those arriving through a scheme, the entitlements and experience of sanctuary may be very different. For example, unlike spontaneous arrivals, people arriving under Government schemes immediately have the right to claim welfare benefits, to work, and to freedom of movement. Given current policy directions in the UK (such as a move towards offshore processing of asylum claims)¹⁶² and calls to extend safe routes to asylum, this distinction (and the resulting inequities it generates) is likely to become even more significant in the future.

A further methodological contribution is connected to my own shift in understanding related to the potential for qualitative interviews to provide an affirming and empowering experience for forced migrant parents (see section 8.3.3). Whilst it will always be crucial to safeguard the wellbeing of participants, as researchers we can often be ethically risk averse in a way that silences important aspects of participant's stories. This has ethical implications, and unchecked can lead to further marginalisation. Conversely accepting the autonomy and choice of participants to tell their stories on their own terms, leads to a recognition that the horrifying nature of their experiences need to be expressed and heard. This aspect will hopefully form

¹⁶² At the time of submission of this thesis, the UK Government has been pursuing a deal with Rwanda to process people seeking asylum in the UK in the central African nation. The implementation of the policy has been thwarted by multiple legal challenges.

the basis of a conference presentation at British Educational Research Association in 2022.

8.4.2 Originality of time and space

The research provided an insight into the lived experiences of parents and practitioners in a particular place (Wales) at what has been a unique point in history. This research was undertaken over a six-year period, during which a number of significant national and international events took place, which had strong implications for the nature of the subject being studied. These unique circumstances have undoubtedly impacted on the study both within the participants' responses and my own thinking. The main factors are identified as follows:

- **Devolution** – in 1999, the National Assembly for Wales was formed and became the devolved administration for Wales in relation to certain (but not all) public services. Such a move enabled the Welsh Government to take a distinctive approach to certain policy aspects relating to refugees, in particular, in 2019, the declaration of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary (the first time the sanctuary approach had been used in relation to a country).
- **Austerity** – in 2010, the incoming UK coalition government initiated a policy which became known as “austerity”. This policy involved a combination of tax increases and significant reductions in the funds available for certain public services.
- **Syrian Civil War** – this war commenced in 2011 and has impacted the country in many ways. The peak of the war was around 2015; and while violence in the country has since diminished, the situation remains in crisis. The events of 2015 resulted in large scale flows of refugees from Syria to Europe and the UK. The refugee “crisis” (sic) also received considerable media interest. What had been under researched and rarely talked about was suddenly headline news, often resulting in polarised discourses of which the practitioner and strategic actor participants were acutely aware
- **Brexit** – in 2016, following a national referendum, the UK voted to leave the European Union. The full departure from the EU was not achieved until 2020 but considerable uncertainty existed (and indeed still exists) concerning ongoing

relationships between the UK and the rest of Europe. A particular aspect of this concerns border controls.

- **Covid 19-** at the writing up stage of thesis production, a global Coronavirus pandemic was providing an opportunity to re-think many aspects of practice, offering new opportunities for online working and perhaps giving everyone a taste of living with liminality, uncertainty, and isolation.
- **Ukraine War-** at the time of my PhD viva, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has resulted in more than 6,000,000 people fleeing Ukraine. The Government has responded with temporary visa concessions and a specific Ukrainian scheme (UK Government 2022)¹⁶³.

These events in the period leading up to and during the research, provide a unique set of contextual factors that enhance the original contribution of this research to knowledge in the field.

There was also a sense in which geopolitical issues were colliding with events in my own life. As mentioned at the outset of this thesis, undertaking the research has coincided with a time of great personal challenge and vulnerability. This influenced both the writing of the thesis and the ways in which I was able to engage empathically with participants (Greenberg et al. 2018). There is much written about how our own experience, if critically reflected upon and used in an intentional and bounded way (Farber 2016), can support practice. I wonder if the same may be true of research. Whilst we can never fully enter the lived experience of others, our own adversity can provide an opportunity for connection and empathy, which in turn can help build rapport with participants (Bondi 2005).

¹⁶³ The Appendix Ukraine Scheme (UK Government 2022) comprises of three elements:

- Ukraine Family Scheme (open to Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians with close Ukrainian relatives) living inside or outside the UK. Those applying from inside the UK can apply for leave to stay. Those applying from outside the UK can apply for leave to enter).
- Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (a scheme for Ukrainians and their immediate family members) living outside the UK. Applicants must have an approved sponsor. Refugees are hosted by UK citizens within their own homes.
- Ukraine Extension Scheme (Ukrainian nationals and their partners/children can apply for this scheme if they were in the UK with immigration permission on 18 March 2022 or if their last permission ended after 01 January 2022).

Whilst the findings of the research may not be generalisable to other contexts, there are certainly lessons that can be learned, particularly in relation to the challenges and opportunities experienced by areas welcoming forced migrants for the first time, and for models of practice that have been effective in areas with more experience of welcoming forced migrants.

8.4.3 *Originality of findings*

The findings of the research can be seen as original in a number of ways.

Firstly, much of its contribution lies in the insight it provides into the perspectives of parents (particularly mothers). The voice of mothers is largely absent from previous research in this area. This research illuminates the experiences, priorities, and aspirations of forced migrant parents, and particularly single mothers, a group that is under-represented within research. The research offered insight into their lives, and particularly into their experiences of navigating the Home Office systems. The experience that emerges is one of liminality (see also Hynes 2011), precarity (McWilliams and Bonet 2016) and constraint (Vervliet et al. 2014).

The findings also highlight how refugee experiences and support differ between geographic locations in Wales. The experience of individuals is further influenced by the way in which they arrive in the UK, whether as a “spontaneous arrival” or via a UK Government resettlement scheme.

The findings identify and describe a distinctly Welsh approach to forced migration, which is currently an aspiration that has yet to be fully realised. This thesis makes a case (in line with Parker 2018a) for the further devolution of asylum support to Welsh Government. Without, these powers the vision of a Nation of Sanctuary will be difficult to fully realise as currently so many of the policies which determine the experience of forced migrant parents are reserved by Westminster, where the presiding government is still pursuing a Hostile Environment policy agenda

The findings provide an insight into the rewards and challenges associated with providing support to forced migrant families. Uniquely, the thesis considers the practitioners’ role in purveying hope, supporting aspirations, and providing opportunities for forced migrant parents to develop self-efficacy particularly in relation to physical and emotional strength. The inclusion of frontline practitioner and

parent voices in Wales enabled a focus on listening to voices that are not always prioritised in research.

8.5 Contribution to theory

Chapter three identified that the literature related to parent support for forced migrant families is fragmented and partial. Through adopting a bricolage approach (Wibberley 2012) to the extant literature it was possible to identify some of the underpinning principles that can clarify the experiences, support needs and aspirations of forced migrant parents.

The importance of reciprocity is a recurring theme within the thesis. There is scope for a reimagining of Mauss's gift theory (Mauss 1990) to encompass the giving and receiving of help and the aspiration to give something back. This is in line with the inclusion agenda of the Nation of Sanctuary and could help to re-position public understandings of forced migrants as strong, resilient and with much to offer to their host nation.

There is a real sense in which the findings of this research challenge common stereotypes connected to the concept of "left behind communities". The Valleys case study took place in one such community, characterised by decades of widening inequalities with other parts of the UK. The area voted strongly in favour of Brexit, despite the benefits incurred from belonging to the EU in relation to the associated net beneficiary of resources. It is all too easy to assume that local concerns to preserve employment for indigenous inhabitants translates to hostility towards forced migrants. This was demonstrably not the case within my research where the overwhelming response was one of welcome and offers of support. Further research on public perceptions of forced migrants in similar areas would be useful in order to test out this finding more robustly.

The emphasis on psychological safety and the need to feel and to be strong in mind and body emerged from the parent findings and perhaps, most strongly from those women who had experienced trafficking and modern-day slavery. Moreover, the insights gained through the parents' voices add weight to calls for a specific focus on women's experience of forced migration (O'Neil 2018; Martin 2017). This thesis has only touched upon the issues and further research, using participatory approaches is

needed to better understand these experiences and to use this understanding to inform policy and practice.

8.6 Next steps

Coming to the end of writing this chapter, I breathe a sigh of relief as described by Appleby (2009), but in common with her, I find that in many ways my work here is only just beginning. Hence, I have identified several important next steps as I think beyond the doctoral Viva.

8.6.1 Disseminating the findings

The role of “expert” sits uncomfortably with me for several reasons, but mainly because I believe that knowledge is co-constructed and emerges from a community of practice (Wenger 1998) and because real expertise in forced migration lies with those experts of experience who have lived through forced migration and resettlement. Nonetheless, as Francis (2015 p.43) points out “What impact does voice have if no one is listening?” Hence, as Mannay et al. (2019b) contend, it is important to share key messages from research to influence practice. I am mindful of the motivation of many of the participants within the study to share their stories in order that things might change. Hence, as many services prepare for the welcoming of Afghani families, I have been asked to develop short courses and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses (see Appendix 12) linked to the findings of this research as part of University of Worcester’s Research and Knowledge Transfer activities. A series of guest lectures are planned within my institution for students of health, social care, and education (see Appendix 11) to include a focus on forced migration within undergraduate courses¹⁶⁴. This aim of raising the awareness of early career practitioners, has been an aspiration since my initial visits to the camps of North France. Coupled with this, I would like to develop Chapters Six and Seven into practitioner facing publications for professional journals. There is also the potential to use the research findings within advocacy and campaigning. I am fortunate to have ongoing involvement with organisations working with forced migrant families who are interested in understanding and making use of the findings of this study. A practitioner toolkit, derived from the findings would provide a valuable resource, particularly for practitioners who are often working in isolation and

¹⁶⁴ And for the ExChange Network within Cardiff University.

without the professional networks that can be so helpful in sharing, reflecting, evaluating, and developing effective practice.

Throughout the research journey I have been privileged to meet with others who are travelling a similar path of research into forced migration, thus providing an opportunity for joint publications and future collaborative research.

8.6.2 New research directions

This research has highlighted several important areas for further inquiry. There is a need to consider the experiences of forced migrants in the post- Brexit era. Whilst, in reality, Brexit has little bearing on policy relating to forced migration, it is likely that issues surrounding immigration generally and populist fears related to the “refugee crisis” were used as a reason for voting Leave (Goodman and Kirkwood 2019; Parker 2018a). Now that the UK has left the European Union, it would be beneficial to explore the extent to which this has affected the experiences of forced migrants, particularly those living in Leave voting areas. Conversely, Welsh Government (2019) has now published its Nation of Sanctuary Action Plan. It would be interesting to consider the impact this policy intent is having on forced migrant families in Wales.

The experiences of women are underrepresented within migration research. Whilst this thesis illuminates their experiences as parents and touches upon their experience of the asylum system, there is much scope for researching their wider experiences. Their aspirations for themselves as well as their children are something that we know very little about and which could help shape interventions. Several the mothers interviewed for this study had experienced trafficking and modern-day slavery. Not much is known about the support needs of trafficked women within the UK, and this presents an important area for future research. There is also scope for a practice network linked to this area, where practice and research findings can be shared.

One of the overriding frustrations of practitioners in this study was the inequity within the asylum system according to means of arrival in the UK, whether by spontaneous arrival or through a government scheme¹⁶⁵. Whilst practitioners and strategic actors

¹⁶⁵ for example, Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) or the new Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

are acutely aware of differential levels of support and resourcing related to Home Office category, it would be helpful to explore the impact that this two-tier system has on the experience and inclusion of forced migrant families as this distinction is likely to become more important over time.

Whilst this research has highlighted some of the principles that underpin support to forced migrant parents, there remains much scope for researching the models of intervention and support and how these are best delivered.

8.7 Final Thoughts

At the time of writing this conclusion, Welsh communities were preparing to welcome forced migrant families from Afghanistan and this graffiti appeared on a Cardiff Street.



Figure 5: Cardiff Street Art (Saki 2021)¹⁶⁶

This, for me, illustrates all that this research has been about, and highlights once again the potential for a radical reimagining of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary. However, to fully realise that vision, much change is needed at all levels of government and achieving this will require concerted political will and a change in public discourses surrounding migration. Without such change, particularly at UK Government level, the helpful policy vision developed around Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary will remain as rhetoric rather than reality.

It seems only fitting to enable one of the parents in the study to have the final word.

¹⁶⁶ The street art in Pearl Street, Cardiff was painted by Persian Artist, Sahar Saki to welcome Afghan Refugees arriving in the area. Sahar subsequently made a postcard out of the mural, to raise money for supporting Afghan refugees in Wales (Alt Cardiff 2021)

Ardita, a survivor of human trafficking and modern-day slavery, at the beginning of her interview with me said this:

“Thank you for asking me about my story. Where to start? It is not a happy story... so much happening and so much hurting.... but now we are here... maybe it is okay? If people listen to this story, maybe things will be better.....?”

Appendix 1

Forced migration statistics

1.1 Classification of forced migrants (UNHCR 2020)

Classification	Numbers (million)	% of total
Internally displaced in-home country	45.7	57
Externally displaced – made up of:	33.8	43
• <i>Refugees</i>	26.0	32
• <i>Asylum seekers</i>	4.2	6
• <i>Venezuelans living abroad</i>	3.6	5
Total	79.5	100

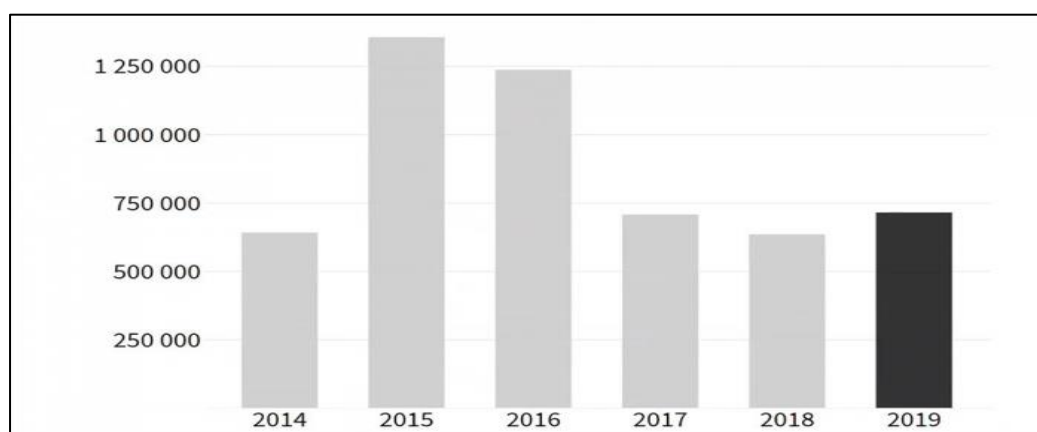
1.2 Age profile of externally displaced forced migrants (UNHCR 2020)

Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
60+	2	2	4
18-59	32	26	58
12-17	6	5	11
5-11	8	8	16
0-4	6	5	11
Total	54	46	100

1.3 Distribution of forced migrants across the globe UNHCR 2020

REGION	%
Africa	
<i>East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes</i>	18.3
<i>Southern Africa</i>	3.1
<i>West and Central Africa</i>	5.0
Total Africa	26.4
Americas	17.8
Asia and Pacific	17.4
Europe	27.4
Middle East and North Africa	11.0
Total	100.0

1.4 Asylum applications in the EU (EASO 2019)



1.5 Distribution of asylum seekers by age group.

Appendix 2

Research typography

Approach	Key features	Knowledge production claims	Theorists
Post positivist	Determinism Reductionism Empirical Observation and measurement Theory verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge is conjectural Data , evidence, and rational considerations shape ideas of “ Truth” Research involves making claims, testing them, and abandoning some Objectivity is essential and standards of validity are important 	Phillips and Barbulles (2000)
Constructivist,	Understanding Multiple participant meanings Social and historical construction Theory generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meanings are created by humans as they engage in their world. Voices are important and so questioning is open-ended. Context is important and researchers engage with this and collect information personally Generation of knowledge is important. Research is inductive, inquirer generates meaning from data collected. 	Crotty (1998)
Advocacy/ Participatory	Political Empowerment issue orientated Collaborative Change orientated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus is upon knowledge which can bring about change Often start from an issue or a stance about a problem in society The aim of knowledge productions is to create discussion to promote social change Participants are active collaborators within the inquiry 	Fay, 1987
Pragmatism	Consequences of actions Problem-centred Pluralistic Real world orientated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truth is what works at the time Knowledge generation can happen by a variety of freely chosen methods Research occurs in a context, and is reflexive of social justice and political aims A strong emphasis on findings that have practical application 	Cherryholmes, 1992

Author's own research typography (adapted from Creswell (2003)).

Appendix 3

Ethics Approval Letter



School of Social Sciences
Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol
Head of School, Pennaeth yr Ysgol
Professor, Yr Athro Amanda Coffey FAcSS

Glamorgan Cardiff University Building
King Edward VI Avenue
Cardiff CF10 3WT
Wales UK
Tel 2087 5179
Fax 2087 4175

www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences

17th October 2016

Our ref: SREC/1979

Alison Prowle
PhD Programme
School of Social Sciences
Dear Alison,

Prifysgol Caerdydd Adeilad
Morgannwg
Rhodfa'r Brenin Edward VII
Caerdydd CF10 3WT
Cymru, Y Deyrnas Unedig
Ffôn 2087 5179
Ffacs 2087 4175

www.caerdydd.ac.uk/social-sciences

Your project entitled 'Migration and Challenge: Narratives of Refugees and Public Service Professionals: an exploration of the family support needs of refugee families entering the UK and how these can best be met within a multi-agency context?' has been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and you can now commence the project.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses, you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g., inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g., including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g., sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us. All ongoing projects will be monitored every 12 months and it is a condition of continued approval that you complete the monitoring form. Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Professor Alan Felstead
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Supervisor: A Pithouse a Rees

Appendix 4

Information letters and consents

Parent Information sheet and consent sheet

Dear Parent,

Research relating to the family support needs of refugee and asylum-seeking families.

You are invited to participate in research to consider the family support needs of refugee families within the UK, and how these might best be met. This is a research project which I am undertaking as part of my doctoral studies at Cardiff University. The research is designed to gather the views of parents and of the staff who are supporting them, about the experiences and needs of refugee/asylum seeking families. I am very interested in hearing your stories about the circumstances that led you to the UK, some of the difficulties you have faced, and about the support that has helped you. I would like to find out what has gone well within this support, and any ideas you have about how support might be improved.

I work for a university within the UK and the research is for academic purposes only. However, I do hope that any learning from the project will be shared with others and hopefully, help to raise awareness of the needs of refugee/ asylum seeking families and inform services for refugee families in the future. However, I must emphasise that I am not connected to any agency that has any influence over your refugee status, asylum claim or your right to remain in the UK. As such, taking part in this project will have no effect on these matters.

If you are willing to take part. I will ask to have a short conversation with you, in which I will ask some questions to help me understand your family's experiences. I would like to record the conversation if possible, and the recording will be for my own research use only. However, if you are not comfortable being recorded, I will just take some notes of our conversation. This conversation will take place in a confidential room within a place that is familiar to you (e.g., Children's Centre) and it will take no more than two hours. However, if you are not comfortable, we can stop the interview at any point. When my research is complete, I will make sure that all those who have taken part can, if they choose, receive a newsletter showing the research findings.

It is important for me to tell you that all data will be kept confidential. I will make sure that no person can be identified within my research thesis or any related publications.

I will make sure that interview notes and recordings are stored securely in a locked cabinet to which only I have access and destroyed after 10 years in line with recommendations from British Ethical Research Association (BERA, 2011).

If you would be willing to participate, please complete the consent form below. However, if you would like any further information about the research, I would be more than happy to answer any questions that you may have. You can contact me by telephone or email to arrange to have a chat, and my contact details are shown below. Also, if you have any concerns about the research, then you are welcome to

contact my dissertation supervisors, Professor Andy Pithouse
(Pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk) and Dr Alyson Rees (ReesA1@cardiff.ac.uk, 029-20875261)

Thank you for considering taking part in this research and I very much look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely

Alison Prowle

a.prowle@worc.ac.uk,

01905 542261

Research Consent Sheet (parent)

Research relating to the family support needs of refugee and asylum-seeking families.

Name _____ (parent)

I have read and understood the research information letter. (Please detach this and keep for your own records)

- I agree to take part in the research project relating to the family support needs of refugee and asylum-seeking families within the UK.
- I understand that all data will be totally anonymous and there will be no identifying features contained in the thesis or any related publications.
- I give my permission for the data to be used for publication and/or presentations by the researcher.
- I am/ am not happy for the interview to be recorded (Please delete as necessary)

Signed.....

Date _____

For further information, please contact:

a.prowle@worc.ac.uk,

01905 542261

Practitioner/ Strategic Actor Information letter and consent sheet

Dear practitioner,

Research relating to the family support needs of refugee and asylum-seeking families.

You are invited to participate in research to consider the family support needs of refugee families within the UK, and how these might best be met. This is a research project which I am undertaking as part of my doctoral studies at Cardiff University. The research aims to gather practitioner and parent perspectives related to needs, positive experiences of service delivery, gaps in provision and lessons learned. The aim of the research is to add to the body of knowledge regarding family support needs of refugee families, to identify effective practice and to consider whether any learning from the project can be identified to inform policy and practice. The sections below aim to give you more information about the project:

Participants will be asked to take part in an interview exploring their experience of working with refugee families, which will take no longer than two hours. You may also be invited to take part in a focus group with other practitioners to explore issues relating to joint working to support refugee families. If you are willing, I would like to record the interviews and focus groups. I will ensure that all participants receive a newsletter outlining the research findings.

It is important to inform you that all data will be confidential, and anonymity will be maintained throughout, with no identifying details included within my PhD thesis or any subsequent publications.

All hard copies of data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and destroyed after 10 years in line with recommendations from British Ethical Research Association (BERA, 2011). Electronic data will be held on a secure server and password protected.

If you would be willing to participate, please complete the consent form below. However, should you require any further information about the research please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone or email (details below)? If you would like to contact my dissertation supervisors to discuss this research further, please contact Professor Andy Pithouse (Pithouse@cardiff.ac.uk) and Dr Alyson Rees (ReesA1@cardiff.ac.uk, 029-20875261)

I very much look forward to working with you, should you feel able to participate in this research.

Yours sincerely

Alison Prowle

a.prowle@worc.ac.uk,

01905 542261

Research Consent Sheet (practitioner/manager/strategic actor)

Research relating to the family support needs of refugee and asylum-seeking families.

Name _____ (staff member)

Organisation _____

- I have read and understood the research information letter. (Please detach this and keep for your own records)
- I agree to take part in the research project relating to the family support needs of refugee and asylum-seeking families within the UK.
- I understand that all data will be totally anonymous and there will be no identifying features contained in the thesis or any related publications.
- I give my permission for the data to be used for publication and/or presentations by the researcher.

Signed.....

Date _____

For further information, please contact:

a.prowle@worc.ac.uk,

01905 542261

Appendix 5

Prompts for semi-structured interviews with parents

(The researcher will make it clear that all questions are entirely voluntary and need only be answered if the parent is comfortable to do so. The researcher will select from the questions to avoid tiring the service user)

Looking back ...

- Biographical info
- Are you happy to share with me something about the situation in home country and what motivated your family to leave?
- Are you happy to share with me something about your journey to the UK and the experiences you had along the way (Journey and experiences, e.g., transit, refugee camps, etc.)?
- Could you tell me a little bit about the challenges have your family faced on the journey? How have these affected you?
- Is there anything specific you would like to say about your children's experiences in your home country, on transit or in the camp? How may these have affected them?
- During these difficult experiences, what kept you going/ what helped you?
- (*Strengths and resilience*)
- Before arriving in the UK what support did you think your family might need to settle in?
- What specific support did you think your children might need to settle in in the UK?

First 6 months

- What was your family's initial experience on arriving in the UK?
- Can you describe your family's first few weeks/ months in the UK?
- What support was your family provided with during this period, and how useful was this?
- Can you tell me a little bit about how your own strengths and inner resources helped you to cope when you arrived in the UK?
- Was there any support you would have liked to receive but didn't?
- What was your family's initial experience on arriving in the UK?
- Can you describe your family's first few weeks/ months in the UK?
- What support was your family provided with during this period, and how useful was this?
- Can you tell me a little bit about how your own strengths and inner resources helped you to cope when you arrived in the UK?
- Was there any support you would have liked to receive but didn't?
- Were your children offered any specific support? How useful was this?
- How well were you helped to settle into the community?
- What practitioners has your family had contact with during this period?

- How well do you think the practitioners working with you understand your family's needs?
- How has the wider community welcomed you?
- How are you feeling now about your life in the UK?
- Is there any support your family would like at this point?

Towards integration

- Experiences of family support to date- how did this evolve over time? What worked and what didn't?
- How is your family feeling about life in the UK now?
- How well has your family settled into the community? What helped or hindered?
- Specific questions to explore identity, integration, connectedness, social networks.
- How have your children settled into the UK?
- How do you think your own strengths and resources have helped you and your family to settle into your new life?
- What support if any are you still receiving? How effective is this? What agencies are working with your family?
- Is there any support you are not receiving but would like to receive? What about the children?
- What are your aspirations for the future?
- Do you have any advice for agencies or practitioners working with forced migrant families?

Appendix 6

Prompts for semi-structured interviews with Practitioners

(Please note not all questions will be relevant to each practitioner so the researcher will select the most appropriate questions)

- Biographical information (role, responsibility, training, prior experience etc.)
- What is your understanding of the political social and cultural contexts from which the families have come from and the issues they may have faced on transit to the UK?
- Could you say something about the expectations of families on arrival in the UK and how this aligns with the actual service response

First 6 months

- Can you describe the support you provided during the first week/first month/ first 6 months? How successful was this?
- How different was your perception of the family's needs from the reality?
- What other agencies have you worked with to provide support and how effective has this been?
- What challenges/ Barriers have you faced, and how were these overcome?
- What support approaches have been successful or less effective? Why is this?
- What impact has support had over this period and are there any unmet needs?
- How could unmet needs best be met in your opinion?

Towards integration

- Experience of supporting families over longer period. What worked?
- How effective were existing strategies and models of support? Did they need to be adapted? Please explain.
- Are there any models or strategies that have proved effective? Why?
- What constraints or challenges have you faced? How were these overcome? How effective has inter-agency work been?
- How well have the family's needs been met? Unmet needs?
- How well have the family settled into the community? What has impacted on this?
- How well supported have you felt in working with refugee families?
- Have there been any implications for training/CPD? Have these needs been met?
- Advice for other practitioners?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 7

Prompts for semi-structured interviews with Strategic Actors

- Roles/ responsibilities/ biogs.
- What do you see as the main strategic drivers for services working with refugees?
- How effective is Government policy relating to this?
- How well is policy understood and implemented at local level?
- What are the main implications for services when working with refugee families?
- What are the barriers/ challenges and constraints? How could these be addressed moving forward?
- Can you identify any models of effective practice?
- Future policy directions?

Questions adapted for specific roles (see example below)

Adapted questions for semi-structured interview with MP

General focus

1. What is your view on the current government's policies in relation to refugees?
2. How would you describe the policy stance on refugees your Party – what are the political implications of this stance?
3. Do you see there being any implications of BREXIT on refugee settlement in UK?
4. Do you have any observations on the relationships between Welsh Government and UK government departments on non-devolved functions which impact on refugees?
5. Do you observe any significant differences in policy and outcomes regarding refugee settlement in Wales and England?
6. Are there any legal issues in refugee re-settlement in the UK that you would like to comment on?

Constituency focus

What is your attitude towards the refugee settlement programme which has taken place (will take place) in X? Do you think this process could have been handled differently/better?

1. Does the settlement of refugees in X pose you any political difficulties?
2. Do you observe any significant differences in policy and outcomes regarding refugee settlement in X and other parts of Wales?
3. Do you have any observations on the relationships between Welsh MPs and Welsh AMs regarding Welsh refugees?
4. Have you had any constituent queries (in writing, telephone or in person) about refugee settlement in X?
5. Any other comments?

Appendix 8

Overview of data produced with the participants

Parent Interviews		
Pseudonym	Recorded minutes	Transcribed words
Ardita	104mins	11145
Luljeta	34mins	2469
Habibah	25mins	1,845
Ranye Haydar	41 mins	3029
Orpita	24 mins	1682
Sadaf	32 mins	2454
Wahiba	51 mins	3373
Khorshid-banou Amir	Not recorded	1280 in notes including verbatim quotes
Practitioner Interviews		
Pseudonym	Recorded minutes	Transcribed words
Tony (Health Visitor)	41mins	5756
Emma (Health Visitor)	57 mins	6976
Chris (Headteacher)	43mins	6163
Lucy (Teacher)	36 mins	4178
Tracey (Teacher)	28 mins	3705
Kate (ESOL Tutor)	40 mins	4804
Andrea (Advisory Teacher)	28 mins	3408
Pam (Advisory Teacher)	37 mins	4004
Nicola (Children and Family Worker)	62 mins	8809
Sonja (Women's Officer)	49mins	5783
Rhea (Women's Officer)	32mins	3691
Pippa (Family Support Worker)	72 mins	11563

Jamie (Family Support Worker)	52 mins	7426
Karen (Family Support Worker)	84 mins	14493
Allie (Family Support Worker)	72 mins	11453
Nyla (Family Support Worker)	64 mins	10981
Carys (Family Support Worker)	51 mins (Sarah also present)	9007
Maisie (Volunteer)	25 mins	3318
Dani (Volunteer)	37 mins	3835
Mahira (Volunteer)	35 mins	3701
Dave (Resettlement Officer)	28 mins	2875
Sarah (Operational Manager)	51 mins	9007
Beth (Operational Manager)	21mins	2940
Jake (Church Leader)	48 mins	6258
Philip (Resettlement Officer)	38 mins	3908
Deb (Community Cohesion Officer)	52 mins	7738
Practitioner Forum		
Attended by 9 individuals ¹⁶⁷	1hour 45 minutes (not recorded)	4,303 words in notes
Strategic Actors		
Politician 1	36 mins	3993
Politician 2	31 mins	3753
Politician 3	42 mins	4803
Politician (Council Leader)	49 mins (Local Authority Senior Officer 2 also present)	6810
Politician (Council Leader)	33 mins	2816
Health Manager	57 mins	7303
Local Authority Senior Officer 1	40 mins	4793
Local Authority Senior Officer 2	49 mins (see above)	6810

¹⁶⁷ The focus group attendees are identified in Table 8. One participant expressed a desire for the focus group not to be recorded so I took notes.

Senior Police Officer	65 mins	9462
Senior Police Officer	35 mins	5124
Senior Officer 3 rd Sector 1	43 mins	4905
Senior Officer 3 rd Sector 2	32 mins	5,011
Senior Officer 3 rd Sector 3	47 mins	5893
Senior Officer 3 rd Sector 4	51 mins	7087
Senior Officer 3 rd Sector 5	46 mins	4653

Appendix 9

Feedback Newsletter for Parents (designed to be used by practitioners)

Migration and Challenge Research Project

Feedback Newsletter for Parents

January 2018

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research on family support for refugee and asylum-seeking families in [City] and the South Wales Valleys. I am now at the stage of writing up my findings and wanted to take this opportunity to share the findings with you.

For the research, I interviewed 10 parents from a range of different countries including Iran, Iraq, Tanzania, Albania, Bangladesh, Algeria, and Somalia. You all have at least one child (or are expecting your first baby). All the parents were living in [City] at the time of the study. Your children range in age from babies to teenagers and young adults. I also interviewed a range of workers from different support agencies as well as people who are involved in making decisions about services for families (for example, politicians, local council leaders and senior managers). Here are some of my findings:

- You are all happy to be in Wales. You feel safe here and for many of you it is beginning to feel like home. You find the local people very friendly and mostly welcoming. You don't like the weather, but you are getting used to it. You really like the city. You find it very calm, easy to get around and friendly. There is everything you need here. Those of you who have been in other areas of the UK think Wales compares very favourably, especially in relation to how you are treated within the community. Some of you really miss your original country, particularly because you may have left relatives behind.
- The asylum process can be very confusing and stressful. Most of you have found the early days in the UK very hard. Having to move accommodation has been particularly difficult for you. Getting connected to local support services can make a real difference and help you feel as if you are not alone.
- You all say that you have had good support from the services that help you.
- The British Health service can be difficult to understand as it is very different from the health service in your original countries but having someone explain how things work can really help you. You have found health visiting services particularly helpful in doing this and the Health Visitor was also able to direct you towards lots of other support.
- Most of you are really surprised at how helpful the British police are and how seriously they take the responsibility to help you feel safe. Feeling safe is important to you, perhaps more important than anything else.

- You all have very high regard for your support workers. You feel that they go beyond their job and really help you to overcome problems and become more confident with living in Wales. You gave me examples of the things they help you with, such as financial advice, the school system and meeting other people. They have helped you support your own health and wellbeing and helped you to support your children, some of whom have been through very difficult experiences which are still affecting them. Some of you describe your support worker as "your angel", "your sister" or "someone sent from God to help you". It can be difficult when the support comes to an end, but a follow up call or visit can be very reassuring. You realise that services cannot support you forever, but you like to know that you can still call on them if you have a problem after the support is finished.
- Your experiences of accommodation have been very mixed. Some of you have spent longer than you hoped in hostels. Some of you have had many moves and with very little prior notice and not much practical support to help you move. Some of you have been happy with the accommodation you have been given. Others have been very disappointed with the quality of the accommodation and have found it damp and uncomfortable.
- Most of you have experienced anxiety or depression. Some of you also report that your older children are also affected by poor emotional and mental health. There can be a long wait for counselling services and some of you find that the counselling sessions are not frequent or long enough to really help.
- Telling your stories can be difficult for you and force you to relive very painful experiences. However, some of you have found it helpful to tell your stories when there is no pressure to do so. In some services, you have been able to make a book about your life and this has helped you to come to terms with some of the things that have happened to you.
- You really enjoy going to centres where you can get advice, food, and clothing as well as meet with other families. The workers there do not judge you and are helpful and friendly. There are social opportunities there for you to enjoy- Family Movie Night (with popcorn and drinks) is especially popular!
- You particularly value those support services that can stay with you even after you get your decision. Getting a positive decision is always a relief, but you have found that there can be gaps in services at this point, leaving you feeling very isolated and vulnerable. Having a support worker that stays with you beyond decision can really help as you move on to the next stage of your life.
- Some of you have told me that schools have been very supportive to your children. Having to move schools when you change accommodation can be very difficult for your child and for you as parents. When you are in initial accommodation, your children are not in school but in CITY, they have developed an outreach programme to support families at this point. This contact with education has been helpful.
- Lots of you are very keen to learn English. Some of you are now fluent! This helps you to meet people and feel at home in your community. However, there are some issues with availability / timing of English classes, especially for those of you with small children.

- Food is important to lot of you. You enjoy sharing hospitality with your support workers and friends. It is very important to you that you can buy authentic ingredients to replicate recipes from your country of origin.
- Lots of you have found support, friendship, and acceptance within faith communities in Wales (Churches and Mosques).
- You find it helpful to meet with other refugees and asylum seekers, especially those who have been in the UK a while.
- Lots of you reported how you are now feeling much stronger. Good support services help you to become more confident and feel in control of your life.
- Some of you are now at the stage when you can dream of a positive future. You have plans for your own future that include work or study. You also think that your children will get good opportunities in Wales.

Thank you for taking part in this research. I hope that it will help inform our understanding of the experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking families in Wales and help services to know how best to support families in the future. If you would like further information, please talk with your support worker, or contact Alison at the following email address: alison.prowle@worc.ac.uk

December 2021

SUPPORTING FORCED MIGRANT FAMILIES IN WALES

Practitioner Feedback

Who Took Part?

- 10 parents
- 33 practitioners from various organisations
- 15 strategic actors (including politicians, senior managers and representatives of advocacy organisations)

About the research

The research explores the lived experiences of forced migrant parents in Wales, along with the perspectives of the practitioners that support them and of decision makers in Wales. The research identified that the families enjoy living in Wales and usually find their communities very welcoming. However, they experience many challenges

Summary of findings

- ◆ **Forced migrant families in Wales experience multiple adversities, including financial constraint, loss and grief and uncertainty about the future.**
- ◆ **The Home Office asylum processes are a source of stress and frustration.**
- ◆ **Attuned practitioners can make a positive difference to families' experience.**
- ◆ **Strength based working, supporting resilience and promoting wellbeing can be helpful approaches.**
- ◆ **There is also scope for information sharing, signposting and advocacy as well as practitioners helping to change public discourses of migration.**
- ◆ **Supporting families to develop their own networks helps create sustainable support.**
- ◆ **Practitioners value and benefit from**

"Thank you for asking me about my story. Where to start? It is not a happy story... so much happening and so much hurting.... but now we are here... maybe it is ok? If people listen to this story, maybe things will be better.....?"

-Ardita (name changed)

Thank you for participating in the research. For further details, please contact Alison Prowle .

A.prowle@worc.ac.uk

Appendix 11

Teaching PowerPoints

The PowerPoints contain audio–visual material and are too large to send by email. They can be accessed via my LinkedIn profile at the address below:



[\(99+\) Post | Feed | LinkedIn](#)

Appendix 12

CPD Flyer

**Continuing Professional Development
Department for Children and Families**

**Including refugee and asylum seeking children
into your setting**



Date: 28th June 2021 (10am—3pm)

Venue: University of Worcester

Fee: £90 per delegate

The webinar is delivered by Janet Harvell and Alison Prowle.

Janet and Alison are both senior lecturers within the Department for Children and Families. They have been involved in a collaborative learning and teaching project linked to refugee children and their families in Calais. This has involved working closely with the family centre at Grande Synth refugee camp, Dunkirk. Janet and Alison draw upon their own extensive professional practice in education, family support, early years, international experience and community development.

The number of globally forcibly displaced people topped 70 million at the end of 2018. This number includes almost 26 million refugees, 3.5 million asylum seekers, and over 41 million internally displaced persons (United Nations, 2019)

Many of these people have been children and families fleeing warzones, hostile regimes and poverty. Then being followed by weeks, months or years in refugee camps. The impact on children's health, safety, education and well-being is significant.

Many settings are now preparing to welcome refugee and asylum seeking children and their families.

Purpose of training:

- To understand some of the experiences of refugee and asylum seeking families who have arrived in the UK, and the ongoing issues they may face
- To consider the experiences and support needs of refugee children and the implications of these for practitioners in helping them to flourish
- To explore the impact of trauma on the brain, and to consider strategies to support children and families who have experienced trauma.
- To reflect upon the importance of practitioner self-care when supporting families who have experienced trauma.

Book This Course

Please email cpdeducation@worc.ac.uk for a booking form.

www.worcester.ac.uk/cpdeducation

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