Examining the Strategic Response and Approach to Integration of Queer Forced Migrants in Wales

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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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Summary

This study considers the integration experiences of queer forced migrants in Wales, as well as the strategic responses. Queer forced migrants' experiences of integration in Wales are characterised by numerous challenges. My study reveals discrepancies between ideals of inclusion as championed by Welsh decision-makers, and the realities of exclusion that this community faces. Through considering the experiences of queer forced migrants, we can gain more comprehensive understanding of their integration journeys in Wales. I use these understandings to inform recommendations of how policymakers can create truly inclusive integration policies for Wales.

Forced migrant integration is a growing policy area in Wales. Through this study, I highlight that most of these efforts overlook intersectional identities, such as those of queer forced migrants. Queer forced migrants in Wales face social isolation and mental health struggles which are compounded by to absence of tailored initiatives. My research advocates for the development of specialised services, community networks and greater awareness amongst the asylum sector about the needs of queer forced migrants. I delve into the structural inequalities that perpetuate discrimination, hindering meaningful participation in policy and practice. I also raise questions around the sufficiency of integration-specific services provided to queer forced migrants.

The research was carried out during the 2020-2021 Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. This impacted the decision to employ online ethnographic methodologies to investigate this topic. As part of the study, I conducted online interviews with queer forced migrants and asylum sector professionals such as politicians, third-sector CEOs, and on-the-ground practitioners. Through incorporating a variety of perspectives, I provide a comprehensive picture of integration efforts and experiences in Wales.

The data analysis revealed key findings including:

- Inadequate support addressing the unique challenges faced by queer forced migrants.
- Self-isolation and lack of community networks forming a barrier to integration
- An urgent need for a paradigm shifts in integration policy and approaches.
- Structural inequalities that perpetuate discrimination and hinder queer forced migrants' meaningful integration.
- A stark gap between policy rhetoric and the lived experiences of queer forced migrants.

This study emphasises the urgent need for systemic reforms within the UK's asylum system and Wales's devolved legal areas, that prioritise queer individuals' rights and dignity. This study gives policy suggestions for inclusive strategies, procedures and processes that allow queer forced migrants to integrate and thrive in Wales.

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Acknowledgments

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1.Introduction

1.1 The Thesis Journey

My journey that led me to creating this thesis began in 2016. After seeing the need for safe space for queer People of Colour (PoC) throughout Wales, I was part of establishing Glitter Cymru. This local grassroots organisation was created to provide an environment where individuals could celebrate their cultures, engage in discussions deemed taboo within their communities, and feel empowered to address topics related to race, sexuality, and gender. Glitter Cymru was initially a space for cultural celebration and dialogue. As queer migrants began joining the group, seeking community and solace, the organisations' role changed to be able to support their challenging experiences.

Initially, Glitter Cymru was predominantly comprised of individuals born and raised in the UK and Europe. We the founders of the organisation, shared a common thread of migration and refuge within our family histories. This shared experience facilitated a natural connection with queer forced migrants. As these individuals became part of the community, it became apparent that they faced unique challenges that were not adequately addressed within existing support systems in Wales. Recognising the gaps in support services and resources available to queer forced migrants, as the grassroots founders, we embarked on a journey of learning and advocacy. I specifically delved into the more practical side of things: understanding UK migration policies, housing regulations, hate crime procedures, and community cohesion strategies. The urgency of the situation became palpable as I found myself providing shelter to homeless newly qualified refugees, often accommodating them on my own sofa.

Despite my efforts to raise awareness and advocate for change, the voices of queer forced migrants seemed to fall on deaf ears within broader society. Faced with the magnitude of the issue and the need for systemic change, I made the decision to pursue a more formal avenue for advocacy: a PhD. This academic endeavour aims to shed light on the experiences of queer forced migrants in Wales and discuss integration - with the goal of driving policy change and improving support services.

After five years of dedicated research and advocacy, the fruits of this labour are emerging. This study, the first of its kind in Wales, is gaining attention and making a significant impact. By centering the voices and experiences of queer migrants, the research has led to tangible outcomes, including contributions to the Welsh Government's LGBTQ+ Action Plan (Welsh Government, 2023) and other policy initiatives. Through perseverance, dedication, and commitment to social justice, the journey that began with a grassroots organisation has

blossomed into a movement for change, ensuring that the needs and rights of queer forced migrants are not only acknowledged but prioritised within Welsh society.

I am a human rights activist, covertly operating under the guise of a PhD researcher. It has taken me a considerable amount of time to feel academically comfortable delving into the realm of integration within the context of queer migration studies and asylum policy. Initially, my work did not fit neatly into a predefined academic category; at its core lies an ongoing dialogue among the intersecting identities of the participants – encompassing gender, sexuality, race, legal status, and mental health – alongside considerations of agency and privilege.

I am both grateful and apprehensive that queer forced migrants have entrusted me with their life stories, despite enduring physical and emotional violence throughout their asylum journeys, all while their humanity is "debated" throughout that journey. Through my work, I aim to provide a safe space for participants to share their stories authentically – narratives that are not homogenised into a singular representation. There exists a myriad of ways to be queer, trans, an asylum seeker, and a refugee, and each individual story speaks for itself I hope that the participants of this study contribute to dispelling the pervasive misinformation surrounding queer and forced migrant lives, adding yet another perspective to the discourse. The life stories of the participants are primarily memories that construct a non-linear narrative. Queerness and asylum are inherently non-linear, characterised by twists and turns. This complexity only enriches their experiences; it does not diminish their value. I am honoured and humbled that my participants have entrusted me to represent their truth in a manner that is intentional and accessible to white, cisgender, middle-class British asylum professionals, who wield considerable power.

I perceive my role as a facilitator who amplifies the voices of those who deserve to be heard. While I am confident that this work will inevitably find its way into asylum professionals' inboxes, or academics' "to read" folders, my greatest aspiration is for my work to resonate with queer forced migrants themselves.

1.2 Statement of the problem

To understand the experiences of displaced people, and in particular queer forced migrants, it is important to consider integration. Although government policies and academic research often feature the concept of integration, definitions and application have a high degree of variation according to context and purpose. In this section, I will examine the ways in which integration is understood and operationalised within the context of queer forced migration. Through this, I will reveal the unique barriers and opportunities that queer forced migrants face whilst navigating life in a new socio-cultural environment. I will uncover the complexities

and barriers facing queer forced migrants during the integration process, through addressing both policy context and existing literature. This complexity is compounded within non-devolved regions like Wales, where centralised policies often fail to account for the specialised needs of marginalised populations.

Looking at integration through the lens of lived experience, reveals a nuanced subject. Integration considerations are a fundamental element in developing law, policy, agreements, and programmes that address the concerns of displaced persons and contribute to broader national and transitional initiatives. Integration is increasingly recognised as a significant area of research and practice. Over time, focus has grown on understanding the integration stories of both present day, and past forced migrants. Importantly, this field has developed through examining the interplay of integration with intersectionality, such as the implications of combining gender, race and sexuality.

Increasingly, academics are highlighting the persistent marginalisation faced by communities of forcibly displaced people. There has been a push for policymakers and practitioners to gain a greater awareness about the importance of including these communities in discourse around integration. By recognising forced migration as a violation in its own right, efforts have been made to emphasise the value in acknowledging their experiences in integration efforts. However, initial attempts to bridge the gap between displaced populations and host communities have underscored the challenges inherent in shaping integration practice and policy.

Those making policy around integration, often lack understanding of the complexities of interactions between host communities and forcibly displaced populations. This has often prevented integration efforts from becoming effective, sometimes leading to hate crime, xenophobic violence and civil unrest.

The UK's current approach to integration at a strategic level, prioritises stronger community relations through active involvement, particularly of disadvantaged or marginalised groups. The UK Government's Sustainable Communities Strategy identifies integration as "a sense of community identity and belonging", as well as "tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs" (ODPM, 2005). The Home Office's Race Equality and Integration Strategy (Home Office, 2004) highlights the importance of developing a "sense of common belonging" and fostering "an inclusive sense of British identity alongside their other cultural identities". Both strategies tap on legally minoritised groups, through the lens of migration management (White Paper 2002; Home Office, 2002) and have contributed to further separate the "deserving" and the "undeserving" migrants (Sales & Willis, 2020).

The U.K. government sends contradictory messages by restricting migrant entry and simultaneously promoting integration. This has resulted in integration becoming a deeply problematic concept that is concerned with the micro-relations and interactions of society members within numerous social spheres (Zetter et al., 2005). Some sociologists argue that this is one of the purposes of integration (Jeannotte et al., 2002), whereas others argue that addressing inequality is the main function of integration (Whelan & Maître, 2005a). Whelan and Maître, argue that the ways in which marginalised groups come together to negotiate their own presence within social structures, showcases the strength of the bond amongst these groups (2005b). This bond is the basis of individual and collective perceptions of belonging. This rings especially true for queer forced migrants, however, the data and research available in the UK and Wales that showcase these bonds remains inadequate. The Home Office only started collecting data on queer asylum applications in 2015 (Home Office, 2015). This has led to a lack of insight and displays a long-held reluctance to delve into the nuances of queer forced migration and its impact on integration.

Despite the UK government's efforts to promote integration, queer forced migrants encounter specific barriers to fully participate in and feel included within mainstream society. Contradictory messages are sent by the government, who restrict migrant entry simultaneously to promoting integration. This further exacerbates challenges. For queer forced migrants, integration encompasses not only a sense of community identity and belonging but also the recognition and validation of their unique experiences and identities within wider society. Their perspective highlights the importance of addressing not only social inequalities but also the specific forms of discrimination and exclusion faced by marginalised groups within migration and integration processes.

This becomes even more nuanced when examined in the Welsh context. Wales has its own distinct cultural identity and strong sense Welsh community, which impacts the integration experiences of queer forced migrants differently compared to other parts of the UK. As such, understanding how queer forced migrants navigate their identities and relationships within Welsh communities is crucial for developing inclusive integration policies and practices tailored to the specific cultural context of Wales. Also, Wales has a smaller population compared to England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, which results in more closely-knit communities and potentially greater visibility and recognition of queer individuals within society. However, this visibility does not necessarily guarantee acceptance or inclusivity, especially for marginalised groups such as queer forced migrants who may face additional layers of discrimination and stigma.

1.3 Reflecting on Current Events and Media Coverage

Community tensions around the topic of migration have been exacerbated by UK news media and social media platforms. This can present additional challenges to the integration of forced migrants, and their ability to feel welcome within host communities. Many current events have indicated the hostility and division felt by host communities on forced migrants, and how to approach perceived issues.

The Migration Observatory has found that “illegality, the failure of asylum claims, and the size of migrant inflows and populations are clear focal points for newspapers of all types.”[1] This rhetoric has stoked anti-immigrant sentiments in the UK and created a lasting impact upon the abilities of forced migrants to integrate.

Additionally, social media has played a significant role in providing a platform for anti-migration sentiments. In 2024, serious riots across the UK began in Southport. These responded to false claims about the identity of the assailant in a stabbing that took the lives of 3 girls. Many of these claims included that the perpetrator was a migrant, a Muslim, or a refugee, and were weaponised by far-right groups to incite violence.

In 2023, Llantwit Major, in South Wales, became the target of far-right groups’ attempts to stoke anti-migrant sentiments through actions such as inflammatory leaflets and rallies. These combatted plans to build temporary housing for displaced people, with the leaflet including phrases such as "No more migrants - Wales is full". Many local groups countered with non-violent resistance, holding overnight vigils, creating safe spaces, and posting social media messages such as "Racism, xenophobia and discrimination have no place in Llantwit".[2]

Controversy surrounded the conservative government’s decision in 2023 to use the Bibby Stockholm barge in Dorset to house asylum seekers. Supporters of the decision felt that this action would deter people from seeking asylum in the UK and keep these communities separate from local populations. This served to promote rhetoric against integration, with the idea that forced migrants should be hosted into a distinct and separate area. Many human rights groups and residents criticised the decision, noting that this not only was inhumane, but it would isolate those individuals from the community, and prevent integration. (The Telegraph & Argus, 2023)

[1] https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/reports/decade-immigration-british-press/
[2] BBC 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65057093

Similarly, the UK government's plans to remove asylum seekers to Rwanda displayed a rhetoric which is fundamentally damaging to integration. Through sending asylum seekers to a third country, this removes the option for these forcibly displaced individuals to integrate with UK communities. This plan faced widespread criticism and legal challenges, eventually being dismissed following a Labour government winning the 2024 UK election.

Some critics have noted that the UK have adopted a "segregated immigration policy which favours those fleeing Ukraine".[3] In contrast to many other forcibly displaced populations, Ukranian refugees were supported through streamlined visa processes, simplified procedures and organised support. UK households were offered £350 a month through the "Homes for Ukraine" scheme to host Ukranian refugees in their homes. This has highlighted the importance of race and islamophobia when considering integration and forced migrant communities. Even within Ukranian communities, there are many reports of non-white members getting non-preferential treatment and facing racism.[4] Through my community work, I saw this in Wales manifested in situations such as non-white Ukrainians reporting difficulties accessing the "Welcome Ticket", which was there to give free transportation to Ukranian Refugees.

1.4 Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary

As a devolved nation, Wales pledged to the better treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum, through their Nation of Sanctuary Action Plan (Welsh Government, 2019). This plan sets out Welsh Government's commitment to ensure that all are treated equally, regardless of immigration status, or country of origin. Despite the UK government being responsible for asylum and immigration matters, the Welsh Government as led by Welsh Labour is responsible for reducing inequality and promoting integration.

The policy approach as set out in the Nation of Sanctuary plan, distinguishes Welsh Government from the UK Government in Westminster. This significant policy divergence highlights the complexity of considering asylum and immigration policy within a devolved context (Davies & Williams, 2019). This tension is compounded through initiatives only

[3] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/07/home-office-accused-of-being-unashamedly-racist-towards-sudanese
[4] https://time.com/6153276/ukraine-refugees-racism/

present in Wales, such as free secondary health care for asylum seekers, free transport schemes, and Wi-Fi provisions in asylum accommodation.[5] [6] [7]

Here I will briefly describe several initiatives in Wales that I will further discuss in my findings chapter:

- The Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) is hosted by Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) The WSMP organises regular forums that include key Welsh stakeholders such as Local Authorities, Welsh Government, the Home Office, Clearsprings, Migrant Help, the NHS, lived experience groups, and third sector organisations.
- The Wales Sanctuary Service (WSS) is "a partnership of 6 organisations who have been funded by the Welsh Government to promote and ensure the rights of people seeking asylum in Wales."[8] WSS provides a wide range of services, including casework, awareness raising, advocacy forums, legal advice and children's advocacy.
- The Move On Service provides face to face appointments and support for newly granted refugees. The scheme assists with a range of essential applications such as for National Insurance, Universal Credit and the Discretionary Assistance Fund and accommodation.[9]
- The Migrant Integration Framework (MIF), which is made up of service providers and public bodies. The MIF aims to promote migrant integration, through the combined knowledge and tools of its members (Williams and Morris, 2020).
- Training and support for landlords under Rent Smart Wales surrounding migrant rights in housing including preventing discrimination and addressing racism and hate crime (Smith & Patel, 2019).
- Support for those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), is a detailed guide for local authorities on preventing individuals with NRPF from facing additional vulnerability or discrimination when attempting to access essential services and support (Sales & Willis, 2020)

[5] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide#:~:text=In%20Scotland%20and%20Wales%2C%20asylum,support%20from%20the%20Home%20Office
[6] https://nation.cymru/news/welsh-govt-extends-unlimited-travel-scheme-for-refugees-but-not-asylum-seekers/
[7] https://nation.cymru/news/asylum-seeker-free-wifi-scheme-scrapped/
[8] https://www.dpia.org.uk/projects/asylum-rights-programme/
[9] https://wrc.wales/move-on-service/#:~:text=During%20this%20time%2C%20homelessness%20becomes,The%20Move%20On%20Service%20team.

- Welsh Public Bodies have been advised that, unless necessary, they should limit data sharing with the Home Office. This action was taken in the hope that this would increase migrant communities' confidence in accessing healthcare and other supports. Proactive engagement with migrant communities is encouraged, as a vehicle of improving confidence and trust, and removing barriers to such essential services (Phillips & Rutter, 2018).
- The Cardiff and Vales Health Inclusion Service (CAVHIS) provides Health Inequalities and Trauma Support. This service works to ensure that health services remain stable and sustainable for migrant communities, as well as focussing on mental health support and vaccine uptake. (Jones & McLean, 2020)
- REACH+ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) hubs, are a fundamental part of the Welsh Government's integration efforts. This scheme provides free language lessons, assessments and certificates for migrants. This has supported many asylum seekers and refugees to improve English and Welsh language skills, and to prove these skills to employers.
- Various sector specific employment programmes and awareness raising initiatives have been active in advocating for the employment of forced migrants. Campaigns such as "Lift the Ban" have been advocating for asylum seekers to be given the right to work.[10]
- Educational Initiatives such as the Financial Contingency Fund and Education Maintenance Allowance have been giving increased opportunities for forced migrants to access further and higher education (Allen & Van der Horst, 2016)
- Multiple universities across Wales are Universities of Sanctuary, including Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of South Wales and Cardiff University. These universities are working to "Make Higher Education institutions places of safety, solidarity and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary"[11] Sanctuary Scholarships or bursaries are offered by 7 out of the 8 universities in Wales.[12]

One significant flaw in each of the outlined strategies is the absence of explicit mention or consideration of queer forced migrants. Through failing to address queer forced migrants' experiences and specific needs, the Welsh Government risks overlooking a marginalised section of refugee and asylum-seeking communities. This goes hand in hand with catering to broad categories of migrants, without adequately acknowledging the intersectional nature of their identities and experiences.

[10] https://liftheban.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Lift-the-Ban-report.pdf
[11] https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org/
[12] https://star-network.org.uk/access-to-university/scholarships/list/

1.5 Objective of this Study

Wales boasts a rich history of migration. In this study, I consider queer forced migrants within Wales's current migration histories. I focus on integration, examining both sides of the strategic coin:

i) The perspectives of queer forced migrants
ii) The perspectives of the Welsh asylum sector professionals

My findings produce a nuanced understanding of integration, through both queer forced migrants' experiences and the perspectives of asylum professionals. Through these insights, critical disparities are revealed between the intentions of integration policies, and the realities faced by queer forced migrants. As such, an urgent need for reforms both in policy frameworks and research approaches is demonstrated.

The narratives that I have collected from queer forced migrants highlights this fundamental gap between the aspirations of asylum policy and their practical implementation. Queer forced migrants face systemic obstacles, despite policy frameworks that acknowledge sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds for persecution. This is especially due to limited legal assistance, and the absence of devolved asylum powers in Wales. Consequently, discrimination is perpetuated, and inadequate protections increases vulnerabilities, as well as exposing queer forced migrants to hostile environments within the asylum process itself. My findings reveal significant barriers for queer forced migrants in accessing essential services, such as affirming healthcare and safe housing. These essential services are crucial for these individuals' mental well-being and successful integration. Deficiencies in provision of tailored mental health services exacerbates the trauma of forced migration. This highlights the need for culturally competent care that is designed with intersectional perspectives in mind.

A similar dissonance is revealed through insights from asylum professionals. Despite desires to provide queer forced migrants with support, asylum professionals' efforts are often hindered by barriers such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited resources, high turnover rates, funding constraints as well as reactive service delivery models that value immediate, measurable outcomes over long-term, holistic support. This misalignment is evident in the disparity between professionals' intentions and the outcomes that funding bodies mandate. For example, the Welsh Government frequently prioritises ostensible metrics such as employment rates or language proficiency rather than seeking genuine in-depth understanding of the unique challenges that queer forced migrants face. A lack of representation from queer forced migrants within the asylum sector further limits the development of inclusive policies and the effectiveness of service delivery.

My findings highlight a significant deficit in integration policies, many of which fail to account for the distinct needs of queer forced migrants. Consequently, rather than facilitating integration, support structures become ineffective and further marginalise and isolate queer forced migrants. Top-down approaches in policy development, where input from those with lived experience is limited, lead to imposed integration frameworks that are disconnected from queer forced migrant's perceptions of their needs. Subsequently, queer forced migrants feel alienated from the very systems designed to support them.

My findings contribute valuable insights towards the research field on queer asylum policy. Discrepancies between lived experience and the intentions of policies, advocates for developing more inclusive, participatory approaches in research and policy development. My recommendation is that future studies amplify peer research and continue to centralise the voices of queer forced migrants, recognising them as essential contributors to the discourse around integration policies. There is also space for research to explore policy structures' impact on mental health and integration, that can inform evidence-based reforms that reflect the needs and experiences of queer forced migrants.

My thesis makes three central claims:

1) Impact of Integration Initiatives:

   The experiences of queer forced migrants are significantly impacted by integration initiatives and policies in Wales. These will either facilitate or hinder their integration process. Facilitation may occur where initiatives and policies create inclusive environments that support the integration of queer forced migrants. They may hinder integration efforts where they perpetuate barriers and discrimination.

2) Integration Opportunities and Limitations:

   In Wales, Queer forced migrants' ability to participate fully in society, and achieve meaningful integration outcomes, is influenced by a range of integration opportunities and limitations. These are often impacted through factors such as social acceptance, employability, legal access and access to support services.

3) Broader Policy Implications:

   There are broader policy implications stemming from the integration attempts of queer forced migrants in Wales. These implicate on a larger policy scale that can potentially influence regional, national and international development and implementation of asylum and integration policies. The lessons learnt through examining the lived experiences of

queer forced migrants in Wales, can have wider implications upon understandings of various integration policies' effectiveness as well as identifying areas for policy reform.

The overarching question guiding my thesis is:

How is the integration of queer forced migrants strategically created and driven in Wales?

The more detailed questions asked are:

i) How is integration facilitated or hindered by initiatives and policies in Wales, and how do these impact upon the experiences of queer forced migrants?
ii) What integration opportunities and limitations do the queer forced migrants face in Wales as a result?
iii) What is the larger policy scale impact of queer forced migrants' integration attempts in Wales?
iv) What are queer forced migrants' and migration professionals' experiences of integration policies and initiatives?

A central argument that I will present, is that integration as a concept can lead to outdated and problematic policy frameworks when applied to queer forced migrants. Integration models presuppose that migrants should undergo a process of adaptation into the values, practices, and social norms of the host society. This does not account for the unique experiences and challenges faced by queer forced migrants, such as social exclusion, systemic discrimination or the pressures of heteronormativity. The obligation to adapt is placed on the individual, and neglects to consider the ways that structural and societal barriers can prevent queer forced migrants from fully participating in society.

Additionally, this argument extends to professionals working with queer forced migrants. My findings show professionals experiencing a discrepancy between integration policies, and the needs and identities of those they support. These policies regularly show an inability to provide the flexibility needed to address the diverse experiences of queer forced migrants. This is especially when considering safety, mental health, and social inclusion. Consequently, these integrative frameworks fail to provide queer forced migrants with adequate support, resulting in absences in service provision and further marginalisation.

To respond to the shortcomings of integrative models, I recommend centering the approach around concepts of "inclusion and belonging." Such an approach advocates for an adaptation process that is mutual between queer forced migrants and host societies. The approach also recognises the importance of cultural and personal identities, that can be sustained through prioritising the establishment of inclusive and safe spaces. This approach enables holistic and respectful engagement with queer forced migrants, through shifting

focus away from assimilation, into encouraging a sense of belonging. Additionally, asylum sector professionals are empowered to develop flexible and individualised support pathways, that can reflect the diverse experiences of those they support. Ultimately, this results in a policy framework that is more ethical, effective, and responsive to the needs of queer forced migrants.

1.6 Overview of the Methodology

Methodology and Epistemological Framework

This qualitative study employs a combination of research tools, including online ethnography, life narratives, and grounded theory. Epistemologically, this work aligns with interpretivism, which acknowledges the diversity among humans as social actors and emphasises understanding through subjective experiences. This approach recognises the existence of multiple realities shaped by sociocultural interactions (Schwandt, 1994; Geerts, 1973)

Intersectional Framework

Utilising an intersectional framework, this study explores the strategic creation and enactment of integration for queer forced migrants in Wales. By integrating both structural and transnational intersectionality, this study aims to bridge the gap between policy-driven understandings of integration and the lived experiences of queer forced migrants (Crenshaw, 1989; Anthias 2012). Whilst structural intersectionality examines how various forms of inequality and disadvantage intersect within social structures, transnational intersectionality considers the cross-border and diasporic dimensions of identity and oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2012).

Adaptation to Online Ethnography

Initially planned as a traditional ethnographic study, the research design had to be adapted due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the adoption of online ethnography. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of the virtual community of queer PoC forced migrants in Wales during a global crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, online ethnography provided a unique opportunity to observe how the community navigated adversity, developed democratic processes, and engaged with asylum sector processionals and the third sector (Hine, 2000; Kosinets, 2010)

This study aims to offer nuanced insights into the complex realities faced by this marginalised community and strategies for navigating integration in a Welsh cultural context.

Life Narratives and Grounded Theory

As part of my study, captured queer forced migrant's individual experiences and personal stories using life narratives. This provides a complex insight into their journey and experience of integration. This approach aligns with an interpretivist paradigm. As suggested by Chase, life narratives are valuable as they "reflect the lived experience of those being researched as they construct their identity through recounting their stories and gaining a deeper understanding of themselves."[13]

I used Grounded Theory to analyse these life narratives. This theory suggests that ideas, themes and pattens can emerge from data through the application of inductive reasoning (Charmaz, 2002). This form of analysis prevents pre-existing theoretical frameworks from impacting findings and aims to stay true to the lived experiences of participants.

Technological Adaptations to Data Collection

The Covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020, meant that this study's data collection needed to include online data collection methods that also consider online ethnographies. Virtual interviews, online meetings, and digital forums were all critical tools for use in data collection. These spaces provided opportunities for interaction and observation. Through them I was able to collect a wide range of data, including information on how the pandemic shaped communities' relationship with social connection and self-advocacy (Garcia et al., 2009; Murthy, 2008).

Contributions and Implications

This study aims to offer nuanced insights into the complex realities and life experiences of queer forced migrants living in Wales, through employing this diverse range of research methods and frameworks. Through it, I aim to highlight the strategies that queer forced migrants use to navigate integration within the Welsh cultural context and emphasise the importance of actively considering intersectionality in policy and in practice. My findings develop current academic knowledge on how marginalised communities interact with policy and social environments, particularly during times of crisis.

1.7 Use of Relevant Terms

Queer

In this study, I use the term "queer", as it is widely embraced and reclaimed within the LGBTQIA+ community, of which I am a member. The term "queer" signifies a departure from and resistance to societal norms, positioning those who identify as such as unconventional (Halperin, 1997). With deep roots and established usage within academia and fiction (Hall,

[13] https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=1932616

2002), “queer” and its variations have become integral to discussions of gender and sexuality. I acknowledge the inherent complexities within the identities of my community, and use "queer" as an umbrella term to encompass the entire LGBTQIA+ spectrum, unless specific theoretical considerations necessitate doing otherwise.

Scholars in have played a leading role in redefining the term "queer" within migration studies, arguing that all identity categories carry historical connotations that transcend time and location and must be critically examined (Luibhéid, 2008; Cantú, 2009). This re-evaluation creates space for the voices of marginalised groups within queer asylum research, including transgender individuals and scholars, who employ intersectional critiques to highlight the overlooked experiences of gender non-conforming forced migrants, particularly within the asylum interview process (Namanste, 2000; Bauer et al., 2009; Serano, 2007).

In my field, the concept of "queer" is utilised to challenge norms and broaden our understanding of terms such as "refugee," "asylum seeker," and "integration" (Manalansan, 2006). By embracing a queer perspective, this study aims to interrogate and expand conventional notions of identity, displacement, and belonging within the context of forced migration and integration.

Forced Migrant

I utilise the term "forced migrant" deliberately to underscore the inherent violence involved in the displacement experiences of individuals within my study. As will be explored in the empirical chapters, it is crucial to recognise that these individuals did not willingly leave their home countries; rather, they were compelled to do so by the viciousness of historical laws that systematically discriminate against their sexuality and/or gender identities. By employing this term, I acknowledge the profound magnitude of their displacement and the inherent struggles they face throughout their journey. "Forced migrant" serves as an inclusive umbrella, encompassing both refugees and asylum seekers, reflecting the prevailing terminology in contemporary policy discourse (Turton, 2006). However, throughout my analysis, I distinguish between refugees and asylum seekers based on the divergent trajectories and experiences encountered during their respective journeys.

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who:

> *"owing to 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 [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being*

> *outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."* (UNHCR,1951)

An asylum seeker is someone who seeks international protection from serious human right violations, whose claim for refugee status has not yet been legally determined. ‘Refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ are important legal and procedural terms. However, they do not represent the full spectrum of displacement situations (Zetter, 2007).

Forcibly displaced migrants may find that they don’t fit into one neat category, but fit into multiple categories simultaneously, or that the terms that apply to them change over time. For example, an individual might have previously been an internally displaced person (IDP) and sought safety in another area of their home country, before crossing international borders to seek asylum. Once gaining refugee status, that individual would have had the experiences of being an IPD, an asylum seeker and a refugee. The term forced migrant presents a solution to this problem. This is by allowing acknowledgement of fluid identities and experiences, outside of rigid legal terms (Zetter, 2007). Additionally, this term leaves space for inclusion of gender and sexuality violence.

It is because of this inclusivity that I decided to use the term “forced migrants” for this study. Castles (2003) suggests that flexible terminology has been necessitated by the complexity of modern migration. This term captures that there is a multitude of reasons that individuals are forced to leave their homes. This term gives the deserved recognition that coercion can derive from a multitude of sources, rather than solely ‘persecution’ in a traditionally conceived format. This provides a more adequate and thorough framework through which to understand displacement (Castles, 2003).

Ethical considerations also lead me to use the term ‘forced migrant’. This is as this term does not separate or prioritise certain individuals due to their legal status. Forced migrants have a shared experience of displacement, and need for protection, which transcends legal definitions (Betts, 2013). This moves focus from legal imperatives to humanistic concerns around protecting individuals and addressing their needs. The term ‘forced migrant’ encourages a holistic approach to policy surrounding migration. Through it, policy can speak to the needs of a wide variety of displaced people, rather than only specific individuals identified through the more rigid legal definitions. For example, this broader categorisation of forced migrants can include climate refugees into policy, thereby making these policies more inclusive of a variety of groups (McAdams, 2012).

“Forced migrants” as a term can fully reflect the reality of modern displacement experiences. This is supported by academics, such as Richmond (1994), who suggested that terms that capture the complexity of migratory experiences are necessary, due to the increasingly

blurred dichotomy between forced and voluntary journeys. As such, academic usage of the term “forced migrant” allows for analysis that represents the reality of modern displacement, rather than becoming restricted by traditional categorisations.

Integration

The term “integration” is a widely used and recognised concept in immigration and asylum policy and governance. This term aligns with international guidelines and frameworks that advocate for the inclusion and rights of forced migrants (United Nations, 2018; OECD, 2019).

My use of the term “integration” covers the diverse and multifaced journey through which queer forced migrants become accepted and active members of their new community. My use of this terms reflects its use within UK policy as a substitute term for “holistic inclusion”. This means that the integration is approached comprehensively, through multiple lenses such as cultural, social, political and economic. My use of the term “integration” places this work within the wider policy discourse, and makes it relevant to policymakers, practitioners and advocates. This ensures that my findings and recommendations can be applied to, and utilised within, existing policy frameworks.

Integration suggests more than just coexistence. True integration is a process that empowers migrants to participate fully and equally within the new community. For queer forced migrants, integration means being accepted, exercising their rights, and accessing opportunities that will allow them to flourish.

UK policy documents often imply that integration is characterised by active participation and contribution to the host community. The Home Office’s “Indicators of Integration Framework” is one such document. UK policy such as this suggest that integration is a two-way process, where both the migrant, and the host society both adapt and work together to find mutual acceptance.

The combination of forced migrant status and LGBTQ+ identity, means queer migrants face specific barriers to participation and integration. This study will highlight the importance of considering queer forced migrants within policy and practice, in a way that will allow them to actively engage with the host community. Importantly, this study will highlight that integration must be done in a way that prevents individuals from becoming passive recipients of aid (Ager and Strang, 2008).

Within academic literature, integration recognises the ability of migrants to contribute to and develop their new communities, thereby emphasising their agency and empowerment (Castles et al., 2002; Phillimore, 2012). Integration is seen as a process that includes

accessing opportunity, building skills and exercising rights. This study's focus on integration is used to highlight the need to empower queer forced migrants and ensure that they can influence their new communities positively, through providing the correct support and resources.

The term "integration" is comprehensive, participatory and highly relevant to policy. It reflects the reality that becoming an active, accepted and empowered member of the host community is a complex process for many queer forced migrants. By placing integration at the centre, this study aims to give a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges experienced by queer forced migrants. I will use this to advocate for the development of more inclusive and equitable policy, that leads to practices that support their full participation in their new communities.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 contains my Literature Review, where I take a deep dive to review the UK's policy approach to migration and asylum, from 1990 to today. Also, I delve into the relevant Welsh Government migration and integration efforts, from the 1999 Welsh devolution and the 2019 Nation of Sanctuary Plan to the 2022 Action Plans that impact the current integration strategies. Moreover, I critically discuss concepts that are relevant to this thesis.

Next comes, Chapter 3, my Methodology Chapter, where I offer explanations relating to my research design and approach. The chapter begins by discussing my conceptual framework. I describe my research design, data collection tools and techniques. Also, I discuss my sampling strategies, as well as data analysis procedures. I offer reflections on the ethical considerations and limitations of this study.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present and analyse my Empirical Findings. Chapter 4, focuses on my discussions with the queer forced migrants and Chapter 5, highlights my discussions with the Welsh asylum sector by conversing with government officials, third sector CEOs and local practitioners.

Chapter 6 engages in Critical Discussion of the interpretation of my findings. I highlight the implications, limitations, and contributions of this study, as well as make policy suggestions and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 7 is my Conclusion. I summarise the main findings and arguments, and re-estate the significance of the research contribution. I provide personal reflections and address potential limitations in the findings presented within this thesis and propose avenues for future investigation.

To sum up, this thesis unfolds across seven chapters that trace the conceptual, methodological, empirical, and analytical journey of the research. It begins with a comprehensive review of migration and integration policy in the UK and Wales, advances through a rigorous methodological design, and presents rich empirical insights from both queer forced migrants and sector professionals. The critical discussion and concluding chapters draw together these threads to underscore the study's contribution to reimagining integration as a dynamic, co-constructed process. Through this structure, the thesis offers both theoretical and practical interventions with the aim of influencing more inclusive and equitable policy approaches.

2. Literature Review

This Literature Review chapter is split into two halves. In the first half, I set out a timeline of key events and changes that impact the experiences of and outcomes for queer forced migrants. In the second half, I turn to the academic literature to identify key concepts that provide an analytical framework for exploring this topic, including homonationalism, social action, social capital and collective identity. In this way, I highlight how the United Kingdom's approach to asylum policy and forced migrant integration has undergone significant evolution over the years, shaped by historical contexts, political ideologies, and shifting in public perceptions. From the establishment of asylum systems to the development of integration strategies, the UK and Wales's response to forced migration reflects a complex and often contradictory interplay of humanitarian concerns, security considerations, and socio-economic factors.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of key themes and concepts relevant to understanding the UK's approach to asylum and forced migrant integration. Drawing on a range of scholarly works and policy documents, this chapter explores the trajectory of asylum policy and practices in the UK, examining the ideological underpinnings, policy shifts, and practical implications for forced migrants including the development of integration strategies and initiatives. This examination considers how integration policies have evolved over time, from early attempts to facilitate refugee settlement to more recent efforts aimed at promoting social cohesion and economic participation.

Furthermore, this chapter explores Wales's asylum and integration efforts within the devolved and broader UK contexts. By examining Wales's distinct approach to asylum policy and integration initiatives, this study elucidates the role of devolved administrations in shaping forced migrant experiences and outcomes.

Throughout this chapter, key concepts will be discussed, such as the intersections of integration with homonationalism and minority influence. These concepts provide the backbone for understanding the complexities and challenges inherent in asylum policy and forced migrant integration in Wales, shedding light on the tensions between humanitarian imperatives, political agendas, and socio-economic realities.

By critically examining these themes and concepts, this literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the UK's approach to asylum and forced migrant integration, while also highlighting avenues for further research and policy development in this field.

2. 1 The UK’s Approach to Asylum– Policy & Practice

The policies and practices outlined in the context of the UK's approach to asylum, particularly regarding the treatment of queer asylum seekers, have profound implications for their integration or lack thereof.

The U.K. Government's Home Office holds responsibility for migration and asylum matters in both England and Wales, encompassing a dual role. Firstly, it functions administratively in alignment with various overarching protective instruments, such as the soft law and guidance notes of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), EU laws, and directives. Secondly, it performs a screening function that focuses on U.K.-specific governmental policies, procedures, and practices, overseeing the management of asylum claims influx. However, these two functions often exhibit contradictions, with the global migration and asylum responsibilities of the U.K. sometimes are conflicting with national-level decisions, and vice versa. Consequently, this dynamic results in a landscape of constantly evolving and inconsistent asylum policies and practices, which can have detrimental effects on asylum seekers.

As in this chapter I discuss a complex, and often overlapping ser of shifts, over a 30-year period, I provide below a table of the publication of key tactics of managing claims, social rights shifts, and integration policy reforms, alongside a brief overview:

Tactic	**Implementation Period**	**Explanation**
Culture of Disbelief	1993-2006	The "culture of disbelief" refers to the systematic distrust and scrutiny applied to asylum claims, which involved treating asylum seekers like criminals, subjecting them to indefinite detention, and biometric data collection.
Reason for Refusal Letters (RFRLs)	1993-2006	Questioning seekers’ integrity and rejecting claims based on subjective and biased grounds.
Discretion Principle	1993 - 2010	The Home Office would deport queer seekers if they

		could avoid persecution by concealing their sexual orientation or gender identity.
The Credibility Line	2010- present	It requires queer seekers to prove their gender identities and sexual orientations. This process often involves intrusive questioning about individual experiences, which can retraumatise seekers.

(table 1)

Social Rights Shifts

Shift	**Implementation Period**	**Explanation**
Immigration and Asylum Act	1996-2006	The 1999 Act consolidated housing and welfare support under the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), leading to involuntary relocation to areas with substandard housing and limited support.
Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act	2006-2012	The 2006 Act further restricted refugees' entry into the labour market, exacerbating integration difficulties
Hostile Environment Policy	2012-present	This policy is restricting access to healthcare, housing, and employment, and requiring landlords, employers, and public service providers to conduct immigration status checks.

(table 2)

Integration Policy Reforms (New Labour)

Strategy	Implementation Period	Explanation
Full and Equal Citizens	2000 - present	The focus of all these strategies were on refugees rather than asylum seekers, reinforcing the notion that integration begins only after gaining refugee status. This approach neglects the experiences of queer asylum seekers and fails to address their specific needs. The New Labour government removed the “right to work” and “right to education” for asylum seekers (Home Office, 2009).
Integration Matters	2005 - present	
Moving on Together	2009 - present	

(table 3)

2.2 Selective Information Provision, Spectacularisation Techniques and Rights Disparity

Forced migrants arriving in the U.K. frequently find themselves deprived of essential information about asylum procedures, particularly regarding the restrictions on employment while their asylum decisions are pending, and how to access welfare benefits. These are recognised as their rights under Amnesty International Guidelines (Home Office, 2009. However, instead of receiving this crucial information, they are given detailed briefings on detention, removal, and deportation, with scant guidance on accessing legal aid. This deliberate and selective dissemination of information is commonly identified by asylum scholars as "spectacularisation techniques," which are designed to instil fear and uncertainty about the asylum process and to deter forced migrants from pursuing asylum claims in the U.K. (De Genova, 2002; Zetter, 2007).

These spectacularisation techniques, are a fundamental component of the Home Office's strategy for managing asylum claims. There are a variety of mechanisms, intended to

undermine asylum seeker's legitimacy and credibility, that make this strategy evident. Here I have listed the primary mechanisms, and their function:

Culture of Disbelief - Where the scepticism and disbelief that asylum claims are subject to, make it more challenging to prove their case (Cohen, Humphries & Mynott, 2002).

Discretion Principle – This principle grants significant discretion, or scope, to authorities when interpreting the stories and evidence of asylum seekers. This is often detrimental to asylum cases (Hamlin, 2014).

Credibility Line – When the notion of credibility is used to assess claims and their plausibility. This means that perceived inconsistencies or minor discrepancies can be used to reject claims (Souter, 2011).

Accelerated Procedure – This tactic denotes when claims are expedited, to gain a faster verdict. This can suggest that claims have not been comprehensively reviewed or given fair judgement and consideration. It can also prevent asylum seekers from having the necessary time or resources to produce key evidence. Ultimately, this mechanism often leads to the denial of legitimate claims (Schuster, 2011).

Hostile Environment – This 2012 policy heighted the deterrent strategies applied to asylum seekers. The policy includes techniques that would encourage voluntary returns, through making life tougher for individuals with no legal status. This was enacted through elements such as requiring public services, employers and landlords to check immigration status, restricting access to healthcare, housing and employment (Yuval-Davis,2011; Wemyss & Cassidy, 2017).

These mechanisms are aimed to be a deterrent, discouraging individuals from seeking asylum in the UK. They create a hostile environment, designed to make migrants feel intimidated and unwelcomed, and to make processes as difficult as possible. Through these mechanisms, UK policy works to reduce the number of new asylum claims (Raboin, 2017).

2.3 Managing Asylum Claims and a "Culture of Disbelief"

Between 1993 and 2006, the U.K. introduced a series of policies aimed at managing and reducing asylum claims. The 1993 Asylum and Immigration Act sought to limit the rights of asylum seekers by categorising them hierarchically based on their legal status. This created a distinction between refugees who had completed the U.K. legal process and gained certain rights, such as access to employment, and asylum seekers who were in the process of claiming refugee status and were denied basic rights like access to education. During this period, asylum seeker claims in the U.K. were primarily managed by the police. Asylum

Seekers were often placed indefinitely in detention centres, and subjected to providing biometric data, effectively treating them as criminals (Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees, 2010).

Asylum scholars have argued that the U.K.'s consistent demonisation of asylum seekers and its restrictive environment fostered what became known as the U.K. Border Agency's (UKBA) "culture of disbelief". This culture was exemplified through the issuance of Reason for Refusal Letters (RFRL) by the Legal Advisers Branch (LAB), wherein unsuccessful asylum seekers were not only denied asylum but also questioned about their integrity (Arnold & Ginn, 2008; Trueman, 2009). The Asylum Aid Report of 1995 highlighted the subjective and biased nature of RFRLs, illustrating the widespread application of the "culture of disbelief". Over time, RFRLs evolved from being applied broadly to all asylum claims to specifically targeting women, children, and eventually, queer asylum seekers (Refugee Council, 2009).

Policy scholars argue that comprehending the "culture of disbelief" is crucial in discussions about U.K. asylum, as it is intertwined with a broader "culture of denial" rooted in Britain's imperial past and the subsequent repression of colonised peoples. This denial is reinforced by post-imperial governments through a "socially organised denial" aimed at distancing from historical atrocities (Zerubavel, 2006). The Home Office's "culture of disbelief" epitomises this denial through carefully constructed state discourse, policies, and practices, leading to grave human rights violations (Crelinsten, 2003). This "culture of disbelief" signifies officials' inherent distrust toward asylum seekers, regardless of the evidence they present (Jubany, 2011). The manifestation of this culture in RFRLs highlights the negative bureaucratic environment within the British socio-political landscape (Jubany, 2011). The Independent Asylum Commission (IAC) of 2008 affirmed that RFRLs perpetuated the "culture of disbelief," which continues to influence decision-makers today.

The IAC concluded that within the current U.K. asylum policy and practice, queer asylum seekers remain among the most disadvantaged populations throughout the British asylum process. Asylum scholars note that the "culture of disbelief" or "culture of denial," as evidenced through Reason for Refusal Letters (RFRLs), posed challenges for queer seekers, as decision-makers often relied on essentialist viewpoints (Cohen, 2001; Jubany, 2011). This culture can manifest in several problematic ways when applied to the context of queer asylum seekers.

One of these manifestations is stereotypical expectations. This refers to the decision makers expectations of how they would expect a queer person to behave. These expectations are often highly stereotypical and based upon westernised notions of what it means to be

LGBTQ+. To be perceived as credible, queer forced migrants are expected to conform to these rigid conceptions of LGBTQ+ people. For example, it may be expected for the individual to have been visibly involved in LGBTQ+ activism, or for their persecution to align with western preconceptions (Murray, 2014; Giametta, 2017).

The second element I will discuss is Rigid Identity Categories. This indicates the use of inflexible definitions of sexual orientation and gender identity. Rigid identity categories fail to acknowledge the diversity and fluidity of LGBTQ+ identities, or that queer forced migrants may identify outside of the western-defined categories of “gay”, “lesbian”, “bisexual”, “non-binary, etc. As such, those whose personal identity does not fall within these rigid categories are at risk of having their asylum claim rejected (Lewis, 2014; Wilkinson, 2020).

Cultural Insensitivity is when the queer asylum seeker’s cultural context is dismissed. Decision makers may overlook the variations of expressions of queer identities across different cultures or not consider that the individual may have had to conceal their identity as a survival strategy. As a result, claims that do not align with decision makers’ cultural expectations, may be dismissed (Kahn, 2015; Shaksari, 2014).

The decision making on queer asylum seeker’s cases are also severely negatively influenced by essentialist perspectives. An essentialist perspective will assume that a legitimate claim for asylum will be characterised by straightforward and extreme forms of persecution. This neglects to recognise more covert forms of persecution and discrimination, which may also be life threatening and a legitimate basis for claiming asylum (Morgan, 2006; LaViolette, 2009). Essentialist perspectives might lead the decision maker to demand evidence on identity and persecution that is both explicit and invasive. For example, the queer asylum seeker might be asked to show physical scars from violence or to provide intimate details about their sexual activity. These questions disregard physical and emotional trauma (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011; Berj & Millbank, 2009), and disregard non-overt forms of persecution or non-traditional categorisations of queer identity.

Each of these elements of asylum decision making culture in the UK are severely damaging to queer individual’s experience of the asylum process. These viewpoints often lead to intrusive and inappropriate questioning, that aim to “prove” sexual or gender identities. A hostile environment is created, as queer asylum seekers face humiliation and dehumanisation during the decision-making process (Dustin & Held, 2018; Lee & Brotman, 2013). The “culture of disbelief” within the UK asylum system is compounded by decision makers’ essentialist assessments. As a result, it becomes particularly challenging for queer asylum seekers to make their claim for asylum seem credible to decision makers and receive a fair and accurate decision. Over-reliance on rigid identity categories and

stereotypical expectations undermines the credibility of genuine claims, and creates a fundamentally discriminatory system (Cohen, 2001; Jubany, 2011; Berg & Millbank, 2009; Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011).

2.4 NASS and Internal Displacement

The social rights of asylum seekers were restricted further through the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, which consolidated both housing and welfare support under the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Through NASS, asylum seekers were offered a weekly allowance of £48.75, in 2024. Asylum seekers with the option of being supported by family or friends would often prefer this option. Those without such options were dependent upon NASS provision of accommodation and financial support. NASS accommodation is provided on a no choice basis, and frequently individuals are involuntarily relocated to areas with substandard housing conditions and limited exposure to migration (Netto, 2011).

Asylum seekers often continue to face housing challenges after being granted refugee status in the UK. This is because NASS support is withdrawn within 28 days of receiving a positive decision on their case. Financial constraints often make this task of finding new accommodation within the local area almost impossible, and many will face destitution and homelessness at the end of the 28-day period (Vamvaka-Tatsi, 2019). Additionally, challenges for refugees in entering employment were exacerbated by the 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act, which stated that the Home Office will not provide employers with guidance on employing refugees, further adding to the barriers faced by refugees in entering the UK job market (Mulvey, 2010). These hostile policies resulted in a significant decline in the acceptance rate of asylum claims. Within the first quarter of implementation, acceptance rates plummeted from 80% to 20% (Blinger & Van Liempt, 2009).

Dispersal refers to the policy outlined in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Home Office, 1999), whereby UK asylum seekers can apply for support, including accommodation and/or subsistence, while awaiting the consideration of their claim or appeal. NASS support is provided based on circumstances and upon meeting a destitution test. The Regional Dispersal Policy introduced in 2000 (Home Office, 2000) stipulates that asylum seekers are accommodated in areas of the UK where there is a greater availability of suitable and cost-effective housing. In practice however, dispersal accommodation has primarily been limited to areas local authorities have agreed to house individuals seeking asylum up to a predetermined cluster limit.

It is important to note that Northern Ireland operates under different arrangements for asylum accommodation and does not adhere to the asylum dispersal system, unlike Wales. Wales's devolved powers include health, social care, education, local government, environment,

housing, culture, and some aspects of transport. Scotland and Northern Ireland have similar areas of devolved power, with the additional area of justice. In Wales, Scotland and Northen Ireland, certain matters remain non-devolved and under the control of the UK Government such as foreign affairs, defence, constitutional issues, immigration, and certain aspects of social security and justice (Mc Ewen, 2018; Cairney, 2011; Birrell, 2012).

The Home Office notified additional local authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales of their designation as asylum dispersal areas in April 2022 (Home Office, 2022). Prior to 2022, Wales only had four dispersal areas: Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, and Wrexham. The widening dispersal in 2022 aimed to assist with relocating asylum seekers currently housed in hotels to more suitable and cost-effective accommodations in the new dispersal areas.

To support this transition, between March 28, 2022, and March 31, 2023, the UK Government pledged to local authorities £3,500 in grant funding per new occupied dispersal bed. The intention of this funding was both to aid asylum seekers settlement, and to reduce strains on local services.

In May 2022, the government conducted with voluntary sector organisations a limited informal consultation. This was however restricted in scope, with only limited select organisations invited to share their perspective. Importantly, this consultation happened after the government announced publicly the move to full dispersal. The Home Office confirmed that Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) would be the primary consultation site with the voluntary sector, despite levels of engagement between SMPs and voluntary sector organisations varying across regions (Home Office, 2022).

Conducting a consultation following announcements to move to full dispersal is an issue primarily for two reasons. Firstly, the purpose of a consultation is to gather information to inform decisions. By conducting the consultation after decisions had been made, this undermines the purpose of having a consultation. As such, the policies created have not been informed by the valuable specialist knowledge on community needs that the voluntary sector possesses. Secondly, marginalising the voluntary sector's role and not engaging with stakeholders leads to inadequate support structures (Home Office, 2022). Importantly, this also breaks down relationships and creates reluctance from the voluntary sector to respond to consultations or be further involved.

For asylum dispersal areas to successfully support asylum seekers, certain principles and procedures must be in place. These principles should include the engagement of wider support systems, including the voluntary sector. In this instance, these principles were not held. The goal of dispersal should be to offer asylum seekers safe and high-quality accommodation within communities capable of providing adequate support. The

considerations displayed focused on the type and quality of accommodation provided and neglected to consider the ways in which the wider community and voluntary sector could be placed to provide this adequate support. Additionally, housing asylum seekers in institutional settings raises questions about segregation, as it is unclear how integration can take place when asylum seekers are physically separated from the communities that they are supposed to settle in. I will discuss this further in a later chapter.

Dispersal area councils often rely upon the UK government's financial support to cover the associated costs of hosting asylum seekers. Local councils receive £1150 per asylum seeker per year through the Asylum Dispersal Grant. The Controlling Migration Fund is available to local authorities to manage the impact that new asylum seekers will have on local services in the area. £100 million was provided by this fund between 2016 and 2020 (Home Office, 2020). In Wales, the specific amounts allocated for dispersal are integrated into the wider support given to Welsh local authorities (Welsh Government, 2019).

There are concerns displayed through academic literature that integration is negatively impacted by dispersal. This is because community relationships that form in dispersal areas are formed out of an emergency necessity, rather than relating to practices that have developed naturally over time (Zetter & Pearl 2000; Zetter et al. 2003). Consequently, much of the academic literature on migration focuses on the response of refugee community organisations to dispersal's practical challenges (Amas & Price 2008). Such literature fails to capture the intersectional experiences of forced migrants. They ignore important elements such as the micro-collective actions that create a sense of belonging, as well as how group solidarity can aid resistance against neoliberal structures and hegemonic processes (Massey 2013; Brenner et al., 2009).

2.5 Queer Asylum Claims

Queer forced migrants' asylum claims are frequently rejected due to cultural biases and assumptions that surround sexuality and gender (Souter, 2011; Welch & Schuster, 2005). Credibility is a central issue in these cases, with decision makers often questioning lower levels of verifiable evidence. As an example, discussion of underground LGBTQ+ organisations that exist in countries where anti-queer laws prevail, can cast doubt on the individual's narrative.

Refugee and Forced Migration Review Boards (RFRLs) often focus on portraying seekers as undeserving of refugee status. This leaves queer asylum seekers in a state of uncertainty and exacerbates their distress through producing procedural errors and inadequacies that further undermine their credibility (Middeklopp, 2013). Legal scrutiny of asylum practices has revealed that RFRLs tasked with assessing queer asylum claims, consistently downplay

their sexual orientation and gender identity concerns, often dismissing their fears of persecution as unfounded (Thomas, 2006; Middeklopp, 2013). Many queer asylum seekers are also often survivors of trauma or sexual abuse. These critiques highlight the asylum systems' systemic biases that lead queer asylum seekers' unique vulnerabilities not being recognised or addressed. This further perpetuates their marginalisation and prolongs their legal and emotional limbo.

In 2010, there was a significant shift in how queer forced migrants' asylum claims are processed when the UK moved from using the Discretion Principle to using the Credibility Line. The Discretion Principle was criticised for the subjective nature of assessments and inconsistencies in decision making. This raised concerns about bias impacting the fairness of asylum decision making (Spijkerboer,2011; Middekoop, 2013). The Credibility Line was therefore created to address these issues, by emphasising specific criteria such as coherence, consistency and plausibility (Cohen, 2001; Kagan, 2003). This provided a structured framework to utilise when assessing an asylum claim.

Prior to 2010, the Home Office specifically deported queer asylum seekers through employing the "reasonable tolerability test". This principle was commonly utilised during face-to-face interviews. The basis of this principle was to determine whether the asylum seekers could avoid persecution in their home country through concealing their sexual orientation and gender identity. The individual would be repatriated immediately if the assessment officer deemed concealment feasible (LaViolette, 2009; Millbank, 2002; Chelvan, 2013). Asylum scholars have criticised this principle as subjective. The U.K. introduced the test as a 'new interpretation' of "fear of persecution" within the definition of refugee under international law (Millbank, 2003). This was through creating a distinction between "discretion out of fear" and "discretion for social pressure" on a case-by-case basis. This new interpretation relied heavily on a subjective understanding of "fear of persecution" by the assessment officer, as well as interpretations of information provided by the asylum seeker during the interview (Weβels, 2011; Giametta, 2017; Millbank, 2002). The subjective nature of these decisions posed a significant obstacle for queer seekers. Where these led to deportation, many were exposed to real harm upon repatriation (LaViolette, 2009; Dauvergne & Millbank, 2003; Millbank, 2002; Giametta, 2017).

There is deep academic debate surrounding the "reasonable tolerability test" and the Home Office and UNHCR's interpretations of "fear of persecution". Many asylum scholars argue that the assessment of "fear" inherently unattainable. This is because all queer seekers present relevant supporting evidence, perceiving their "well-founded fear of persecution" as genuine and absolute. The Home Office's lack of understanding on the various expressions

of fear, transforms the term "well- founded fear of persecution" into an evaluation of anxiety (Noll, 2005; Hathaway & Hicks, 2005; Kagan, 2003). Grahl-Madsen (1996) argues that regardless of the immediate risks and dangers, all queer forced migrants live with a well-founded fear of persecution. Moreover, the linguistic usage of "well-founded" suggests the existence of a UNHCR checklist that outlines real situations and scenarios that constitute fear as "well-founded." This is not the case. Hathaway and Hicks (2005) explain that while asylum decision makers may have a general understanding of what constitutes a "well-founded fear of persecution," only a queer forced migrant can truly know what this feels like. This aspect was often overlooked during the test. Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011) argue that throughout their displacement, queer forced migrants frequently conceal their sexual orientation to varying degrees. This is a common thread in queer asylum claims. They explain that as concealing their sexual orientation is the norm for many seekers to avoid the risk of persecution, the discretion principle becomes a significant obstacle for queer forced migrants. Therefore, the Home Office's "discretion principle" becomes even more problematic as it differentiates between queer status and queer conduct, perpetuating discrimination abroad (LaViolette 2009; O'Dwyer 2008; Millbank, 2009). Hathaway and Pobjoy (2013) advocate for the separation of status and conduct. They arguing that the courts must determine which activities are inherent and, therefore, crucial to asylum claims. This thereby places the power of status protection and the asylum seeker's worthiness in the hands of the courts (Hathaway & Pobjoy, 2013).

2.6 "The Discretion Principle"

Queer displaced individuals are required to prove their gender identities and sexual orientations as genuine under the "discretion principle,". Many asylum scholars approach credibility from policy and legal perspectives, focusing on the process, decision-making, and outcomes (Cohen 2001; Kagan, 2003; Thomas, 2006). Psychology has begun to examine the role of memory, trauma, and consistency in the credibility line. Anthropology has explored this from the perspective of critical actors such as judges (Graham, Herlihy & Brewin, 2014; Rogers, Fox, & Herlihy, 2015). Thomas (2006) suggests that the "discretion principle" provides seekers with an opportunity to disclose all evidence that supports their need for protection under international law. Home Office decision makers expect queer asylum seekers to reveal sensitive and individual experiences of sexual assault, violence, and persecution in a detailed and factual manner. Late-stage disclosures of traumatic events, or the asylum seeker is perceived as "too willing" to share these events, can lead to decision-makers doubting the validity and viewing the account as fraudulent (Vamvaka-Tatsi, 2019).

Lack of familiarity with Western queer culture, was another factor that undermined queer asylum seeker's credibility. During Home Office interviews queer asylum seekers are often questioned about queer culture, art and nightlife, as well as national and international queer organisations. Their credibility is called into question where seekers' responses are vague or do not align with Western queer culture. This form of assessment fails to recognise cultural differences in queer culture, as well as the accessibility of Western queer culture in countries where strict media and anti-queer laws are present. There is also a presumption that seekers would have an interest in Western gay culture (Berg & Millbank, 2009). Additionally, queer seekers are frequently required to demonstrate their knowledge on current legal positions and queer criminalisation in their countries of origin, as well as specific issues faced by the queer community.

The Home Office assumes that queer seekers would be aware of penal codes within their country and would have acquired specific knowledge of experiences with law enforcement through being actively persecuted as a minority. Queer seekers are similarly often questioned about their country's religious stance on homosexuality, which both assumes religious beliefs and implies religious bias (Berg & Millbank, 2009). Another credibility challenge stems from the lack of understanding of Western queer definitions and vocabulary. Queer seekers may misunderstand questions and provide inaccurate definitions due to cultural differences, limited English proficiency and mistranslations, all of which are not always addressed by the Home Office assessment officer (Berg & Millbank, 2009; Spijkerboer, 2000).

The Home Office has over forty asylum policy instructions for the "credibility assessment", which are primarily at the bureaucratic level. These don't provide a comprehensive model but comprise of brief instructions that offer a general framework for decision-making. The instructions are not binding. This is important, as it allows decision-makers to deviate from those instructions without consequences. This is consequently a matter of concern for asylum scholars (Thomas, 2006). Since 2005, the U.K. has used two to three-member panels at the tribunal level, in attempts to improve the quality of interviews and enhance the reliability of decisions. This strategy has been deemed unsuccessful however, since tribunals offer limited legal scrutiny of previous decisions and do not advise on claim re-evaluation. As such, providing an appraisal for a non-credible claim becomes an impossibility (Spijkerboer, 2011; Spijkerboer, 2012; Noll, 2005). Millbank (2009) introduced the term 'ring of truth'. With this term he suggested that queer seekers' narratives, which is often their primary evidence, should be considered indisputable and undeniable facts for the Home Office's decision-making. The 'ring of truth' was not incorporated into Home Office policy. Queer seekers are regularly disbelieved, with decision-makers viewing their

narratives as biased and refusing to give them the benefit of the doubt. Millbank (2013) underscored that the UNHCR states that all seekers should receive the benefit of the doubt. As a result, the Home Office published the specific guidelines “Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status” in 2012 (Home Office, 2012). These claimed that asylum claims are carefully evaluated, a stance that has been criticised as unfounded (Middekoop, 2013; Millbank, 2009). According to scholars, these guidelines characterise sexual orientation claims as "easy to make but impossible to disprove". This reflects decision makers' unwillingness to acknowledge the specific sensitivities of sexual orientation claims and demonstrates homophobic prejudices (Middekoop, 2013; Berg & Millbank, 2009; Spijkerboer, 2011; Spijkerboer, 2013). In 2010, a landmark judgement by the U.K. Supreme Court ruled that queer individuals should not have to conceal their sexuality or gender identity to avoid persecution. The ruling stated that sexuality impacts the risk of persecution regardless of whether is public or discreet. The "discretion principle" principle was shown through this ruling to be problematic, unreliable, impractical and not in line with the UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). Consequently, the "discretion principle" was officially removed from the Home Office's toolkit. Asylum scholars argue that this concept was subsequently substituted with the "credibility line."

2.7 The Credibility Line

During the asylum process, one of the most daunting aspects for seekers is the asylum assessment interview, where they are required to present their personal narratives (Berg & Millbank, 2009). These interviews often involve repeated questioning to prove the credibility of their narratives, which can trigger traumatic memories (Berg & Millbank, 2009). As a result, seekers may feel compelled to 'come out' as sexual minorities, using a common process known as 'reverse-covering', where they exaggerate or conform to Western stereotypes of sexual minorities, such as portraying themselves as butch lesbians or flamboyant gays (Yoshino, 2006).

Yoshino (2006) used the term “reverse covering”, to describe when forced migrants who disclose their LGBTQ+ identity feel compelled to perform exaggerated western stereotypes of queerness. For example, a homosexual person may feel compelled to perform the role of a butch lesbian or a flamboyant gay man. These roles assist the individual to navigate the relationship between their identity and the new socio-cultural environment.

This concept of “covering” has been comprehensively examined outside of forced migration contexts in identity studies. The concept was originally introduced by Erving Goffman (1963) and described how individuals fit themselves into societal norms through downplaying their stigmatised identities. More recently, academic has included the term in discussions related

to marginalised groups and intersectional identities. “Covering” has therefore assisted with understanding identity management in a wide variety of groups, such as PoC, disabled people and the queer community (Goffman, 1963; Norton, 2013). Yoshino’s definition of “reverse covering” as specific to the experiences of forced migrants, is therefore linked to a wider discussion on negotiating stigmatised identities within the expectations of the cultural context.

This process fails to acknowledge the reasons why seekers may have chosen to conceal their sexual orientation and gender identity (Berg & Millbank, 2009). While the 'coming out' process is often celebrated in Global North contexts as empowering, for queer asylum seekers, it can be deeply traumatic, especially for those who have faced persecution and violence in their home countries (Jordan, 2010). Many queer seekers may struggle with repression, denial, and shame, making it difficult for them to openly discuss their sexual orientation, particularly if they come from oppressive societies where disclosing such information could have severe consequences (Vamvaka-Tatsi, 2019).

Scholars such as Luibheid (2008), suggest that the ‘coming out’ process highlights that within the asylum system there is an assumption that all immigrants are cisgender and heterosexual. This underscores hetero normativity and cis normativity within asylum spaces. From the moment queer forced migrants apply for refugee status, there is a constant pressure to 'come out', which further extends to interactions with asylum sector professionals and authorities (Berg & Millbank, 2009; Lewis, 2014). Transgender forced migrants are particularly vulnerable to early 'outing' in cases where their gender expression does not match the legal gender or name on the claim form. This can expose transgender forced migrants to transphobia from other seekers and from officials (Berg & Millbank, 2009). Academic literature has also criticised the use of gender-neutral claim forms, as these contribute to cis-normative practices that that fail to account for transgender individuals' experiences (Shuman & Bohmer, 2013).

Cossman (2004) argued that asylum decision makers have essentialist perspectives on both sexuality and gender expression. Decision makers’ assumption of the gender binary and inflexible understandings of queer identities impacts the way that queer narratives are assessed. These essentialist perspectives force queer forced migrants who do not fit these inflexible presumptions, to prove the authenticity of their queerness through accounting for experiences of sexual violence in detail. As such, the direct implication is that public visibility of their identity is prerequisite to being justified and believed (Murray, 2014). Essentialist approaches overlook the multitude of ways in which queer identity is constructed and

displayed. They fail to acknowledge the diversity of queer experience and overlook the ways in which queer identity is socio-historically complex.

2.8 2015 Onwards: Tracking Queer Claims

In 2013, the restructuring of the "U.K. Border Agency" resulted in the formation of the "U.K. Visas and Immigration" department, which became part of the Home Office. This restructuring aimed to enhance the Home Office's oversight of the U.K.'s visa system and immigration implementation, known as the screening function. The then Home Secretary, Theresa May (2010-2916) presented the restructure as a step towards stability, coinciding with increased asylum detention and decreased asylum rates (Mayblin, 2017; Raboin, 2017). Subsequently, in 2014, the Home Office initiated a review of the processes and practices concerning the determination of queer asylum claims. This review marked the first comprehensive examination since 1999, when the UNHRC legally affirmed the asylum rights of queer forced migrants. The outcome of this review was the publication of the inaugural Home Office report on queer asylum claims. Prior to this, the U.K. did not systematically collect or retain data on claims related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), citing the diverse range of SOGI categories as a primary challenge. Consequently, the 2015 report lacked a structured data collection strategy and statistical methodology. Additionally, in 2015, the Home Office updated the Foundation Training Programme and assessed the training needs of officers handling queer claims (Raboin, 2016). These updates to the training aligned this to the E.U.’s Data Protection, Security and Human Rights (DSSH). Updates provided regulations on the collection, processing and protection of personal data, to ensure that this personal data is safeguarded. It also emphasises respect for human rights through considering human rights standards whilst setting privacy and data security measures alongside addressing issues such as sensitive questioning techniques and stereotyping. Concurrently, the Home Office released Country Information and Guidance (CIG), and an Operational Guidance Note (OGN) for assessment officers handling queer claims, explicitly prohibiting questions about sexual practices (Raboin, 2016).

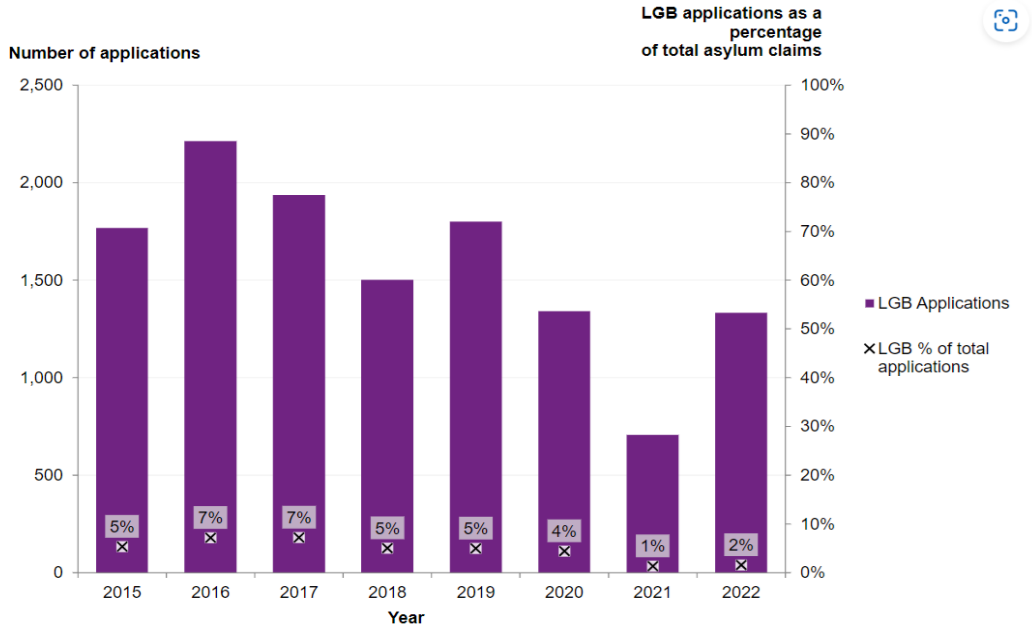
The above policies and practices within the UK's asylum system, particularly concerning queer forced migrants, present significant challenges to their integration into society. The selective provision of information, cultural biases, and disbelief inherent in the asylum process create barriers that hinder queer individuals' ability to access essential resources and establish their legitimacy within the system. Moreover, policies such as dispersal and restrictions on social rights further exacerbate feelings of isolation and marginalisation, hindering their integration prospects.

Officially, Wales does not refuse to count how many refugees live within its borders. However, the available data on refugees living in Wales is limited and managed primarily by the UK government. Asylum policy, as well as the tracking of asylum seekers and refugees, remains a matter reserved for Westminster (Nation of Sanctuary, Welsh Government, 2024). The Home Office provides figures on asylum claims where sexual orientation was part of the basis for the claim (Home Office, 2022). The Home Office does not collect data on sexual or gender identities other than binary classifications of lesbian, gay and bisexual. As such, provided data on LGBTQ+ asylum claims, only reflects these three categories relating to sexual identity.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic on the 11th of March 2020. By the 23rd of that same March, the UK government announced their first lockdown measures. Other governments globally issued similar restrictions around this time. This pandemic, and lockdown restrictions globally, had a profound impact on the UK immigration. This included limitations on migrant movement to and from the UK, as well as impacts on operational capacities and applications and decisions on asylum claims.

Below, I present tables from the Home Office with information on LGB asylum applications from 2015 through to 2022. I will make comparisons that include considerations of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on these figures.

Figure 1: LGB asylum applications[1] lodged in the UK, 2015 to 2022

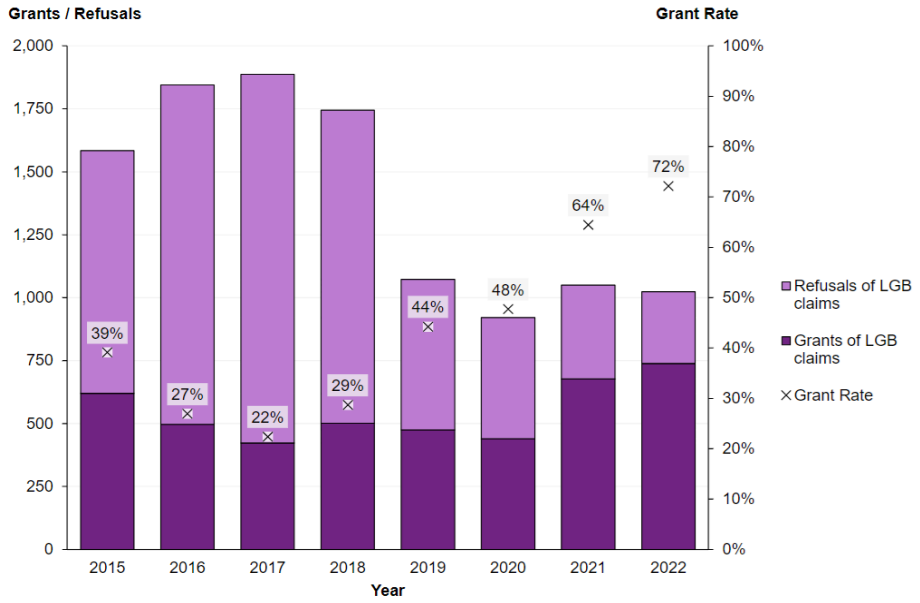


(table 4, Home Office 2022)

The number of LGB claims in 2022 increased by 89% from 2021. However, LGB claims were 26% higher than 2022 in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this decline in

LGB applications from 2019 through 2022, overall asylum applications more than doubled during this period. This led to LGB claims becoming a proportion of around 2% of all asylum applications in 2022, which is lower than from 2015 through 2019, where this percentage ranges between 5 and 7 %.

Figure 2: Initial decision[1] on LGB asylum applications, and the grant rates[2] on such applications, 2015 to 2022



(table 5, Home Office, 2022)

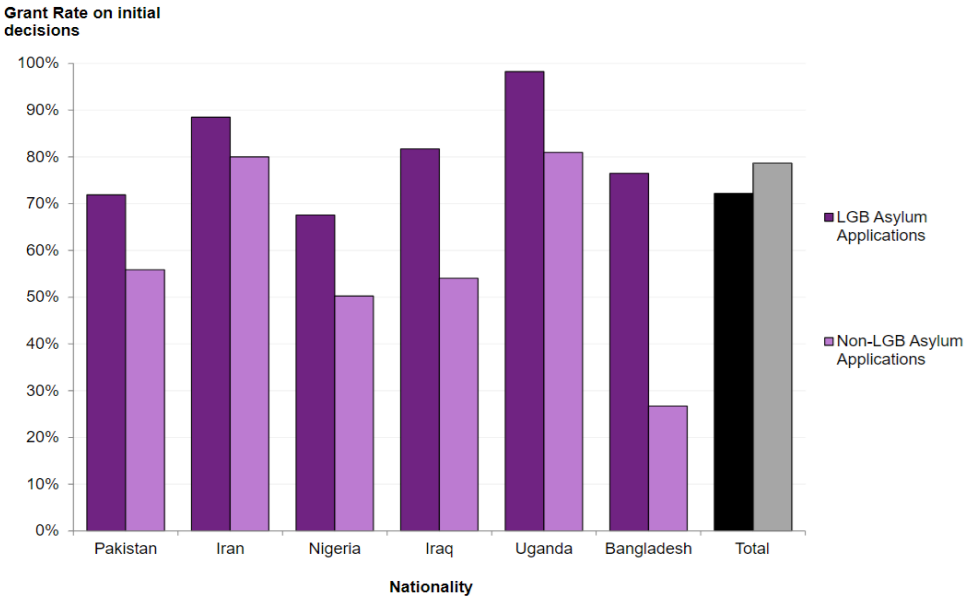
Figure 2 shows that in 2022, 739 out of 1024 initial decisions on LGB asylum cases (72%), resulted in grants of refugee status, or alternative forms of leave. This marks a substantial increase in grant rates from 2019, when grant rates were 44% for LGB cases. This increase is even more pronounced if you consider the change since 2017, when this figure was only 22%.

The total number of initial decisions on LGB cases peaked in 2017, where there were 1887 decisions. Over the past 4 years, this total is markedly lower, with an average of around 1000 decisions per year. This decline reflects current trends in overall asylum decisions, impacted by disruptions to asylum processing activities due to the pandemic. The number of LGB decisions has remained relatively stable from 2019 through 2022, with these figures standing at 1073 (2019), 921 (2020), 1049 (2021) and 1024 (2022).

The total number of granted LGB claims have remained relatively consistent since 2015, with an average of 546 grants per year. The past 2 years have seen slightly higher numbers, with the highest number occurring in 2022, with a total of 736 grants of LGB claims.

As seen above, refusals at the initial decision stage of LGB claims, have significantly decreased over the past 3 years. In 2022 there were 285 refusals, compared to the peak of refusals at 1464 in 2017. There has been an increasing grant rate for LGB claims post 2017, which reflects broader tends in overall asylum grant rates (Home Office, 2022).

Figure 3: Grant rates at initial decision[1] on LGB asylum applications, by nationality[2], 2022



(table 6, Home Office, 2024)

Figure 3 shows how in 2022, grant rates at initial decision on LGB applications differ between nationalities and compares the grant rates of LGB and non-LGB asylum applications. This graph illustrates that the overall grant rate for non-LGB cases was higher (77%) than the grant rates for LGB cases (72%). However, for the six nationalities with the highest numbers of LGB applications, the grant rate on initial decisions is higher for LGB applications than non-LGB applications.

Throughout the past six years, the highest number of LGB applications have come from Pakistani nationals. Pakistani nationals represented 3% of total asylum applications, but 21% of LGB applications in 2022 (278 applications). (Home Office, 2022). LGB applications are proportionally a minority of total asylum applications for most nationalities. Uganda is an example of an exception to this rule. Overall numbers of Ugandan asylum applications are low, with a total of 1258 applications between 2015 and 2022. However, 679 of these were LGB applications, making these constitute a majority of 54%. A similar number (650) of LGB applications were received in this period from Iranian nationals. However, this constitutes a minority of 2% of total asylum applications from Iranian nationals (Home Office, 2022).

The Home Office has been changing how they manage immigration data, transitioning to a new system called Atlas, from the prior Case Information Database (CID). Figures post 2020 have been extracted from Atlas. The figures provided by the Home Office (2022) display information surrounding initial decisions and appeals on cases where LGB identity was an element of the claim. However, the data does not show whether sexual orientation was the sole basis for the claim, at what point this was raised, or its impact upon decisions made. There is also no separation of the three sexual orientations recognised, with all seekers being indicated under the label LGB. It is suspected that historical data recording practices could have also led to underrepresentation of LGB seekers in older cases.

Examining the Home Office data on LGB asylum claims between 2015 and 2022 reveals patterns and trends that reflect advancements and challenges in asylum policy and integration. The data shows large fluctuations in total LGB claims over time, with numbers almost doubling between 2021 and 2022, despite remaining lower than levels before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2017, there has been a yearly increase in grant rates for LGB asylum applications. This reflects overall increases in asylum application grant rates but also indicates progress in addressing the specific concerns of LGB asylum seekers within the UK immigration system. The Home Office do not present the figures regarding LGB asylum cases for before 2014, that we receive for the years after. Improvements in data recording have been evident. However, historical underrepresentation, as well as variations in data collection systems and practices, caution against direct year on year comparison.

The insights that this data provides on LGB asylum claims, overlap with our broader discussions on integration. Ensuring fair asylum decisions are made, and the appropriate data is collected, is a crucial part of ensuring the effective integration of queer forced migrants.

2.9 The UK's Historical Approach to Integration

The integration strategies employed by the UK's devolved nations differ greatly from the umbrella integration strategies put forward by the Home Office and Westminster. The UK's multi-levelled governance has led to tensions between reserved and devolved responsibilities. This has been particularly apparent in areas such as accommodation, health, education and social services. These tensions impact the welfare of forced migrants living in devolved regions. I would suggest that forced migrants have been negatively impacted not only through the UK's hostile response to asylum, but also through their disinterest in forced migrant's integration. Through this section, I will examine the ways in which forced migrants' social exclusion has been furthered by the UK government's historical approach to integration.

Integration strategies in the UK place the responsibility to integrate solely upon forced migrants. The complexities involved in integrating within the diverse UK population are overlooked. Many UK integration strategies were developed alongside a context of significant policy changes, such as reductions in housing and financial support, driven by increasing fears over asylum applications. Both border control and economic benefits were sought out through New Labour's approach to immigration policy. The result was legislation aimed at not only managing migration flows but also promoting integration. Conflicting rationales underly UK asylum policy, as structural integration is prioritised, without considering the ways in which this is impacted through hostile immigration policies. This remains a subject of scholarly critique.

In the early 2000s, under Prime Minister Tony Blair's leadership, the UK government introduced its first refugee integration strategy "Full and Equal Citizens" (Refugee Council, 2004). This was subsequently followed by two additional strategies in 2005 and 2009. Since the departure of the New Labour government in 2010, the UK government has not updated or issued new UK wide integration strategies. In both Wales and Scotland, devolved governments continue to update existing plans and release new strategies. Rather than appearing as a comprehensive and fully formed policy document, the strategy of “Full and Equal Citizens” appears more as a work in progress. There is a lack of explicit mention of engaging with refugees and local communities. Even though it is not explicitly stated, Full and Equal Citizens neglects to promote integration for asylum seekers. Instead, integration is framed as reserved for those with settled refugee status. Importantly, there is not a single mention or acknowledgement of queer forced migrants throughout the strategy document.

The subsequent strategies published by the labour government were titled "Integration Matters" (2005) and "Moving on Together" (2009). Both explicitly stated that they were intended only for refugees and were not geared towards the needs of asylum seekers. This was based off the false premise that integration in the UK only begins once refugee status is granted. There is an acknowledgment within "Integration Matters" (2005) that whilst their cases are being processed asylum seekers might have integration experiences. However, this is followed by an assertation that only after receiving refugee status can an individual plan for a long-term future in the UK and experience integration in its full sense. “Integration Matters” therefore positions refugees as deserving of integration opportunities and efforts. The New Labour government's commitment to deterring asylum seekers from entering the UK is reinforced by this sentiment that they are undeserving of integration opportunities. In 2005, the grant to successful asylum cases of indefinite leave to remain was replaced with being granted five years of limited leave to remain. This produced further barriers to refugees' ability to plan for a long-term future in the UK. This shift indicated a move away

from facilitating integration, towards a focus on purely protection. Such a shift aligns with government efforts to reform the asylum system and reduce numbers of asylum applicants, which prioritises refugees' protection over integration within their host communities. Such concepts centering integration around protection, reflect the ideological stances of the Labour government under Tony Blair. These stances prioritised addressing perceived abuses of the asylum system and deterring asylum seekers from entering the UK. The broader context of UK migration and the relationship between forced and non-forced migrants is ignored through excluding asylum seekers from integration strategies. This suggests that during this period approaches to migrant integration were limited and problematic. As with "Full and Equal Citizens", neither "Integration Matters" or "Moving on Together" include mention of the integration needs of queer forced migrants.

In 2004, the Home Office commissioned research on refugee integration from Ager and Strang (2008). This followed initial integration strategies through "Full and Equal Citizens" (2000) and was intended to guide the production of future strategies. The resultant "Indicators of Integration" report was highly influential in the production of "Integration Matters" (2005). "Indicators of Integration" used a framework of ten indicators, to provide a comprehensive definition of integration. Westminster Government's definition of integration within "Integration Matters" selectively omits elements of Ager and Strang's "Indicators of Integration". Notably, these omissions include key areas of integration such as health, education, employment, and housing. Crucially, the policy document neglects to acknowledge refugees' outcomes should be equivalent to those of the wider British public. This could potentially lead to inequality. Within "Full and Equal Citizens" refugees are referred to as "members of British society" rather than "citizens", adding to inferences of inequality. "Integration Matters" centres integration around refugees feeling empowered to realise their full potential as members of British society. It is suggested that refugees' integration occurs through meaningfully contributing to society and accessing the public services that they are entitled to. This definition introduces ambiguity regarding refugees' empowerment, suggesting a lack of agency on their part.

In 2009, the Labour Government introduced several policy measures, such as the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES), with the purpose of assisting refugees in achieving their full potential. Following the coalition government's austerity measures, RIES was discontinued only two years later in 2011. Budget cuts have had a significant and destabilising impact upon refugee integration and support services and broader policy. The closure of RIES led to a significant reduction in support services dedicated to improving refugee's integration. This included a reduction in the economic integration which is crucial to self-sufficiency and long-term settlement. Munck et al. (2012), suggest that these services'

closure led to major challenges in providing comprehensive integration support to refugees in the UK. According to Ruhs & Vargas-Silva (2012), the decision to close RIES is indicative of broader policy shifts towards fiscal restraint and away from sustained investment in refugee support and integration services. Following such gaps in government involvement, third sector and community organisations have increasingly stepped into these support and integration roles. Such organisations have the capacity to address integration needs outside of economic factors and have developed into primary providers of essential services such as cultural orientation, language classes, and social support (Goodman & Speers, 2013).

RIES's closure was indicative of concerns that the UK government was prioritising economic outcomes over holistic integration goals. An overt focus on economic outcomes and value, imposes on forced migrants the neo-liberal burden of "achieving their full potential" which ultimately impacts their level of social inclusion and overall wellbeing. (Bloch et al., 2011; Ruhs & Vargas-Silva, 2012). "Achieving their full potential" is not a phrase that is specifically codified in UK policy documents, but it is regularly discussed as a broad conceptual goal within the UK government's integration policies. The intended goal is for migrants to fully participate and thrive within their new communities, including social inclusion, cultural adaptation and economic self-sufficiency. The principles underlying "achieving full potential" are apparent in policies relating to forced migrants that promote education, employment, language proficiency and community engagement (Bloch et al., 2011; Goodman & Speers, 2013). Recent studies, such as those by Ruhs & Vargas-Silva (2012) and Csaika & de Haas (2014), have highlighted the importance of going beyond mere economic integration, to ensure that forced migrants are able to truly thrive in their host society.

2.10 Wales's Asylum and Integration Efforts

The Welsh Government's efforts to support refugees and asylum seekers have been underscored by concrete actions that are aimed at addressing key challenges faced by these communities. These actions aim to facilitate effective integration and prevent destitution through prioritising considerations around access to essential services such as healthcare, education, housing, and employment support. Through targeted actions and collaborations with stakeholders, Wales aims to create a more inclusive and compassionate society. Although these actions have room for improvement, their pursuit of social justice sets a good example.

In the UK, asylum and immigration are not devolved, with the UK government holding jurisdiction over this area. Despite this, the Welsh Government has committed itself to welcoming and integrating forced migrants. They aim to create a "nation of sanctuary" through reducing inequalities, increasing opportunities, and promoting good relations

between forced migrants and wider Welsh communities. Welsh Government has declared this commitment through their Nation of Sanctuary Action Plan (2019). Subsequent Welsh Government initiatives such as Re-Start (2020), the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (2022), and the LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales (2023) outline strategies to ensure equal treatment for all, regardless of immigration status or background. In this section, I will explore the opportunities and gaps in Welsh Government's integration policies.

Nation of Sanctuary Plan (2019)

As Minister Jane Hutt explains "*The Nation of Sanctuary plan outlines the breadth of work which the Welsh Government is undertaking across Wales to ensure inequalities experienced by these communities are reduced, access to opportunities increased, and relations between these communities and wider society improved."*

Lived experience experts were consulted in the plan's choice of key issues to address. The key points include elements such as accommodation, employability, financial inclusion, healthcare, mental health, education, advice and advocacy, hate crime and safeguarding. Despite the plan's array of action areas, it lacks any explicit consideration of queer forced migrants or the unique challenges that they face. This represents a significant policy gap within the plan. Queer forced migrants experience high levels of discrimination, due to the identity intersection between being both queer and a forced migrant. This can exacerbate vulnerabilities, and lead to unique challenges in integrating into Welsh communities. Ideally, this gap would be addressed through inclusion of queer forced migrants into the Welsh Government's integration policy space. Essentially, the specific needs of queer forced migrants should be recognised and addressed. This includes diverse integration action areas such as mental health support, access to inclusive healthcare, legal protections and targeted interventions. Additionally, there is a need for Welsh Government to improve support provision for queer forced migrants. Such improvements should include the incorporation of queer-affirmative language and policies into support provision, encouraging service providers to attend training on queer forced migrants and to establish specialised support programmes tailored to queer forced migrants' needs.

ReStart 2020

ReStart was a Refugee Integration Project established by the Welsh Government and funded through the European Union Asylum Migration Integration Fund. The initiative looked at increasing refugee's employability opportunities in Wales. The project combined four elements, an integration centre, ESOL hubs, Pan-Wales Employer engagement and development of a Wales-wide refugee integration website (Business Wales, 2020). Despite offering valuable services, ReStart omitted to provide services that addressed the trauma

and emotional barriers to employment that refugees face. Trauma informed care and mental health resources are an essential element to facilitating forced migrants' integration into labour markets. This programme neglected to specifically address the intersectionality of forced migrants, as factors such as queerness, disability and ethnicity can present additional barriers to employment. Services provided through ReStart were not tailored to, or trained on the needs of, queer forced migrants. Queer forced migrants can have complex employability needs. Initiatives like ReStart, though providing important general services, lack the elements needed to effectively cater to their needs, and to address wider issues surrounding emotional trauma.

Anti-racist Wales Action Plan 2022

The Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (2022) states its purpose is to "make a measurable difference to the lives of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people" The plan envisioned creating an "anti-racist Wales" by 2030. The experiences of racism that Refugees face was built in as an explicit part of the plan, and further outlines initiatives that can support and integrate both refugees and asylum seekers. As with the other initiatives we have explored, the plan notably omits any consideration of queer forced migrants and overlooks their unique experiences and needs. The plan includes no acknowledgement of the intersectionality of many forced migrant's identities. As such, it does little to engage with the complex and intricate challenges faced by intersectionally marginalised individuals. The plan's ability to measure its own effectiveness and remain accountable to set actions is limited through a lack of using data-driven approaches to inform the policy's development and evaluation. Ideally, inclusivity, intersectionality and evidence-based practice should be prioritised in Welsh Governments future development of integration programmes. This would help to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all migrants.

LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales 2023

The Welsh Government's LGBTQ+ Action Plan sets out their strategy to achieve their ambition of making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe. The plan sets out "the steps we will take to strengthen equality for LGBTQ+ people, to challenge discrimination, and to create a society where LGBTQ+ people are safe to live and love authentically, openly and freely as themselves." This plan explicitly includes discussion of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. This includes criticising the impacts that UK government plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda would have on LGBTQ+ forced migrants. Welsh Government include three key actions relating to queer forced migrants:

i) "Identify, safeguard and signpost LGBTQ+ people in claiming asylum.

ii) Encourage the development of LGBTQ+ only asylum properties in Wales.

iii) Ensure Wales a Nation of Sanctuary remains inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. “

Additionally, the Welsh Government commits to collaborate with key stakeholders on amending asylum support forms and providing tailored training for service providers to enhance understanding and support for LGBTQ+ migrant groups. These commitments demonstrate Welsh Governments commitment to queer forced migrant inclusion and creating a sense of welcome for these individuals.

Welsh Government also demonstrates recognition of queer forced migrants' specific challenges through these commitments. The inclusion of sentiments critiquing the UK government's Rwanda plans, displays an acknowledgement of the broader context of migration and asylum policies that impact upon queer forced migrants' integration journeys. However, this may be perceived as mere symbolic gesture, as the criticism is not backed up by concrete actions within the wider policy sphere. The Welsh Government's ability to fully meet their commitment to welcome and inclusion of queer forced migrants, is hindered by the challenges presented through limited resources, jurisdictional constraints and the UK Government's asylum policies.

Despite a laudable commitment from the Welsh Government to the concept of inclusivity and support for queer forced migrants through the LGBTQ+ Action Plan, there are still gaps in their integration strategy that should be addressed. Firstly, the plan lacks mention of the intersectionality of queer forced migrants, such as where this identity transects with race, religion or disability. I would also suggest that there is a need for deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by queer migrants, through collaboration with queer forced migrant support services. Welsh Government's efforts in collecting a wide range of positive and negative experiences have been commendable. However, I would suggest that plans would benefit from a more systematic approach to incorporating queer forced migrants' perspectives into policymaking and service provision. For example, this might include developing formal feedback and consultation mechanisms. Finally, many of the plan's actions prioritise areas around housing and training service providers. The plan includes little mention of initiatives that address other integration areas, such as healthcare access, education, employment or community support. Each of these areas present barriers to queer forced migrants through challenges such as discrimination, language barriers, or lack of culturally competent services. As such, these elements should be included to create a comprehensive action plan that is able to provide the welcome that Welsh Government commits towards.

Migrant Integration Framework: Case Studies 2023

The Migrant Integration Framework's "Case Studies" were contributed by external organisations, experts and stakeholders. These case studies were purposed to showcase how the Welsh Government's recommended approaches could effectively support migrant integration across various domains. Each case study highlights an initiative or action that has successfully facilitated migrant integration into Wales. Notably, these case studies lack mention of services tailored towards queer forced migrants, as there was a lack of engagement with LGBTQ+ organisations in forming the document. An additional concern was that individuals holding openly transphobic and homophobic views were included within the integration framework's steering group. It is highly important that policy-making bodies are made up of inclusive and diverse representatives. This can help ensure that policies are developed in a way that is able to create a supportive and welcoming environment for all migrants, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

2.11 Concepts Relevant to this Study

Critical Interventions in Queer Migration Studies – Structural Violence, Identity Politics, and the Complexities of Integration

Queer migration studies is an evolving interdisciplinary field that interrogates the intersections of sexuality, gender identity, race, citizenship, and transnational mobility. It foregrounds the experiences of those who are simultaneously queer and displaced, whether through forced migration, statelessness, or voluntary relocation. Emerging in response to two critical gaps—the heteronormativity of mainstream migration studies and the nationalistic bias of early LGBTQ+ research, queer migration studies challenge normative paradigms that ignore or knowingly erase the lived realities of LGBTQ+ migrants. As such, the field rejects universalising frameworks that presume either a linear progression from oppression to liberation or a singular mode of queer expression that maps neatly onto Euro-American/ Western paradigms.

Since its consolidation in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the field has expanded through key interventions that explore how queerness is constructed, regulated, and experienced across borders. Foundational scholars like Eithne Luibhéid (2005), Lionel Cantú (2009), and Karma Chávez (2013) have drawn attention to the state's role in managing sexual citizenship and the uneven geographies of queer mobility. This body of work grapples with the politics of visibility and invisibility, the narrativisation of trauma in asylum processes, and the colonial and racial legacies that structure the global governance of borders and bodies. More recently, emerging subfields within queer migration studies have turned toward

questions of epistemic resistance, trans-specific asylum struggles, and decolonial critiques of humanitarianism (Aizura, 2018; Haritaworn, 2015).

In contrast to studies that universalise migration or treat queer identity as monolithic, this literature review foregrounds three critical orientations- positionality, intersectionality, and temporality. First, positionality refers to the varying social locations of queer migrants and how these influence their recognition, access, and survival strategies. Intersectionality originating from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), urges an analysis of how sexuality intersects with race, class, gender, religion, and legal status in shaping lived experiences and systemic exclusions. Temporality, meanwhile, draws attention to the nonlinear, cyclical, and often precarious timelines of migration, thus, rejecting teleological accounts that equate queer migration with progress or freedom.

Significantly, queer migration studies have moved beyond a narrow focus on asylum and refugee claims to include a broader array of mobility experiences: transnational relationships, queer diasporas, and queer tourism. The field increasingly recognises the need to attend to non-Western and sub-national contexts, as well as to deconstruct the spatial binaries between “here” and “there,” “progressive” and “regressive,” “safe” and “dangerous.”

It is within this critical terrain that my research intervenes. I explore the integration experiences of queer forced migrants in Wales, drawing on key theoretical frameworks including structural violence, homonationalism, collective identity, minority influence, and social capital. By engaging both the institutional strategies of asylum governance and the everyday lived experiences of queer migrants, my study develops a multidimensional analysis of integration that attends to power, agency, and precarity.

Importantly, my work contributes a regional and intersectional lens to a field that remains predominantly focused on global cities and national capitals such as London, Toronto, and New York. Wales is a devolved UK nation with distinct policy frameworks, cultural histories, and language politics which offers a vital yet understudied context. Here, questions of sanctuary, and community are mediated through both national immigration policy and localised discourses of Welsh identity, community cohesion, and inclusivity.

This literature review, therefore, is not only a survey of existing scholarship but also a theoretical and political positioning of my research within queer migration studies. It aims to show how queer forced migrants in Wales navigate and challenge dominant narratives of queerness, integration, and belonging, and how their lived experiences reveal the limits and possibilities of inclusion in contemporary Britain.

Structural Violence and the Bureaucratisation of Vulnerability

The concept of structural violence, first introduced by Johan Galtung (1969), refers to a form of violence that is indirect, often invisible, and embedded within the social, legal, and political architectures of society. Unlike direct or physical violence, structural violence is not enacted by individual actors but manifests through institutional arrangements and systemic inequalities that prevent people from meeting their fundamental needs. It is deeply entangled with social stratification, bureaucracy, and legal mechanisms, explicit forms of power that are often masked by claims of neutrality, efficiency, or even benevolence.

In the context of queer migration, structural violence offers a powerful theoretical lens to interrogate how harm is systemically produced by asylum regimes, border controls, welfare infrastructures, and legal procedures. Rather than being episodic or incidental, the suffering of queer forced migrants is structured into the very logics and practices of immigration control. It is enacted through the denial of housing, delays in asylum processing, restriction of legal work, and inhumane conditions in detention centers—often under the guise of policy, protocol, or procedure.

Queer forced migrants are especially vulnerable to this form of violence because they occupy multiple marginalised positions simultaneously: as non-citizens, as racialised subjects, as non-normative gendered and sexual beings, and often as individuals with precarious economic or linguistic capital. Their experiences of violence are not only interpersonal, such as familial rejection, mob violence, or community ostracization, but deeply institutional. For example, seemingly mundane encounters like an asylum interview or a medical assessment can become sites of re-traumatisation, surveillance, and identity regulation.

Scholars such as Mullaly (2010), Spade (2011), and Giametta (2017) have shown how asylum regimes produce structural violence by demanding narrow, coherent, and culturally legible narratives of queerness. These narratives must conform to dominant Western norms—such as the expectation of an early "coming out," engagement in same-sex relationships, and visible participation in LGBTQ+ spaces. This demand for legibility produces what Puar (2007) refers to as homonormativity: the institutional preference for certain types of "acceptable" queerness over others.

In practice, this means queer migrants must often perform their identities to meet the expectations of legal decision-makers. Asylum seekers who do not conform because they come from cultural contexts where queerness is lived differently, or because their experiences of sexuality and gender are non-linear or non-disclosive, as well as the risk of being disbelieved or deemed fraudulent. As Shuman and Bohmer (2014) argue, the asylum

system does not simply seek facts but coerces narratives, often requiring applicants to re-live traumatic experiences in a format that aligns with Eurocentric understandings of identity and oppression.

Such narrative demands operate as a form of epistemic violence: they delegitimise other ways of knowing and being queer. The requirement for documentary proof of sexual orientation or gender identity, such as photos with partners, participation in Pride events, or testimony from Western NGOs, creates a structural bias that privileges urban, cisgender, male, English-speaking applicants. Trans and non-binary individuals, people from rural areas, or those with limited digital footprints are often disadvantaged by these evidentiary standards.

Building on Foucault's concept of biopolitics, Giametta (2017) critiques the role of humanitarian governance in reinforcing structural violence. While asylum systems are ostensibly designed to offer protection, they often function through paternalistic logics that cast queer migrants as passive victims in need of rescue. The host state positions itself as morally superior, "saving" queer individuals from their backward or barbaric home countries, thereby, reproducing neocolonial hierarchies. This is not simply a representational issue; it shapes material outcomes, such as the design of integration programmes, eligibility for benefits, and the framing of public narratives.

In this framing, queerness becomes instrumentalised as a metric of national virtue. As Puar (2007) and El-Tayeb (2011) have noted, Western nations use their support for LGBTQ+ rights to differentiate themselves from supposedly regressive others, even as they simultaneously enact racist, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant policies. This instrumentalisation reinforces a binary between the "civilised" Global North and the "homophobic" Global South, obscuring the systemic and anti-queer violence within the very nations offering asylum.

What makes structural violence particularly insidious in the asylum context is its multi-scalar operation. It manifests simultaneously at the macro level of national immigration policies, the meso level of NGO bureaucracies, and the micro level of everyday interactions between caseworkers and asylum seekers. In devolved contexts like the UK, these layers are further complicated by region-specific policies and institutional fragmentation.

My research responds directly to this multi-scalar challenge by tracing how structural violence is produced across institutional and geographic layers, from Westminster immigration policy to Welsh Government initiatives and local third-sector practices. This spatial analysis is crucial, as it reveals that structural violence is not uniformly distributed. The experience of a queer asylum seeker in rural Wales differ markedly from one in London

or Glasgow, not due to national law alone but due to the availability of support networks, language policies, and regional attitudes toward inclusion.

Moreover, the temporality of asylum produces its own structural harm. Long delays in asylum adjudication leave queer migrants in a state of legal limbo, unable to work, study, or build stable lives. This "waiting" is not a passive condition but an active form of control, what Mountz (2010) refers to as the “politics of slow violence”. Time itself becomes a weapon of the state, used to exhaust the applicants.

My research contributes to this body of critical work by offering a grounded, regionally specific exploration of how structural violence affects queer forced migrants in Wales. Drawing on Mullaly’s (2010) theory of social justice, my work maps how institutional arrangements, both overt and covert, compound vulnerabilities throughout the asylum journey, pre-, during-, and post-claim. I show how rights, recognition, and resources are not just abstract legal principles but lived realities shaped by geography, policy, and power.

By foregrounding Welsh experiences, my research highlights the uneven geography of rights in the UK where devolved administrations may pledge inclusion and sanctuary while remaining entangled with a hostile national immigration apparatus. This duality produces contradictions that queer migrants must navigate daily: local community initiatives that promote inclusion coexisting with national systems that criminalise, surveil, or expel.

Homonationalism: The Selective Recognition of Queer Life

One of the most impactful conceptual interventions in queer migration studies is Jasbir Puar’s (2007) theory of homonationalism. This term describes the process by which Western liberal democracies co-opt certain queer identities into the national project while simultaneously weaponising sexual tolerance to justify racism, nationalism, and imperialism. Through this lens, state recognition of LGBTQ+ rights does not necessarily indicate a commitment to justice or liberation. Rather, it serves a dual function: it marks the state as “progressive” and modern while excluding those queer bodies that do not align with white, middle-class, cisnormative, and homonormative ideals. Puar (2013) further emphasises that homonationalism is not merely about gay racism; it is a biopolitical project that uses sexuality as a regulatory mechanism to sort desirable and undesirable populations.

In the context of asylum and immigration systems, homonationalism functions as a form of identity filtering. It privileges queer asylum seekers who conform to Euro-American norms of visibility, such as being “out,” monogamous, sexually active, and publicly aligned with liberal rights-based frameworks. Those whose queer identities are rooted in spiritual, cultural, or collective forms of expression, especially queer Muslims, Black trans individuals, and non-

binary persons, which are often rendered illegible or even suspicious in the eyes of the state. Their failure to perform queerness according to Western norms often leads to accusations of deceit or fabrication (Vaid, 2021; Vamvaka-Tatsi, 2019).

Studies by Murray (2014), White (2013), and Vamvaka-Tatsi (2019) provide compelling empirical evidence of how homonationalist frameworks are operationalised in asylum systems. Queer migrants are often pressured to construct linear and hyper-visible queer narratives in order to be recognised as credible claimants. These narratives frequently include tropes such as early self-discovery, consistent persecution due to sexual orientation or gender identity, flight to a liberal nation, and redemption through visibility and Pride. Legal advisors and NGOs, often with good intentions, "coach" asylum seekers to craft these stories in ways that align with the expectations of asylum officers and judges. In doing so, they inadvertently reinforce a hierarchy of queer legibility rooted in whiteness, Western exceptionalism, and capitalist modernity. This results in what scholars identify as epistemic violence, a form of harm where the diversity of queer existence is reduced to a narrow, yet recognisable script (Shuman & Bohmer, 2014; Giametta, 2017). Queer migrants who fail to fit this script are not merely misunderstood and they are often denied asylum. In practice, this means that a bisexual woman who expresses her identity as private and relational may be deemed less credible than a cisgender gay man who publicly attends Pride parades.

My research in Wales demonstrates how these dynamics materialise in local asylum adjudication and queer community organising. Legal support structures, community-based NGOs, and even queer-focused advocacy groups may, often unintentionally, reproduce homonationalist assumptions. For instance, queer forced migrants who are religious, culturally conservative, or hesitant to publicly identify due to past trauma are sometimes interpreted as insufficiently queer. The demand for visibility becomes a test for legitimacy, essentially forcing them to "edit" their stories by omitting religion, downplaying trauma, or exaggerating Western-coded expressions of queerness.

This reproduces what Butler & Spivak (2011) and Gentile & Kinsman (2010) describe as the "rescue narrative": a discourse that casts queer migrants as passive victims fleeing barbaric cultures, saved by tolerant liberal nations. Such framing is not only patronising; it reifies colonial ideologies by positioning Western nations as arbiters of freedom and modernity while racialising the Global South as inherently homophobic and regressive (Said, 1979; Bracke, 2012). The figure of the queer migrant becomes instrumentalised as a political token, useful to Western nations only so far as they reinforce national myths of tolerance and exceptionalism.

Homonationalism has significant implications for integration discourses, which often treat visibility and cultural assimilation as indicators of success. In practice, this means that queer forced migrants are not simply asked to resettle or participate in civic life, they are asked to align with an acceptable form of queerness to be embraced. My research highlights how this conditional inclusion leads to internalised shame, performative identity presentation, and isolation from both ethnic communities and mainstream queer spaces.

This is compounded by bureaucratic expectations within the asylum process. As White (2013) demonstrates, applicants are asked to provide evidence that reflects Western imaginaries of queerness, such as photographs at gay bars, text messages from romantic partners, or proof of participation in LGBTQ+ organisations. This not only ignores cultural differences but penalises those who come from contexts where public queerness is unsafe or impossible. As a result, queerness becomes a performance rather than a lived identity, and integration becomes conditional on strategic self-erasure or overcompensation.

The contradiction at the heart of homonationalism is that it appears to offer queer migrants protection, yet it does so by restricting their agency and scripting their identities. It invites inclusion only by demanding assimilation into normative queer citizenship. This is what Lisa Duggan (2003) termed "homonormativity": a politics that privileges neoliberal, depoliticised forms of queerness that are palatable to the state. My research shows how this plays out not only at the level of asylum claims but in integration programmes, social services, and community partnerships in Wales.

Importantly, my work challenges these frameworks by foregrounding the voices of queer migrants who reject, resist, or navigate these pressures in complex ways. Some strategically perform queerness to survive; others choose to celebrate hybrid, or diasporic expressions of identity. This reveals a more nuanced and intersectional view of integration—one that is not about inclusion into dominant systems but about reshaping those systems through resistance and redefinition.

Homonationalism thus highlights the urgent need for more inclusive, pluralistic, and decolonial models of queer integration. These models must move beyond Eurocentric assumptions about what queerness looks like and instead embrace a diversity of expressions, embodiments, and relationalities. They must also interrogate how state policies, community practices, and NGO interventions may unconsciously reproduce the very exclusions they aim to address. My study examines how these tensions unfold in the Welsh context, where progressive rhetoric (e.g., “Nation of Sanctuary”) may be undermined by hostile environment policies and narrow integration frameworks. It also provides a roadmap for future interventions, as it is highlighting the importance of trauma-informed,

culturally sensitive, and co-produced approaches that recognise queer migrants not as passive beneficiaries but as agents of social and political transformation.

Social Capital: Between Belonging and Burden

Social capital has long been a central analytic in migration, as well as integration studies, offering a guide to understand how social networks, trust, and reciprocal obligations function as both resources and constraints for migrant populations. Originating in the sociological works of Pierre Bourdieu (1985), James Coleman (1988; 1990), and Robert Putnam (2000), social capital was first conceived as the relational resources embedded in networks of social interaction. It encompasses both bonding capital, the ties within close-knit communities and bridging capital – the ties that connect individuals to broader, often more powerful social institutions.

While originally used to analyse civic engagement and political participation, social capital theory has been retooled to explore migrant integration, adaptation, and belonging. Bourdieu (1986) emphasised how access to social capital is shaped by one's position within larger fields of power. Thus, social capital is not a neutral or universally available good but it is indeed shaped by intersecting structures of racism, xenophobia, classism, gender norms, and legal status. For queer forced migrants, these intersecting structures often create a hostile or ambivalent terrain in which access to supportive networks is conditional, limited, or denied altogether.

In the context of queer migration, social capital takes on profoundly layered and paradoxical meanings. As Phillimore (2011) and Strang & Ager (2010) argue, forced migrants often lack bridging capital, the cross-cultural, institutional links that facilitate integration into the host society. This is compounded in the case of queer migrants, who frequently experience double marginalisation. Many are estranged from their ethnic or faith-based communities due to homophobia or transphobia, while also facing racism, xenophobia, and classism within mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces. As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020) notes, queer migrants may be "out" but not "in", rendered hypervisible through their difference yet excluded from the very communities that claim to offer sanctuary.

My research in Wales brings these tensions into sharp focus. Most of the participants described intense feelings of being burdensome, not due to a lack of will, but because the asylum system structurally prevents participation in work, education, or even in some cases, volunteering. The prolonged legal precarity of waiting for refugee status suspends individuals in a liminal zone where the ability to reciprocate, the moral core of social capital is consistently institutionally denied. This not only fosters economic dependency but corrodes self-worth and hinders opportunities to form durable social ties.

While often framed in transactional terms, social capital also has an affective dimension. Belonging, trust, and recognition are not just sociological categories; they are felt experiences that are deeply shaped by emotional labour, vulnerability, and mutual care. Scholars such as Yuval-Davis (2011) and Rainie & Wellman (2012) remind us that the formation of social capital is contingent not only on institutional access but on interpersonal legitimacy, on who is welcomed, who is understood, and who is trusted. This is particularly salient for queer forced migrants whose identities may be questioned, misunderstood, or exoticised. My participants described this as an ongoing struggle to "prove" they belong, whether to LGBTQ+ groups suspicious of migrants, or migrant support groups ill-equipped to engage with queerness. Thus, the emotional economy of social capital is shaped not only by opportunity but by repeated exposure to epistemic exclusion and identity fatigue.

Social capital, as theorised by Putnam (2000) and later refined by Ostrom & Ahn (2009), is sustained by norms of reciprocity. However, in queer migration contexts, reciprocity is not always possible, particularly under asylum regimes that prevent migrants from participating in economic or civic life. This leads to a structural asymmetry in relationships: migrants are positioned as recipients of support rather than as agents of reciprocity.

My work demonstrates how this dynamic creates what Nancy Fraser (2000) calls a "politics of deservingness", where only certain migrants are deemed worthy of inclusion, based on their ability to "contribute" or conform. For queer migrants, these judgements are often compounded by racialised and gendered expectations. For instance, a white gay man with fluent English and a professional background may be more readily accepted than a Black trans woman who speaks little English. These hierarchies profoundly shape access to both formal and informal social capital. Moreover, expectations of gratitude and performance are often projected onto queer forced migrants. As my participants revealed, even well-meaning allies may impose moral expectations: "we helped you, now you must assimilate." These dynamics, while subtle, reinforce paternalistic forms of inclusion that constrain agency and define integration on narrow, state-sanctioned terms.

Despite these challenges, my research uncovers significant examples of agency, resilience, and creativity among queer forced migrants in Wales. Participants found ways to mobilise micro-social capital through LGBTQ+ grassroots support groups, local activism, and informal mutual aid circles. These networks often operate way below the radar of formal integration structures but serve as vital lifelines. They offer spaces not only for survival but for the reclamation of joy, safety, and belonging. These findings resonate with Skoric & Shu (2015) and Lin (2001), who argue that social capital can be activated for political resistance. In this light, queer migrants are not merely passive participants in integration processes, but they

are political actors building new forms of sociality, solidarity, and new forms of citizenship from the margins. They reconfigure the very terms of belonging, moving beyond institutional models to forge emancipatory communities that are diverse, intersectional, and diasporic.

Ultimately, my study calls for a rethinking of integration not as an individual achievement or state-managed process, but as a relational and ongoing negotiation. Following Yuval-Davis (2011) and Brettell (2016), this model views integration as a dynamic, two-way process of accommodation, learning, and contestation. It insists that queer migrants be seen not merely as objects of policy but as co-constructors of community, who bring their own histories, values, and epistemologies to the table.

Minority Influence: Disruption, Voice and Resistance

The concept of minority influence, pioneered by Serge Moscovici (1976) and later expanded by Turner (2005) and Mugny (1982), remains foundational in understanding how marginalised groups can challenge dominant norms, shift public discourse, and catalyse systemic change. Unlike majority influence, which relies on coercion or normative compliance, minority influence is disruptive by design work by de-stabilising consensus, generating cognitive conflict, and offering alternative moral or political visions. This form of influence is particularly important in the case of queer forced migrants, who often stand at the intersection of multiple minoritised identities and whose lived experiences directly confront the normative assumptions embedded in migration, citizenship, and queer belonging.

Queer migrants disrupt dominant cultural narratives not merely through visibility, but through everyday acts of epistemic resistance (Medina, 2013), such as volunteering, mutual aid, storytelling, artistic expression, and participation in radical advocacy. These acts constitute more than symbolic resistance; they are claims to space, voice, and recognition in systems that render them invisible or unintelligible. Yet, as my research demonstrates, such resistance is fraught with obstacles, such as legal precarity, stigma, racialisation, and institutional gatekeeping that often constrain the transformative potential of minority influence.

While minority influence is often most powerful when a shared collective identity is established (Melucci, 1996; Snow, 2001), queer forced migrants face challenges in constructing such unity. The heterogeneity of queer migrant populations across lines of national origin, language, gender identity, religion, legal status, and trauma histories, complicates efforts to build cohesive movements. Shared group membership, as argued by Mugny and Papastamou (1982) is crucial for effective re-categorisation and influence. However, queer forced migrants frequently lack even a minimal baseline of group

recognition due to their marginalisation from both ethnic and migrant communities, due to homophobia, and mainstream LGBTQ+ communities, due to racism, xenophobia, or classism.

In my Welsh-based research, this tension was reflected in the ambivalence some participants expressed about participating in LGBTQ+ spaces that felt “whitewashed” or “tokenistic.” In such settings, minority influence is blunted not by a lack of conviction or clarity, but by structural and interpersonal exclusions that fracture solidarity. This raises important questions about who gets to speak for queer forced migrants, and under what conditions their claims are heard or dismissed.

Social action, particularly volunteering, emerges as a vital mode of engagement for queer forced migrants. As scholars such as Fortier (2010), Orsi (2004), and Khan (2008) show, volunteering enables migrants to assert belonging, generate social capital, and reshape community relations. These acts are often misrecognised as assimilation, but they are in fact radical assertions of citizenship through reclaiming visibility and agency in a context where both are structurally denied. Volunteering enables participants to challenge dominant tropes of dependency and victimhood. As my study shows, many queer migrants in Wales engage in community projects not to perform gratitude, but to counter de-humanisation, rebuild self-esteem, and foster mutual care. They do so despite considerable constraints: lack of work rights, housing insecurity, trauma, and the precarity of immigration status. This reflects what Zetter et al. (2003) describe as "resilience through reconstitution” the creative strategies migrants use to rebuild social and symbolic lives in exile. However, it is crucial to interrogate the conditions under which volunteering is possible. Migrants with limited English, or trans migrants facing surveillance often find volunteering inaccessible or unsafe. Moreover, participation in such activities is frequently unrecognised by integration metrics that privilege economic contribution over civic or cultural engagement.

Minority influence and social action also serve as counter-public formations, a radical way for queer forced migrants to push back against exclusionary discourses not only in law but in culture. Wales-wide celebratory events like Refugee Week, storytelling campaigns, and queer migrant collectives offer platforms for self-representation that resist the dominant logics of victimhood, passivity, and saviourism. They also allow migrants to intervene in the symbolic economies of the host society, where legitimacy is often granted only to those who conform to normative scripts of queer Western identity. In this sense, social action becomes a site of critical pedagogy, teaching the host society to confront its complicity in queer displacement, and racial capitalism. These engagements are not neutral; they are political interventions grounded in care, visibility, and subversion (Gramsci, 1982; Weng & Lee,

2016). They challenge the integration model that positions migrants as objects of policy, offering instead a vision of relational, co-produced belonging.

As my research makes clear, one of the most persistent barriers to sustained minority influence is the temporality of legal status. Queer forced migrants in the asylum process often exist in a state of suspended liminality, as they are unable to work, study, or fully participate in society while awaiting decisions that may take months or years. This legal suspension weakens their ability to build consistent relationships, invest in long-term projects, or maintain leadership roles in community spaces. As Wahlbeck (1997) and Kelly (2003) note, temporariness fractures not only material conditions but also political identities. Migrants are rendered "unreliable allies" in the eyes of institutions, even as they are doing the most to transform them. My findings highlight how this precarious temporality shapes the kinds of influence that are possible. Many migrants are eager to engage but fear drawing attention to themselves while their claims are unresolved. Others lose access to support once granted asylum, making long-term activism unsustainable. These dynamics underscore the need for structural reform, a radical and much-needed shift toward systems that enable rather than inhibit civic participation by queer migrants.

Ultimately, minority influence and social action invite us to rethink integration not as absorption or assimilation, but as a politicised process of negotiation, recognition, and co-authorship. Integration, in this framing, is not the end goal, it is a means of justice-seeking, through which minoritised people remake the spaces that excluded them. As Tyler (2006) and Fortier (2010) argue, inclusion must not be premised on compliance, but on transformative engagement that destabilises the very structures of exclusion. My study contributes to this critical reframing by demonstrating how queer forced migrants in Wales act as agents of change, not merely as subjects in need of care. They disrupt the state’s narrative of queer tolerance, confront racism within queer spaces, and demand that integration account for pluralism, precarity, and agency. Their actions do not simply affirm their right to belong; they reimagine what belonging means.

Collective Identity: Intersectionality, Belonging, and Agency

In queer migration studies, collective identity has emerged not only as a source of community cohesion and empowerment but also as a site of contestation and negotiation. As theorised by Melucci (1996) and Snow (2001), collective identity is the outcome of shared experiences, common practices, and sustained interaction among individuals who see themselves as part of a broader political or social group. It is not a fixed or essentialist marker of identity, but rather a dynamic, processual constructed through narratives, symbols, rituals, and affective ties that both unite and differentiate individuals.

For queer forced migrants, collective identity is shaped by multiple and intersecting axes of identity and oppression: race, gender, class, nationality, religion, legal status, language, and trauma history. As such, the category "queer refugee" or "LGBTQ+ asylum seeker" is not merely a descriptor, it is a discursive battleground where belonging, visibility, and legitimacy are constantly being negotiated. My research underscores this complexity, showing how queer migrants in Wales co-create collective identities that are fluid, contingent, and deeply shaped by context.

Collective identity allows queer migrants to transform personal narratives of displacement and marginalisation into shared political struggles. This is what Lentin & Titley (2011) describe as identity-based resistance, as a mode of mobilisation that challenges dominant discourses of nationalism, heteronormativity, and racialised citizenship. Through activist networks, cultural production, and mutual aid initiatives, my participants resist not only the erasures imposed by the asylum system but also the pressures of assimilation into a mythologised “Britishness.” These acts of resistance are not merely symbolic; they constitute what Gramsci (1982) might call a “war of position”: a long-term strategy of building cultural and ideological alternatives within civil society. In this context, collective identity becomes a space of counter-hegemonic production, where queer forced migrants assert their right to difference without sacrificing claims to recognition or rights. This dual perspective, both affirming distinctiveness and demanding inclusion, opens space for more nuanced and pluralistic understandings of integration.

While collective identity can be a powerful mechanism for mobilisation and solidarity, it is also shaped by internal heterogeneity. Differences in migration histories, legal status, gender identities, languages, educational backgrounds, and religious affiliations often make the formation of unified groups difficult. My findings in Wales point to both the potential and the friction of collective organising. For example, while some participants found refuge and purpose in queer-led activist collectives, others felt alienated by the dominance of white, cisgender narratives within these spaces. This echoes critiques by Fortier (2010) and Ferguson (2004), who caution against the assumption that shared marginalisation automatically produces solidarity. Instead, they call for politics of recognition, an approach that values difference as foundational rather than disruptive. As Fominaya (2010) asserts, collective identities must be capacious enough to include contradiction, internal dissent, and layered affiliations. Otherwise, they risk reproducing the very hierarchies they seek to dismantle.

Queer migrants, like all diasporic subjects, also construct imagined communities, networks of belonging that are not bound by territory but sustained through affect, memory, and

shared political struggle. Drawing on Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities, Das (2006) and Gilroy (2001) argue that displaced populations often form what could be called "compact social blocs", coalitions of solidarity rooted in shared historical injuries, emotional labour, and the ongoing negotiation of legal and social liminality. In my research, these blocs manifest through grassroots initiatives, digital storytelling, and participation in translocal queer networks. Events such as Refugee Week, art collectives, and queer migrant organising circles serve as platforms for redefinition, places where identities can be re-articulated outside of the state's classificatory gaze. These are not just support groups, they are sites of strategic self-representation, where migrants articulate new grammars of belonging, often outside of formal integration programmes.

Policy frameworks in the UK and elsewhere have often equated integration with assimilation, measuring success by indicators such as language acquisition, employment, or civic compliance. Yet these frameworks often ignore the cultural, emotional, and relational dimensions of integration that are central to queer migrants' lives. By contrast, my research shows that collective identity provides an alternative model of integration, one that prioritises cohesion without conformity, and participation without being erased. Through collective identity, queer forced migrants build intercultural bridges, create spaces of care, and participate in social dialogue that challenges exclusionary policies and practices. This supports the arguments of Phillip & Berman (2003), Weng & Lee (2016), and Khan (2008), who argue that identity-based community organising is essential for fostering inclusive public spheres and combating isolation, distrust, and community fragmentation. Moreover, collective identities offer protection against symbolic violence, they allow queer migrants to resist being misnamed, misunderstood, or miscategorised by host societies.

Despite this potential, collective identity formation is also constrained by material and structural limitations. As my study reveals, many queer forced migrants continue to experience social isolation from both queer and migrant communities, distrust due to racialised or gendered stereotypes, and legal precarity, which undermines long-term participation in activism or community building. These constraints limit not only access to community networks but also the ability to engage in political life as equals. This is where Reicher & Hopkins (2001) and Howarth (2002) locate the most urgent task of collective identity work, not only in affirming who one is but in transforming the social conditions that constrain identity expression.

My research shows that queer forced migrants in Wales are not passive recipients of integration policy, they are producers of political and cultural meaning, shaping what community, solidarity, and inclusion can look like. By centering collective identity, my work

offers a more humane, democratic, and justice-oriented model of integration, one grounded in relational ethics, pluralistic recognition, and the transformative power of collective voice.

Deepening the Theoretical Core: Integrating Queer Forced Migrants in Wales through an Intersectional Lens

The integration of queer forced migrants is both a moral imperative and a vital benchmark of a democratic society's commitment to inclusivity, human rights, and pluralism. For individuals situated at the intersections of queerness, displacement, and systemic vulnerability, integration cannot be reduced to a checklist of policy outcomes. Rather, it must be understood as deeply political, emotional, and material process, one that engages with historical injustice, contemporary inequality, and the aspirations for dignity and belonging. This research conceives integration not as a one-directional path towards assimilation, but as a negotiated space of resistance, transformation, and relational belonging.

To that end, this study insists that integration strategies must not be designed for queer forced migrants but co-produced with them. Integration imposed from above risks reproducing paternalistic dynamics and overlooking the complexities of lived experience. It fails to account for the epistemologies, aspirations, and strategies that queer migrants themselves bring to the table. Therefore, this project adopts a “bird’s eye view” approach, analysing integration from multiple perspectives: the strategic actions of Welsh Government officials, the work of third-sector leaders and practitioners, and, most crucially, the situated voices of queer forced migrants navigating the everyday realities of settlement, visibility, and recognition in Wales.

This study is anchored in an intersectional theoretical framework, drawing on Crenshaw’s (1989) concept of intersectionality to examine how queer migrants experience integration through the prism of race, gender identity, sexuality, nationality, language, legal status, and socio-economic position. Rather than treating queer asylum seekers and refugees as a homogenous category, the research explores how racialisation, classed hierarchies, and surveillance regimes shape both the possibilities and limits of integration. As Luibhéid (2005) and Cantú (2009) have noted, the narratives of queer migration are embedded within global power relations and often reproduce colonial and heteronormative logics. This study contributes to the literature by unpacking how such dynamics materialise in the Welsh context.

In particular, the research draws on Cantú’s (2009) concept of the “sexuality of migration,” which positions sexuality not simply as a reason for flight, but as a form of symbolic capital and constraint that operates across migration routes, borders, and asylum regimes. For queer migrants in Wales, sexuality may become a site of both scrutiny and leverage, a

means of claiming rights but also a terrain of surveillance. This duality is central to understanding how integration is structured by legibility and desirability, and how migrants resist or adapt to such structures.

The research also engages with critiques by Karma Chávez (2013) and Nayan Shah (2011), who challenge the linear temporal narratives that dominate integration discourse. Migration is often framed as a journey from repression to liberation, from the Global South to the safety of the Global North. However, queer migrants often encounter cyclical, fragmented, and non-linear experiences characterised by extended periods of precarity, multiple displacements, or even reverse migrations. Chávez's concept of deservingness is particularly relevant here: access to protection and inclusion is not equally distributed, but contingent on racialised, gendered, and classed criteria that shape who is seen as a legitimate subject of care. My study builds on these critiques by showing how integration in Wales is mediated by bureaucratic delays, unstable immigration statuses, and uneven community receptivity. The so-called "integration timeline" is fractured by waiting periods, temporary accommodation, employment restrictions, and inconsistent support services. These interruptions are not merely logistical, they are existential, eroding migrants' sense of time, purpose, and futurity. By centering the voices of queer forced migrants, my research reveals how integration is not experienced as progress, but often as suspension.

In choosing to focus on Wales, my work makes a distinctive and much-needed contribution to queer migration studies. The academic literature remains disproportionately centred on national capitals and global cities, such as London, Toronto, or New York. In contrast, Wales presents a devolved political landscape, with its own language politics, cultural narratives, and policy ambitions. The Welsh Government's commitment to becoming a "Nation of Sanctuary" suggests a progressive ethos that prioritises inclusion and rights-based frameworks. However, my findings expose the gap between policy rhetoric and everyday reality.

Although policy documents speak of sanctuary, my research uncovers structural and systemic limitations. These include regional disparities in service provision, a lack of culturally competent housing for queer migrants, and the absence of targeted LGBTQ+ asylum support. In many cases, third-sector organisations are overburdened and under-resourced, relying on volunteers or inconsistent funding streams to fill critical gaps. While some regions foster innovative partnerships between grassroots organisations and local authorities, others remain disconnected or hostile. My research demonstrates that integration is unevenly territorialised, with migrants' access to rights, recognition, and belonging contingent on local politics and institutional culture. I explore how asylum regimes

render certain queer lives unlivable, exposing them to homelessness, medical neglect, or deportation. These are not unfortunate byproducts of an overstretched system—they are part of a governance logic that disciplines, categorises, and disposes of queer bodies that are seen as excess or threatening. My focus on topics which include housing, employment restrictions, and trans healthcare in Wales deepens the theoretical critique by highlighting everyday infrastructures of abandonment.

My empirical questions are designed to explore both the institutional design and lived navigation of integration, and as such my research offers a multi-scalar contribution to queer migration studies. It amplifies the voices of queer migrants who are too often spoken about but rarely centered. In doing so, my work lays essential groundwork for intersectional, relational, and anti-colonial models of integration that can transform both policy and practice.

Collective Identity

The concept of collective identity is pivotal for understanding and enhancing the integration experiences of queer forced migrants in the UK. This lens offers insights into how marginalised groups, such as queer forced migrants, navigate societal norms and political landscapes to assert their existence and advocate for their rights. In the context of my study, collective identity serves as an explanatory perspective through which to explore how queer forced migrants in the U.K. form cohesive groups, mobilise for activism, and negotiate their identities within the broader socio-political context. By examining how collective identities are constructed and utilised by queer forced migrants, the study aims to illustrate their agency in challenging dominant narratives and advocating for inclusive asylum policies.

Queer forced migrant's integration is facilitated by collective identities, as this nurtures positive community relations and intercultural dialogue. Collective identities enable queer forced migrants to challenge discrimination and promotes social inclusion, through providing a platform for community networks and organised activism (Phillip & Berman, 2003; Weng & Lee, 2016; Khan, 2008b; Fortier, 2010). Additionally, queer forced migrants are supported to resist the pressure to assimilate through collective identities, as well as providing a space to affirm diverse identities. This promotes informed understandings of complex identities that transcend host societies' over-simplistic categorisations, and is therefore essential for integration (Ferguson, 2004; Lentin & Titley, 2011). Queer forced migrants can contribute to social dialogue on inclusion and diversity through asserting their identities through collective action. This can lead to positive changes on integration policies and practice.

Furthermore, collective identities play a crucial role in fostering positive community relations with dominant British and Welsh cultures and encouraging inter-dialogue, which are deemed essential for integration by policymakers. Through organised activism and community

networks, queer forced migrants create spaces for dialogue and collaboration, enabling them to challenge discrimination and promote social inclusion. These collective efforts not only empower queer forced migrants but also contribute to a stronger sense of community cohesion and resilience in the face of adversity. However, despite the potential of collective identity to promote integration, queer forced migrants may still face barriers such as isolation, lack of social trust, and uncertainty regarding legal status. These challenges can hinder their ability to fully engage with mainstream society and access essential services and support networks.

The concept of collective identity signifies a shift in focus from the connection between the self and a specific social group to a broader inclusion of society at large. Reicher (2004) contends that identities are constructed as projects aimed at facilitating collective action, particularly when determined by those acting collectively to influence the social landscape. Collective identities are conceived as shared spaces associated with collective agency and situated within action and interaction (Snow, 2001). Melucci (1989, 1996) underscores the significance of 'the other' in collective identities, framing it as a process rather than a static product. This process is manifested through common language, rituals, and practices, reflecting a network of distinct relations that differentiate oneself from others. It is through this ongoing process that individuals identify themselves (Howarth, 2002). Fominaya (2010) argues against reducing collective identity to a single shared characteristic, advocating for an inclusive approach that acknowledges its inherent contradictory nature (McDonald, 2002).

Collective identities are shaped by various socio-political, geo-historical contexts, and perceptions of 'the other,' through the construction of national identities (Reicher, 2004). Queer forced migrants constitute a marginalised group aware of the lack of recognition and appreciation for their identities by the political status quo, which promotes assimilation into 'Britishness' (Ferguson, 2004; Fortier, 2010; Lentin & Titley, 2011). To assert their existence and navigate the political climate, queer forced migrants utilise collective identities to showcase their diversity and values through activism, creating what Gramsci terms 'a dual perspective' (1982) to juxtapose 'imagined' Britishness and challenge hegemonic asylum policies (Burgess et al., 2006; Khan, 2015a).

Through activism, queer forced migrants take the first steps in fostering positive community relations with dominant British culture and encouraging inter-dialogue, deemed essential for integration by asylum sector professionals (Phillip & Berman 2003; Weng & Lee, 2016; Khan, 2008b; Fortier, 2010). Additionally, collective identities serve as a basis for building community networks to counter elevated levels of racism from host communities (Briskman & Cemlyn, 2005; Temple & Moran, 2005).

Forced Migrants' creation of new social groups and support networks are often driven by factors such as isolation, lack of social trust, and uncertainty surrounding their legal status. Through these groups and networks, forced migrants can engage in organised activism, as well as develop a framework for intergroup acceptance and resistance (Gilroy, 2001). Dummet (2001) suggests that forced migrants' solidarity and desire to support each other is strengthened through shared experiences of challenges presented by the UK immigration system. He maintains that this can lead to collective action that is able to transcend national and geographical boundaries. Through using collective identity, forced migrants can form 'compact social blocs' that are able to resist the state's hegemonic asylum policies and promote a stronger sense of collective identity and structured imagined community (Das, 2006).

Collective identity offers a powerful tool for resistance and empowerment. Addressing systemic barriers and promoting greater social inclusion are essential to the integration of queer forced migrants. As such, collective identity is a key element of queer forced migrants' integration experiences.

2.12 The POV of this Study

This study uses a "bird's eye view" perspective to focus on integration. This involves analysing the subject from a wide range of perspectives, including both the strategic actions of Welsh Government officials, third-sector CEOs and asylum sector practitioners, as well as the standpoint of queer forced migrants themselves. I will examine the intersecting opportunities and challenges posed by markers queer and forced migrant identities. I incorporate both asylum seekers and refugees into my study of queer forced migrants. Through this research, I aim to illuminate the complex dynamics that facilitate and impede the agency of this marginalised group, within the context of integration.

I have structured my research questions to explore how integration is strategically created and driven in Wales. I focus upon developing understandings of the impacts that integration initiatives and policies have on the experiences of queer forced migrants. I will examine the opportunities and limitations that facilitate or block queer forced migrant's integration in Wales. Additionally, I will consider the broader policy implications of their integration attempts. Through this study, I aim to contribute a deeper understanding of queer forced migrants' experiences of the integration process, that can become a vehicle to advocate for more inclusive and equitable policies and practices that empower them within the integration journey.

Three central claims are made in this thesis:

1) Impact of Integration Initiatives

Integration initiatives and policies in Wales significantly impact the experiences of queer forced migrants, either facilitating or hindering the integration process. Initiatives and policies either contribute to establishing inclusive environments that support the integration of queer forced migrants, or they inhibit integration efforts through perpetuating barriers and discrimination.

2) Integration Opportunities and Limitations

Queer forced migrants in Wales face a range of integration opportunities and limitations. These influence their ability to fully participate in society and achieve meaningful integration outcomes. Opportunities and limitations are shaped by factors such as access to support services, social acceptance, employment prospects, and legal rights.

3) Broader Policy Implications

There are broader policy scale implications that result from the integration attempts of queer forced migrants in Wales. These implications impact regional, national, and international development and implementation of asylum and integration policies. Examining the integration experiences of queer forced migrants in Wales, adds essential knowledge to understandings of integration policies. This knowledge is transferable to broader integration spaces and can help identify areas for policy reform and improvement.

2.13 Conclusion

Through this literature review, I have reviewed a wide range of academic works as well as action plans and policy documentation. I have explored the complex trajectory of asylum policy and practice in the UK and Wales, encompassing multiple areas, such as the intricacies of asylum decision making and concepts and strategies related to integration. Through this, I have elucidated the dynamic interactions between historical context, political strategies and public opinion, that impact upon approaches towards integration within the UK and Wales.

The evolution of integration policies and practice is a central theme that I have explored throughout my literature review. I have tracked developments through, from early integration initiatives that prioritise refugee settlement, to more recent attempts to promote social cohesion and economic participation. I have explored the relationships between these policies, and key concepts such as homonationalism and minority influence. Through such key concepts, I provide a lens that is critical to full understanding of the complexities present when considering integration and asylum policy.

My review includes examinations of Wales's approach to asylum policy and integration initiatives within both devolved and broader UK contexts. I highlight the importance of considering regional variations in policy, through showing the implications that Wales's devolved administration has on the integration experiences and outcomes of forced migrants.

I developed the research questions through my literature review. These questions frame my in-depth exploration of integration in Wales and reveal the significant impact that integration initiatives and policies have on queer forced migrants. Ideally integration initiatives support integration through fostering inclusive environments, but in some cases these initiatives perpetuate barriers and discrimination. This highlights the need for more equitable and empowering practices. Through considering the effectiveness of various integration policies and identifying areas for reform, this research contributes to ongoing dialogues on inclusive and equitable integration practices. My literature review has considered the broader implications on regional, national, and international asylum and integration policies resulting from queer forced migrants' integration journeys in Wales.

In conclusion, I have used this literature review to explore the relationships between humanitarian imperatives, political agendas, and socio-economic realities that shape the UK's asylum system and integration frameworks. In critically examining a multitude of relevant themes and concepts, this review provides a comprehensive understanding of the UK and Wales's integrative approaches.

In the next chapter, I discuss my methodology. The methods chapter offers a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion of findings. As such, I contribute nuanced understandings of perspectives on integration held by queer forced migrants, and asylum sector professionals.

3. Methodology

The methods chapter serves as the backbone of my research endeavour. Through it, I will provide a detailed account of the strategies I employed to collect and analyse data. I will explain the methodological approach adopted in this study through comprehensively detailing my use of research methods, sampling techniques, data collection procedures, and data analysis strategies. Through this chapter I hope to justify the systematic framework that I have used to guide my exploration of these marginalised communities' narratives. Developing a proficient methodology has contributed to this research's ability to truly understand the experiences and needs of both participant groups.

My research is grounded in qualitative inquiry, employing an interpretivist phenomenological approach to consider the complex experiences of queer forced migrants in Wales and the perspectives of policymakers. I have used interpretivist phenomenology, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of subjective realities. This is crucial as it allows me to emphasise the significance of individual perspectives and lived experiences, as well as facilitates the generation of concepts and themes from the qualitative data collected. My principal method of data collection was in-depth interviews conducted with participants from both groups. I designed these interviews to acquire rich narratives and insights into queer forced migrants' lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations, as well as the perspectives and policy considerations of asylum sector professionals. These interviews were informed by ethical principles, with participants being provided with comprehensive information about the study and receiving guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

I used grounded theory to guide systematic analysis of the qualitative data. This comprised of a multi-phase coding process that could uncover developing themes and patterns. I provide a close examination of participant narratives through initial line-by-line coding, followed by focused coding to identify key concepts and theoretical directions. Through theoretical coding I have integrated these concepts into a cohesive framework, facilitating the development of substantive theories that are grounded in the data.

3.1 Researcher Positionality

Researcher's positionality holds immense significance within this study. As Maher and Tetreault (1994) suggest, researcher positionality not only shapes subjectivity but also influences the research process, including topic selection, data collection, and analysis. Through this study, I adopt the identity of a "researcher near," (Mannay, 2009), meaning that I am operating within a familiar cultural environment. In creating my research, I leverage my identity as a queer person of colour (PoC) that operates within the grassroots organisation that the participants were recruited from. My contextual familiarity facilitates deeper insights.

Being a “researcher-near” reduces power imbalances between interviewer and interviewees and helps create rapport with participants. Through my researcher positionality, I can navigate the complex nuances of this distinct community and better understand the challenges queer forced migrants face. However, I differentiate myself from an "insider researcher collaborating with insiders" (Labaree, 2002). This is because despite sharing certain community spaces and aspects of my identity with participants, I do not possess the lived experience of being a queer forced migrant in Wales. Though my queer identity and familial history of migration offer valuable insights, I acknowledge that my experiences differ from those who have sought asylum in the UK based on their queer identity.

According to Mannay (2019) it is essential to recognise that being a near researcher comes with its own disadvantages. Entering the field, I cannot entirely disregard my pre-existing knowledge and social relationships with participants. Through acknowledging these biases, I aim to challenge my assumptions and "make the familiar strange" (Mannay, 2009), thereby de-familiarising myself with the community's issues. Regardless of my use of an online ethnography, it was still important to create space between myself as the researcher and participants to allow for a more balanced power dynamic. Through using a range of psychosocial methods, including researcher diaries and researcher life narratives, I facilitated the re-introduction of familiar experiences (Gauntlett, 2007). As a result, I ensured that my involvement in the grassroots organisation did not influence or constrain participant’s ability to feel empowered to share their experiences. I implemented this combination of these strategies to foster an open and equitable research environment, enabling authentic and uninhibited dialogue during the data collection process.

3.2 Epistemological and Ontological Design

This qualitative study utilises a blend of data collection and analysis techniques, specifically online ethnography, and life narratives (Creswell, 2003). The fundamental aim of qualitative research is to grasp how individuals construct frameworks to interpret their surroundings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Epistemologically, qualitative researchers strive for close engagement with the participants they study. This study aligns with the online ethnographic tradition, aiming to uncover realities from the firsthand perspectives of those experiencing them. Given the focus on describing and analysing the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences, online ethnographic studies typically adhere to the interpretivist phenomenology paradigm.

In terms of epistemology, this study is situated within interpretivist phenomenology, as articulated by emphasising in the understanding the variations among individuals or groups whose actions and interactions shape social phenomena and meanings within a particular

context (Saunders et al., 2007). Interpretivist phenomenology researchers are often sensitive to the emotional dimensions within their research, recognising the existence of multiple realities shaped by sociocultural interactions and continually evolving (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Tracy, 2013; Wolcott, 1999).

Ontologically, qualitative researchers endeavour to unveil a spectrum of realities derived from the perspectives and authentic narratives of a diverse array of participants—a principle that strongly resonates with the objectives of this study (Creswell, 2007). This approach acknowledges the multiplicity of lived experiences and aims to capture the richness and complexity of individual interpretations of reality.

My methodological approach is informed by grounded theory, as this allows for the development of theory directly grounded in participant experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2003). Grounded theory's focus on inductive, and flexible data analysis makes it well suited to exploring the nuanced experiences of queer forced migrants, as well as the institutional logics of asylum professionals and policymakers, aligning with the study's emphasis on identity, belonging, and power in migration contexts.

Grounded theory is particularly appropriate given the sensitive and layered nature of queer migration and asylum. The structured approach of grounded theory, beginning with line-by-line coding and advancing through focused and theoretical coding, enables the emergence of themes that are rooted in participants' narratives. This aligns with phenomenological aims to authentically represent lived experiences and allows for an exploratory rather than confirmatory analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Additionally, his study integrates intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and analytical lens. Intersectionality, initially theorised by Crenshaw (1989), provides a means of understanding how multiple axes of identity and structural power converge in shaping the lived realities of queer forced migrants. While grounded theory helps generate empirical insights from participant data, intersectionality ensures that the analysis remains attuned to interlocking systems of oppression. Thus, grounded theory and intersectionality are not in tension but in productive dialogue: grounded theory builds theory from experience, and intersectionality structures how that experience is interpreted in relation to broader power systems (Bilge, 2009; Hancock, 2007).

This integration is further enriched by grounded theory's origins in symbolic interactionism, which is central to understanding how queer forced migrants and policymakers negotiate meaning in their interactions with institutions and each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Symbolic interactionism enables the analysis of micro-level interactions, such as asylum interviews, community integration efforts, and everyday negotiations of identity. When

combined with intersectionality, it allows this study to examine how social meanings are both constructed and constrained by structural forces such as asylum law, homonormativity, and national policy frameworks.

Grounded theory's iterative nature is also well suited to exploring emerging forms of marginalisation that may not be captured by static theoretical frameworks. For example, as themes around structural violence, epistemic exclusion, or homonationalism emerge in the data, grounded theory allows for flexibility in coding and theory development. This responsiveness is crucial for research involving precarious and evolving experiences, such as those of queer forced migrants in legal limbo or policy transition.

Importantly, this methodological integration also addresses critiques of intersectionality that question its operationalisation and complexity (Lutz, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2012; Puar, 2013). While intersectionality offers essential theoretical depth, grounded theory offers analytic clarity and methodological rigour, enabling a structured engagement with multiple identity categories and their interplay in real-world contexts. By adopting intracategorical intersectionality, this research centres specific identity configurations (e.g., lesbian refugees, bisexual cis-male asylum seekers) and explores how these are lived and understood in different sociopolitical contexts (McCall, 2005; Choo & Ferree, 2010).

This integrated methodology thus enables a multi-dimensional understanding of integration, where grounded insights from participant narratives are interpreted through intersectional, symbolic, and structural lenses. It ensures that the research remains rooted in the voices of queer forced migrants while critically engaging with the broader regimes of knowledge, power, and exclusion that shape those voices. By prioritising participants' voices and experiences, qualitative research seeks to uncover the nuanced layers of meaning embedded within their narratives, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. In this study, the emphasis on elucidating multiple realities underscores a commitment to embracing the diversity and complexity inherent in human experiences and perspectives.

3.3 Intersectionality as Theoretical and Methodological Framework

In this study, the framework of intersectionality will serve as a lens to delve into the strategic creation and enactment of integration among queer forced migrants in Wales and its impacts. Intersectionality, introduced in academia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has expanded across various academic fields, including queer migration studies (Cho et al., 2013). Initially integrated into feminist scholarly research, intersectionality seeks to incorporate interconnected identity categories such as nationality, class, and sexuality into design and methodological analyses when studying marginalised populations (Armstrong et

al., 2018; McGuffey, 2013; Collin & Bilge, 2004). This theoretical stance challenges the universalist, often Eurocentric or heteronormative tendencies in traditional scholarship.

In queer theory, early discourses typically privileged white, cisgender, middle-class gay men, leaving out queer people of colour, trans individuals, and those from non-Western contexts. Similarly, migration studies have long been criticised for their heteronormative, desexualised, and sometimes gender-blind approaches (Luibhéid, 2008). Intersectionality allows for a more nuanced analysis by centering the experiences of those at the nexus of multiple marginalisations, such as queer refugees, who may face exclusion from the state, mainstream LGBTQ+ communities, and their ethnic or religious networks simultaneously.

Within queer migration studies, intersectionality serves to describe the multiple oppressions related to sexuality, gender and class (Lykke, 2010). It acts as an analytical tool to understand the power structures that regulate behaviours and shape the lived experiences of queer forced migrants (Bilge, 2009). Furthermore, intersectionality aids in identifying and comprehending the forms of suppression that subgroups face within already marginalised communities (Bilge, 2009). This theoretical orientation illuminates phenomena such as structural violence, homonationalism, minority influence.

Critical Notions of Intersectionality

There are several critical considerations that academic scholars have identified relating to the implementation on intersectional theory. For instance, Lutz (2011) underscored how the application and measurement of intersectional theory is complicated by the fluid and shifting nature of diverse identity categories. Lutz suggested that although these categories' fluidity provides researchers with a degree of freedom by allowing for a wide-ranging examination of multiple categories, this presents practical challenges in determining how many intersecting categories to include within the analysis. Whilst Lutz suggests that this number can be as high as fifteen, Crenshaw proposes a limit of three (Crenshaw, 1989). Consequently, intersectional analysis can become abstract and vague due to the various category configurations, prompting questions about what constitutes a relevant category and appropriate configuration.

Hancock (2007) considers intersectionality to be a holistic approach to empirical research that investigates the sharp edges of identity categories, and the impact that these have on the everyday lives of the members of particular social groups. Through his work, Hancock emphasises the importance of using empirical justification for analysing the relations amongst categories within various contexts. Hancock argues against relying upon an infinite number of categories. Rather he suggests that researchers remain alert to categories that

emerge from the research that might either restrict or facilitate intersection with other categories.

The challenge of operationalising intersectionality as a theoretical framework is acknowledged by Yuval-Davis (2012). She notes this challenge is particularly present when evaluating and measuring instances of discrimination and oppression that are based on sexuality, race, or class. Yuval-Davis argues that individually analysing these categories risks essentialising identities by imposing social and behavioural expectations on category members. This may further marginalise those who do not visibly embody all the required identification criteria.

In contrast to Crenshaw's view, Puar's (2013) perspective on intersectionality diverges significantly. Puar contends that intersectional analyses reproduce 'otherness' and 'over-determinism' by focusing on identity politics at the expense of structurally critiquing power. She argues against intersectional identitarian analyses, claiming they overlook the ways societies capture and reproduce intersectional bodies as sources of information, reducing them to statistical probabilities.

Puar's view is echoed by scholars such as Chavez (2013), Chow (2005), and Singh (2015), who emphasise the fluidity and flexibility of intersectionality. Lugones (2007) argues that intersectionality, as a descriptive tool, fixes identities instead of liberating them. In queer migration research, intersectionality becomes a useful tool for discussing homonationalistic and essentialist structures that produce and survey intersectional identities and societies. Therefore, in this study, I will begin by using two umbrella categories, “queer” and “forced migrant” and delve deeper into more specific intersectional category configurations, such as “bisexual cis male asylum seeker” or “lesbian refugee”, to explore the distinctions between each combination and the concept of integration.

Structural Intersectionality

Crenshaw's concept of structural intersectionality examines how individuals belonging to intersecting identity categories face specific forms of oppression due to discriminatory social structures. This oppression can manifest in many ways, such as unemployment, inadequate housing options, and economic marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989; Brotman, 2013). Applying structural intersectionality to the study of queer forced migrants and integration can provide a macro-level understanding of how discriminatory social structures impact their identity categories and shape their lives (Brotman, 2013; Ou Jin, 2011). Existing literature on queer forced migrants suggests that this population experiences structural marginalisation before, during, and after the asylum process. Studies from the United States have utilised the concept of structural intersectionality to examine broader social dynamics and challenge the

interactions and connections that shape the experiences of queer forced migrants. These interactions encompass both formal and informal networks, including personal relationships, community ties, institutional interactions, and societal structures. By focusing on these dimensions, researchers highlight how queer forced migrants, and their host communities navigate and influence each other across various levels (Carlin & DiGrasia, 2003; Jordan, 2010).

Intracategorical Intersectionality

Intracategorical intersectionality underscores the significance of embracing partiality through practices closely aligned with reflexivity (Berger, 2015). This structured approach emphasises transforming intersectional categories into analytical interactions rather than mere descriptions (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Consequently, it provides nuanced understandings, empowering researchers to enhance data collection methods and guide fieldwork interactions based on prevailing and emergent power dynamics. Intracategorical intersectionality acknowledges the importance placed by scholars in refugee studies on cultivating trust-based relationships with participants (Eastmond, 2007). Consequently, such relationships contribute to advancing and enriching sociological theories with rich data (McCall, 2005). Luibheid (2008) contends that employing intersectionality in queer migration studies offers insight into understanding sexuality within multiple intersecting power relations, including race, nationality, gender, class, citizenship status, and geopolitical location. She argues that sexuality impacts all forced migrants, not just those who identify as queer. Lykke (2010) underscores the paramount importance of intersectionality in migration studies for examining power relations and their impact on forced migrants.

Transnational Intersectionality

The concept of 'transnational intersectionality' originates from 'transnationalism', which underscores how forced migrants occupy diverse and sometimes conflicting social positions both in their host countries and their countries of origin (Anthias, 2012). These social positions vary depending on where forced migrants are in their asylum process, as their experiences of marginalisation based on identity markers such as race, gender, sexuality, and age are neither stable nor linear (Athnias, 2012; Stone et al., 2005; Purkayastha, 2012). 'Transnational intersectionality' sheds light on the nuanced ways in which power dynamics and marginalisation intersect, evolve, obscure, and contest across national contexts in the lives of forced migrants. Exploring these contexts allows for an examination of the multiple and intersecting identities and relationships of forced migrants, thus uncovering contemporary and evolving structures and processes of marginalisation (Anthias, 2012).

The lens of transnational intersectionality is predominantly employed by Canadian migration scholars to address issues such as heterosexism and homophobia in the Canadian context and their impact on the access of queer forced migrants to social services (Mule, 2005; Brotman et al., 2002). Additionally, Canadian scholars have integrated transnational intersectionality into migration studies and social work to investigate how cissexism and cisnormativity shape the accessibility of healthcare services for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals (Pyne, 2012). The utilisation of transnational intersectionality also reflects a shift in Canadian scholarly analyses, focusing on the intersections of citizenship, policy, and practice within sexually diverse communities of queer and transgender people of colour (Brotman et al., 2003; Hulko, 2009; Massaquoi, 2011; Meyer-Cook, 2008; Poon, 2004; 2012; Woodruffe, 2008).

Intersectionality in this study: A Methodological Reflection

The use of intersectionality as a methodological framework for this study offers several key benefits that were critical to the richness, integrity, and social justice-oriented ethos of this study. At its core, intersectionality enabled the capture of complex, layered narratives from participants whose lives are lived at the crossroads of multiple systems of oppression. The participants were not treated as anomalous or marginal cases. Rather, the study placed their lived experiences at the centre of inquiry, thereby challenging dominant epistemologies within both migration studies and queer theory.

To further deepen this analytical framework, the study integrated both structural and transnational intersectionality. This dual approach was employed to bridge the gap between static, policy-driven understandings of integration and the nuanced, lived realities articulated by asylum professionals and queer migrants themselves within various Welsh contexts. Structural intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) provided the lens through which to analyse how systemic forces, such as legal regimes, racialised state surveillance, and welfare conditionality, produce and reinforce marginalisation; the “double oppression model” was particularly relevant, as it exposed how the intersection of refugee status and queer identity intensified challenges in accessing healthcare, housing, legal protection, and community support.

At the same time, transnational intersectionality (Anthias, 2012) allowed for a more spatially and historically attuned analysis. Queer migrants inhabit a web of transnational social locations, wherein their marginalisation in host societies is shaped not only by local structures but also by pre-existing experiences of persecution, displacement, and colonial legacies in their countries of origin. This perspective revealed how belonging, exclusion, and identity are continuously renegotiated, whether through interactions with diasporic

communities, remittances of trauma, or the navigation of Western queer norms. By attending to both structural constraints and transnational flows, the study generated a multi-scalar analysis that traced how queer forced migrants are positioned by the intersecting axes of power across time and space.

This intersectional approach also supported a social justice-oriented, participatory methodology. Participants were not framed as passive recipients of policy but as active knowledge producers. Their narratives were not extracted, flattened, or codified for representational utility, but were engaged with respectfully and reflexively. This method allowed space for counter-narratives to challenge normative assumptions around asylum, queer identity, and national belonging. In doing so, the study disrupted dominant discourses that often define queer migrants either as apolitical victims or as hyper-assimilated "deserving subjects" of Western tolerance.

However, the methodological application of intersectionality was not without its challenges. A central difficulty lay in determining which identity categories to prioritise, given the risk of reifying or essentialising social markers such as "trans," "Black," or "asylum seeker." These are not neutral descriptors but are embedded within historical structures of violence. To mitigate this, the study employed a participant-led logic, allowing for identity categories and their significance to emerge contextually, from within the lived narratives and self-identification of participants themselves.

Another persistent challenge was the potential for methodological overload, a common critique of intersectional research (McCall, 2005; Hancock, 2007). The vast array of intersecting identities present in the sample made comprehensive analysis difficult without sacrificing depth. To address this, the research design prioritised depth over breadth, opting for focused, intensive engagement with a smaller and purposefully diverse sample. This enabled a more textured, grounded, and relational analysis of how power operates through intersecting identities and institutions.

Finally, the adoption of intersectionality as a methodological framework required a rigorous and continuous reflexive practice. The researcher maintained reflective journals, revisited analytical decisions, and engaged critically with both verbal and non-verbal cues within the data. This reflexive posture was essential in avoiding the reification of identities or the abstraction of participants' experiences into rigid typologies. Instead, intersectionality was kept as a living methodology that shaped all phases of the research and remained responsive to the realities of those most affected by exclusionary policies and practices.

In sum, this study's methodological orientation affirms intersectionality not as a fixed template but as a dynamic analytical strategy. By combining structural and transnational intersectionality, and adopting an intracategorical approach to identity, the research was able to theorise and make visible the nuanced ways that oppression, resistance, and belonging manifest in the lives of queer forced migrants in Wales. This approach not only contributes to the empirical literature but also offers a sociologically richer and ethically grounded model for future research on migration, sexuality, and social justice.

3.4 Design Development

Ethnographic Foundations and Research Design Shift

My original research design was centered around ethnography rooted in my extensive involvement within the queer forced migrant community in Wales as well as my participation in policymaker and third sector circles. Prior to commencing data collection, I had been actively engaged with individuals from these communities, discussing their lived experiences, organising advocacy strategies, and managing policy initiatives in various meetings, panels, and conferences over several years as an activist.

Ethnography, as an additional branch to my work, emerged as the most suitable approach due to its holistic social scientific research methodology, deeply rooted in anthropological traditions (Wolcott, 1999). The primary objective of ethnography is to elucidate and explore the lives and social worlds of a specific group of people within a particular context and timeframe. Ethnographers seek to comprehend these phenomena by analysing the lived experiences of individuals within the group, employing methods such as social interaction and observation to uncover patterns and insights within the community they are studying (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Before commencing my data collection, I conducted two face-to-face pilot studies to test my interview questions and research tools. These pilot studies provided invaluable feedback and adjustments to refine my approach. However, just as I was about to embark on my data collection journey, the outbreak of COVID-19 occurred. Like many young researchers, I was compelled to reassess my study design and various other aspects of my research. With all activities, meetings, panels, and conferences transitioning to the online realm, it became evident that an online ethnography would be the most suitable approach for my study.

Justification for Online Ethnography

Online ethnography is a research method that applies ethnographic principles, perspectives, and methodologies to the study of online and virtual settings (Isomäki & Silvennoinen, 2013). Through this approach researchers can study online communities that have been created

through virtual interaction, as well as examine hybrid communities that exist both online and offline. Despite facing initial resistance, digital ethnography has become a widely accepted research method across disciplines, including anthropology, education, political science, and sociology (Hine, 2000). Digital ethnography offers several advantages. These include the ability to access dispersed communities, the opportunity to observe interactions in real-time, and the capacity to collect substantial levels of data across multiple digital mediums (Hine, 2000).

Originally, I did not plan to utilise Online Ethnography as a research method within this study. My shift to using online ethnography was influenced by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many communities to move into online spaces. However, my use of this method was not just a matter of necessity but gave me an opportunity to explore the unique dynamics of the queer PoC forced migrant community in Wales in unprecedented ways. Markham (2013) highlighted that online platforms create virtual spaces where communities can form around shared interests, therefore expanding traditional definitions of the ethnographic field site. I was able to observe and participate in a rich tapestry of interactions presented through online spaces. Through online spaces I witnessed the community's response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. I witnessed how during hard times the community rallied together, navigated the pandemic's challenges, and facilitated online accessibility for disconnected group members. I used online ethnography for a period lasting a year from 2021 to 2022. Through this method I significantly enhanced my knowledge, allowing me to provide more comprehensive data than solely traditional ethnographic methods could have.

My shift into online ethnography enabled me to study interactions among geographically dispersed queer forced migrant communities across Wales, which would have been difficult to access in person (Hine, 2000). Queer forced migrants living in rural Wales experience vast differences from those in urban areas. This can be especially seen in areas such as community support, visibility, resource accessibility, and advocacy opportunities. In urban areas, isolation and discrimination is reduced as there is generally stronger LGBTQ+ networks, access to specialised services and more tolerant environments (Rahman, 2020; Valentine, 2001). Conversely, rural areas often lack these resources, leading to less visibility and greater vulnerability for queer forced migrants (Bell & Valentine, 1995). Urban settings offer a multitude of platforms for advocacy, such as pride events and community workshops. Rural areas will often only have access to smaller grassroots efforts that have limited visibility (Oswin, 2007; Rahman, 2020). Such disparities highlight the need for tailored policies and community-building initiatives within rural areas, that can bridge gaps and

ensure equal access to resources and support across all queer forced migrants (UNHCR, 2022; Mulé et al., 2021).

I have observed that digital platforms often serve as spaces for organising real-world activities or maintaining long-distance social connections (Leander & McKim, 2003). This overlap between online and offline experiences requires me to analyse how digital interactions shape behaviours in physical spaces and vice versa, integrating insights from both contexts into my research (Pink et al., 2016). As a result, the nature of online spaces has pushed me to reflect on my digital presence and its potential impact on the communities I study. As a digital ethnographer, I often take on a more visible role within the online community, which can influence the dynamics of interactions (Hine, 2000). This visibility requires greater reflexivity about my role as a researcher and the potential effects of my online presence on the studied group (Postill & Pink, 2012).

The shift to online spaces has expanded the possibilities for my ethnographic research, offering new ways to study cultures and social interactions. At the same time, I have had to adapt my methods and ethical considerations to address the unique complexities of digital environments, ensuring that my approach remains sensitive to the nuances of online communities.

Methodological Adaptations and Challenges

Online ethnography provided me with the opportunity to interact with the forced migrant community to produce detailed observations, experiences, and learnings. Witnessing marginalised communities using online spaces to not only survive but thrive and expand their membership base during a global pandemic, was truly inspiring. A unique but solemn richness was added to my study, as observed the isolation, pain, anger, and frustration experienced by community members in relation to authorities and marginalisation. Utilising technology-based data collection methods became a natural and practical choice within the context of my research (Lomborg, 2012).

Despite its advantages, my use of online ethnography as a research method presented a range of ethical challenges, particularly regarding privacy, consent and anonymity. I needed to consider defining the boundaries of what constitutes a "public" or "private" space online, to ensure the protection of participants' identities (Bruckman, 2002). Due to threats such as internet disruptions and technological failures, I took proactive measures to prevent losing communication with my participants. For example, I provided each participant with my dedicated phone number, acquired specifically for the data collection period, as well as at least one alternative online link. This diminished the risk of losing communication, through ensuring that participants were able to reach me through multiple channels.

Another challenge of online ethnography is that there is a need for the researcher to possess strong digital literacy skills. This is needed both for the researcher to access online spaces, and to assist participants with online accessibility. Thankfully possessed a good level of digital skills prior to my research, though I ensured to develop and strengthen these prior to engaging in online ethnography.

Online ethnography presented challenges as many participants residing in dispersal accommodations lacked access to private spaces. This necessitated careful consideration of timing for the research's online interactions. As a result, most data collection activities were scheduled for early mornings or late evenings. Participants were more likely to have spaces to themselves in these timeframes. Through being flexible to participant needs around research times, I facilitated participation through improving accessibility.

There was a risk of excluding participants with limited IT and literacy skills, as well as those lacking access to Wi-Fi or the internet. To address this practical challenge, I collaborated with Glitter Cymru and successfully secured funding to provide essential resources such as data packages, tablets, laptops, smartphones, and mobile top-ups. This initiative was particularly critical during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure equitable participation through bridging the "digital divide" (Selwyn, 2004). Providing these resources was crucial in enabling participants to engage fully in the research process, ensuring their voices were heard, and their experiences documented.

Online ethnography gave me rich insights into how queer PoC forced migrant communities across Wales navigated the pandemic. I was able to see how communities supported their members with online accessibility and advocated to Welsh Government and authorities about their needs and concerns. Online engagement gave me a rich and nuanced insight into queer forced migrants' lived experiences during the pandemic. Through this research method, I was able to document the community's resilience, adaptability and strength. The proactive measures and adaptations I took to ensure accessibility and continuous communication were instrumental in overcoming the challenges posed by the shift to an online ethnography

Deepening Community Engagement

Before commencing this study, I already considered myself to be a key player within the community. However, to deepen community engagement I further engaged with the community and sector. I identified key organisations and individuals and attended meetings with these key stakeholders. For example, the Welsh Refugee Council, the Welsh Refugee Coalition, LGBTQ+ All Wales Network, NHS Mental Health and Wellbeing Forum, DPIA's Advocacy Forum and key stakeholder meetings with the Welsh Government. I also

participated in UK wide sector meetings led by Stonewall, and one to one meeting with organisations such as Rainbow Migration and Micro Rainbow. Through extensive engagement, I was able to gain a first-hand understanding of the strategy, decision making, and operations of these organisations.

Building relationships with key stakeholders helped me build stronger links and trust within the asylum and refugee community. I positioned myself as both advocate and ally, rather than just a researcher. Using an immersive approach, allowed me to gain insider knowledge and created a collaborative environment where individuals became more comfortable to share experiences and ideas. Deepening my community engagement ultimately provided me with a rich and detailed lens through which I could understand the broad sociopolitical context surrounding queer PoC forced migrant communities in Wales.

Use of Psychosocial Methods

This research utilises a psychosocial narrative interviewing approach to gather in-depth, nuanced insights from both queer forced migrants and third-sector policymakers. This approach consists of using interviews to collect data on the participants experiences and perspectives. I chose this method because of its unique capacity to capture individuals' complex and subjective experiences. Rather than solely being able to share their factual experiences, psychosocial methods allow participants to share the emotional and psychological dimensions of these experiences. Such dimensions are essential to truly understand the impacts that integration policies have on queer forced migrants. Use of psychosocial methods aligns with the interpretivist framework, which prioritise subjective realities and aim to reveal how individuals make sense of their experiences within specific socio-political contexts (Mack et al., 2005). My established relationships with local organisations and community leaders further helped me gain insight into the cultural nuances of participants' experiences (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004).

Psychosocial methods provide a respectful and ethically responsible approach for the researcher to engage with participants. In utilising this method I adhering to robust ethical guidelines, fully briefing each participant on the study's aims, methods, as well as their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, in line with the ethical standards established by Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001). My research acknowledges the vulnerability of queer forced migrants, a majority of whom have experienced deep trauma. For many, this vulnerability can create hesitancy in sharing personal stories. As such, careful ethical consideration was critical to use of this method, as well as ensuring informed consent and guaranteeing confidentiality. Throughout my research, I adopted trauma-informed approaches that emphasise sensitivity to participants' mental and emotional states. For

example, I ensured to avoid intrusive questions that could evoke distress (Herman, 2015). I also paid attention to non-verbal communication such as body language or hesitation to guide me in adjusting or pausing discussions. As a result, participants were provided with full agency to pause or stop interviews, ensuring a safe and empowering interview environment (Baird & Boyle, 2012). Given the vulnerabilities of forced migrants, I integrated support services into the research framework. I gave participants the resources to address any challenges arising from their involvement, including offering access to counselling, legal aid, or advocacy services (Goodkind, 2006).

Psychosocial interview methods are characterised by their unstructured and in-depth nature. Throughout my interviews I facilitated organic conversation through use of loosely open-ended questions. My aim during all interviews was to be an active listener. This allowed me to gather data on each respondent's experience of integration, to identify underlying policy mechanisms within the forced migration sector in Wales.

The interviews were deliberately informal, as this gave respondents the freedom to 'freely associate' and share stories and life narratives, with minimal input from me the researcher. My methodological approach resembles the 'biographical interpretative method', as described by Hollway and Jefferson (2000a). The biographical interpretative method was designed to facilitate understanding through four key principles. Firstly, use of open-ended questions encourages respondents to discuss the meaning and quality of their experiences, rather than providing simple yes or no responses. Secondly, encouraging stories allows for a deeper exploration of the respondent's experiences and choices. This can provide insight into projective communication, as well as the dynamics of transference and countertransference within the interview relationship. Thirdly, interviewers are encouraged to avoid the use of 'why' questions. This prevents clichéd responses or provision of sociological explanations and encourages respondents to share narratives. Finally, they suggest mirroring respondents' ordering and phrasing. This ensures that follow-up questions are tailored to participants own paradigms, allowing for a more organic conversation flow.

Psychosocial methods require disciplined listening, and the researcher's ability to not impose external interpretations on respondents' stories, but act as a facilitating catalyst. This method requires developments throughout the process, both in terms of actively listening to respondents and identifying themes for further exploration. "Free association" is a psychoanalytic technique central to this method, as respondents are allowed to structure the interview and choose what they 'feel' like talking about. This provides valuable insights into unconscious feelings and motivations, which may not be accessible through traditional research methods (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a).

Psychosocial methods' emphasis on empathy and relational engagement fosters trust between the researcher and participant. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a). This is a key advantage, especially when engaging with queer forced migrants, who may feel a heightened sense of vulnerability and distrust due to past experiences of persecution, isolation, and exclusion. Traditional interview approaches risk inadvertently replicating external power dynamics or reducing participants' narratives to simplified accounts. The psychosocial approach mitigates these risks, creating a supportive environment where participants feel seen and understood holistically as individuals. The life stories of queer forced migrants are often deeply personal and painful. This approach utilises a compassionate and ethically attuned method that significantly counteracts re-traumatisation and allows participants to share freely and honestly (Mack et. al, 2005)

Psychosocial approaches centre the intersectionality of queer forced migrants' identities, acknowledging how their experiences of forced migration are influenced by the interplay of factors such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. As such, this method allows my research to capture these layered experiences, enabling a highly nuanced analysis that respects the interconnections within participants' identities. Non-verbal cues and emotional cues are fundamental in bringing comprehensive understandings of participants' experiences. Trauma and marginalisation are often communicated as much through silence, pauses, and emotional reactions as through words. The psychosocial approach places value on the interpretation of expressions. This interpretive depth is essential for research on queer forced migration, as the researcher becomes able to read implicit meanings and capture unspoken emotional truths (Orb et al., 2001)

Finally, I will note the psychosocial method's value in relation to sensitively interacting with the internalised impacts of stigma and shame that queer forced migrants may carry (Orb et al., 2001). Due to their queer identity, many of my participants have experienced rejection from both society, family and community members. Through creating spaces that acknowledges internal struggles and frame these within a supportive dialogue, the psychosocial method enables participants to reclaim and reinterpret their stories on their own terms. Participants are resultantly empowered to reconstruct narratives that can acknowledge their resilience and agency, within their experiences of a hostile socio-political context (Mack et al. 2005).

Collecting Life Narratives

Life narratives constitute a vital component of my research design. This is a qualitative research method that seeks to understand individual or group experiences through collecting and analysing personal stories. Life narratives align with the principles of ethnography, as

they are collaborative efforts between the interviewee and interviewer, (Visweswaran, 1996). Use of life narratives is especially poignant regarding those who face exclusion from societal power dynamics (Harding, 2004). Considering their lived experiences serves as a valuable source of knowledge that is rooted in the struggle against shared group oppressions (Hirschmann, 1997). Life narratives offer marginalised groups a platform to voice their identities (MacAdams, 1993). The use of life narratives is aligned with intersectional feminist standpoint traditions, which prioritise amplifying the voices of minority and marginalised groups. Given that marginalised life experiences are often overlooked in dominant power structures, life narratives serve as important vehicle to produce knowledge that illuminates collective struggles against oppression (Harding, 2004; Hirschmann, 1997). Despite interconnected experiences of oppression across various social dimensions (Hirschmann, 1997), it is critical to remember that life narratives are not purposed to imply a singular perspective among all marginalised groups.

Life narratives, as a research method, complement my use of online ethnography, as this explicitly acknowledges and analyses the researcher's personal connection with the participants (Vis Eswaran, 1996). Life narratives and that daily human reality can be viewed as socially constructed, akin to an enacted narrative (Czarniawska, 1998). They acknowledge that individuals construct stories about their own lives (Hirschmann, 1997). Adopting a life narrative approach requires identifying "eligible candidates" who embody the criteria of interest to the researcher (Warren, 2001). Etter-Lewis (1991) suggests that oral narratives are crucial in aiding understanding of diverse viewpoints through providing a unique and thought-provoking means of capturing information. Life narratives offer marginalised groups the opportunity to voice their experiences which are often unremarked upon in mainstream discourse (Etter-Lewis, 1991). MacAdams (1993), notes that life narratives can be seen as "personal myths," that shape identity through organising stories into a revised biographical narrative. As my study’s objective is to gain deeper insights into individuals' identities, life stories is a particularly valuable research method.

The researcher approaching interviewees in a trustworthy manner is particularly vital to the life narrative approach, due to the sensitivities involved in discussing private, and sometimes traumatic, experiences. Hence, I initiated conversations by discussing participants’ feelings and general life experiences in Wales (Appendix A). Many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their experiences, highlighting the importance of having someone listen to their stories (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). As the life narrative space is informal, participants sometimes sought my opinions and life narrative, deviating from traditional question and answer interviews. This approach, characterised by occasional sharing of individual opinions, aligns with interpretivist phenomenological concepts on

interviewing (Riessman, 2001). As supported by Atkinson and Flint (2001) and Riessman (2001), I would argue that life stories are co-constructed between the teller and the interviewer, making life narratives an interactive process of constructing and interpreting experiences. Co-construction is facilitated through asking directive questions, which helps to alleviate power imbalances between researcher and participant. As the interview progresses, this collaborative process can lead to a sense of pride and satisfaction for the researcher.

Researcher Diaries

Throughout the fieldwork, I maintained a detailed diary in which I recorded my emotions after each interview. Upon reflection, I noticed a prevailing theme of guilt. I recognised that solely for the purpose of research I was asking for my participant's time, and often eliciting deeply personal, sometimes traumatic stories. This realisation served as a stark reminder of my privilege, leaving me feeling uneasy. After some interviews, participants requested practical assistance, such as accompanying them to the Home Office. I felt compelled to consider these requests, aiming to alleviate my guilt and rebalance what felt like an unequal relationship. While I did provide various forms of support, such as writing letters of support and editing blogs, I refrained from accompanying any participants to the Home Office.

It is common for qualitative interviewers to maintain relationships with respondents beyond the research (Warren, 2001). Oakley (1981) suggests that there is an obligation for women interviewing women maintain contact, whilst Alvesson (2003) notes that shared characteristics such as age, race, and background can develop a sense of camaraderie between researchers and participants. Indeed, I continued to communicate via text to many of my participants after the interviews, allowing me to check in and discuss topics raised during our conversations. Feedback from participants indicated that they found the research enjoyable and beneficial, enhancing their self-worth and providing insights into their personal challenges.

Additionally, to a diary, I wrote memos after research encounters. Through these memos I captures emerging insights and reflections on interactions my participants. This served a different purpose to my diary, which primarily offered a space to document shifts in understanding and to explore the emotional complexities of the research.

Co-production Workshops

I conducted three co-production workshops in collaboration with some of the queer forced migrant participants. The purpose of these sessions was to design the semi-structured script provided to the study's asylum sector professional participants. As such, the questions

intended for the asylum sector professionals were coproduced with queer forced migrants (see Appendix B).

I utilised this integrative approach to data collection to empower the queer forced migrant community through positioning them as stakeholders within the research process. The co-production workshops included representatives from 'seldom heard communities'. As such, I prioritised their voices and perspectives through merely facilitating the discussion, prioritising aspects of the session where I could listen and take notes on what participants would like to inquire from asylum sector processionals.

The co-production workshops encompassed various activities, including joint fact-finding, participatory policy analysis, collaborative dialogues, and interactive knowledge exchange. The insights generated during these sessions served as the foundation for constructing the policy maker interview script. Through this collaborative approach, constructive dialogue among the queer forced migrants drove both the identification of issues and the exploration of potential solutions. This process involved thorough exploration, discussion, and negotiation of diverse knowledge domains to inform decision-making. Using Edelenbos et al.'s (2011) framework for assessing co-production workshops, these sessions could be characterised as instances of "medium interaction". This indicates that joint activities were strategically developed with input from participants, with the ultimate outcome was creating questions to generate knowledge, the objective was not to establish a common knowledge base beyond the context of the policy maker interviews.

One to One Interviews (Asylum Sector Professionals)

For my one-to-one interviews with asylum sector professionals, the co-production workshops produced a set of semi-structured open-ended questions (Appendix B). This choice was purposeful, in pursuit of creating a conversational and informal atmosphere. In most instances, I emailed this semi-structured script to the participants ahead of our interview to solicit their approval and facilitate their preparation. This approach provided participants, many of whom were public figures, with the opportunity to delve into their personal and organisational perspectives whilst also allowing them time to formulate their responses.

The semi-structured interviews were divided into three distinct sections, each represented by a distinct form of questioning. Firstly, initial open-ended question, secondly, intermediate questions, and finally, concluding questions. Additionally, I introduced a category containing probing questions, which served as a guideline to ensure that the line of questioning remained respectful and non-intrusive.

Each section of the interview explored various aspects of the participants' opinions. The initial open-ended questions served a dual purpose, allowing participants to provide their own narrative whilst also setting the stage for following conversations. The intermediate questions facilitated the exploration of themes and ideas emerging from the initial responses, as well as addressing any new concepts introduced by the participants. The concluding questions primarily consisted of follow-up inquiries aimed at clarifying points and ensuring mutual understanding. Finally, the closing questions were designed to respectfully conclude the interview interaction.

3.5 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations are fundamental to this study, especially due to the vulnerability of many of my participants. Each section of my methodology chapter bears their own ethical implications. I obtained ethical approval for this research from the SREC on December 11, 2020. Given the necessity of conducting fieldwork during the COVID lockdowns, updated ethical approval was secured on April 20, 2021 (Appendix C). Consent in this study is regarded as revocable, granting participants the freedom to withdraw from or rejoin the study at any point.

Prior to initiating the one-to-one interviews, I engaged in extensive discussions regarding anonymity with potential participants. Multiple participants expressed concerns regarding sharing information relating to their immigration status, prompting the adoption of measures such as altering participants' names and providing only approximate geographical locations of their home countries. Additionally, specific dates and locations that could potentially lead to identification were omitted. A breakdown of Cardiff University's data protection policy was included in the consent form to further reassure participants. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research, with the understanding that information shared would be secure under data protection, even after entering the public domain.

As an active member of the local queer community, I was concerned regarding the potential for altered researcher-participant relationships post-interview. To address this, participants were assured during briefings that the interview process should not impact existing relationships. Furthermore, I refrained from leveraging personal knowledge acquired prior to the study to influence responses to personal questions. Whilst pre-existing rapport with some participants was beneficial, maintaining objectivity was essential to avoid evading difficult topics. As sessions required self-reflection but also had a collective character, I prepared to tackle unexpected response areas such as illegal activity, domestic violence or drug use. Since the findings could impact the participants’ wellbeing, I was extremely careful

about which type of information I collected, and only gathered data that was essential for my specific research aims.

Engaging with participants who shared deeply traumatic experiences had a significant emotional and psychological impact on me throughout this research process. Listening to narratives of pain, loss, and systemic marginalisation was incredibly challenging, especially since many of these stories involved violence, persecution, and displacement that the participants had endured. This constant exposure to such distressing material led to my feelings of vicarious trauma—a well-documented phenomenon where researchers and practitioners absorb some of the emotional pain of those they study (Sampson et al., 2009). The impact that these stories had on me manifested in various ways. These included feelings of sadness, anxiety, and moments of emotional exhaustion. Often, stories shared by participants lingered in my thoughts long after the interviews had ended, making it difficult to fully disengage from the emotional weight of the research. At times, I struggled with a sense of helplessness, feeling overwhelmed by the structural injustices faced by the participants, which were beyond what I could address directly as a researcher.

To cope with this emotional toll, I implemented several strategies to maintain my well-being throughout the research. These included debriefing sessions with my supervisors and receiving peer support from colleagues who had had experience in similar research contexts. Attending debriefing sessions with my supervisors provided an opportunity after each interview to process their emotional impact. This assisted me to promptly address any feelings of empathy fatigue or secondary trauma. These sessions were crucial in preventing the buildup of stress and giving me a space to reflect on my emotional responses (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). They also offered a space for critical reflection and feedback, allowing me to refine my approach and remain sensitive to the ethical complexities involved in conducting research regarding queer forced migrants. Additionally, these conversations guided me on how to maintain professional boundaries. As noted previously, on occasion participants asked me for assistance after being interviewed and this required case by case negotiation that considers my dual role as researcher and as an activist within the community.

Throughout the research process, I made a conscious effort to maintain self-care routines, including regular exercise, time outdoors, and engaging in creative activities. These activities provided a sense of normalcy and mental relief, as well as giving me a necessary distance from the intensity of the research. Additionally, I set strict boundaries around my work schedule. I ensured to take regular breaks and avoided engaging with sensitive material late in the day, allowing me to recharge from the emotional strain (Kiyimba & O'Reilly, 2016). I found reflective journaling to be a valuable method for processing my

experiences. Writing down the challenges and emotions that arose during the research helped me to externalise my feelings and better understand my reactions. This also allowed me to track the evolution of my emotional responses over time. These practices both served as a form of emotional release and helped me to stay mindful of my own well-being. I believe that this is an essential part of conducting ethical research (Etherington, 2007).

The ethical considerations relating to my research not only related to myself and the queer forced migrant participants, but also to the asylum sector professionals interviewed. Asylum sector professionals' public-facing roles and contributions to sensitive discussions carry professional, institutional, and political implications. This group's need for anonymity was paramount, particularly given the potential for their views to be associated with their professional roles or institutions. Consequently, to ensure the ethical integrity of the research process it was essential to safeguard their anonymity through employing tailored strategies. Throughout this study I describe all professionals through general terms such as "a senior policymaker in regional governance," rather than identifying individuals through specific titles, departments or geographical areas. Moreover, I aggregated insights from policymakers in the reporting process, as a method of ensuring individual contributions were indistinguishable. Through this strategy I minimised the risk of participants being associated with specific views or statements. Prior to the interviews, I provided professional participants with detailed information on how their responses would be anonymised and incorporated into the study. I carefully framed the interview questions to obtain information without proposing perspectives or leading participants toward disclosing controversial or politically sensitive responses. I successfully established trust and encouraged candid participation through explicitly communicating research objectives to participants, as well as emphasising the study's academic nature. During the interviews with professionals, I ensured that space was given that could aid distinction between professional roles and personal views. Consequently, participants were able to frame their contributions appropriately.

My use of a piloting phase gave me a useful opportunity to refine these ethical protocols. During this phase, I identified potential challenges and addressed these. For example, the piloting process revealed the need for reporting language to be generalised to ensure participants' anonymity whilst maintaining an accurate depiction of their contributions. Additionally, this process raised considerations of how to reconcile asylum sector professionals' obligations with the need for candid dialogue. Through the pilot, I was able to develop informed strategies to manage tensions between individual perspectives and institutional positions. In the subsequent section, I will further elaborate upon the piloting process's role in strengthening ethical safeguards.

I prioritised participant's mental health and wellbeing throughout the research. It was important that I provide appropriate support measures. For example, I provided participants with leaflets and contact information on relevant support services such as The Samaritans, NHS 111 and Cardiff University's helpline. Before completing the fieldwork, I ensured that all participants had received mental health information via email and text and asked if they required any assistance in accessing mental health support.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

Structured Reference Forms

I utilised Hollway and Jefferson's (2000a) concepts of structured reference forms as a basis of my data analysis. Hollway and Jefferson advocated for the use of structured reference forms to detail biographical details, key themes, and a descriptive 'portrait' of each respondent. They argue that use of these forms brings participants experiences to life for the reader. The structured references use two forms:

(i) A pro-forma that details biographical details, key themes and ideas that arose from the interview

(ii) A written 'portrait 'which is descriptive and enables the respondent to 'come alive' for the researcher

I used these two forms throughout the data analysis process and found them to be incredibly valuable. This method enabled me to identify common experiences and feelings across the sample group, whilst acknowledging the uniqueness of each respondent's individual experience. This form of analysis additionally facilitated interrogation of the psychodynamic interplay between the researcher and the researched, which is particularly pertinent to my study.

My systematic analysis was facilitated through meticulously organising the data according to Hollway and Jefferson's guidance. Each of the interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed in detail. These transcripts, alongside notes made during each interview and immediate reflections captured in my researcher's diary, constitute a substantial volume of material. Immersing myself in the transcription process supported my theoretical understanding of the content and assisted with identifying emerging themes and issues. Possessing a theoretical understanding of the subject matter facilitated this process. I accompanied each transcript with notes to outline key themes, experiences, and theoretical observations of psychological mechanisms. Through analysis I was able to make connections and identify patterns across the data. Through meticulous comparison of the transcriptions and notes, I discerned similarities in experiences and feelings within the

sample group. My use of structured reference forms enhanced my ability to form an in-depth analysis of complex qualitative data. Consequently, this method was an effective vehicle to forming analysis of both the uniting and disparate elements that influence queer forced migrant experiences.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a research methodology that allows concepts and themes to emerge directly from the data collected, rather than imposing preconceived ideas onto it. In analysing the data for this research, I employed a systematic and iterative grounded theory approach. To organise data and index categories, I created a hierarchical tree network. Through this structured approach, I developed a dynamic framework with the capacity to adapt to real-life patterns rather than adhering to fixed theories. This was an asset, enabling me to deepen understandings of integration processes in Wales as the research developed. The strength of grounded theory lies in its responsiveness, producing research that is empirically grounded and highly relevant to participants' lived experiences (Robrecht, 1995). My research methods aligned with grounded theory, as I collected and analysed data in a reflexive, participant-centred manner. This reflexive model frames the research process as a collaboration between researcher and participant, thereby fostering respects and prioritising participants' perspectives (Golden, 2006).

Grounded theory combines particularly well with psychosocial methods, making this ideally suited for my research. Psychosocial methods emphasise relational depth, reflexivity, and lived experience as a complex interplay of social, emotional, and psychological factors (Charmaz, 2006). Psychosocial methods' focus on capturing participants' subjective experiences, including emotional and relational dimensions, are complemented by grounded theory's systematic approach to uncovering patterns directly from data. In grounded theory, data is gathered and analysed in an iterative cycle. Over time, concepts and themes are continually refined through comparison and reflection. Prioritising emergent insights over predefined hypotheses allows for an exploration of both the spoken and unspoken aspects of participants' stories (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000b). Consequently, grounded theory accommodates for the complex and layered realities faced by queer forced migrants.

Grounded theory's adaptability also fits well with the interpretivist framework, which is centred upon understanding the ways in which individuals construct meaning within their social contexts (Charmaz, 2006). As such, this approach enables my research to stay closely attuned to participants' realities, and offer perspectives on their experiences that rigid, top-down methodologies might overlook. Within grounded theory participants' voices drive the development of concepts. This mirrors interpretivist commitments to understanding

social phenomena through the lens of those experiencing them. (Charmaz, 2006) Grounded theory's focus on reflexivity makes it extremely compatible with the interpretivist goal of minimising power imbalances and researcher bias (Charmaz, 2006).

The combination of grounded theory's inductive coding with psychosocial techniques such as in-depth, narrative interviews encourage a comprehensive view of participants' experiences. This convergence enriches the analysis, making it possible to capture how participants internalise and navigate challenges, such as identity-based exclusion or policy-induced vulnerabilities (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000b). The use of memos and diaries provided me with the space to reflect on personal interpretations, emotions, and evolving understandings, all of which are essential in interpretivist research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Throughout the analysis process I sought to maintain an open, responsive approach to participants' narratives, ensuring that their voices shaped the research outcomes rather than being filtered through a purely theoretical lens.

The notion of approaching data as a "blank slate" is often critiqued, as researchers inevitably bring their prior knowledge, experiences, and positionality into the interpretative process (Charmaz, 2012). In the context of this research, familiarity with the topic, including my activism and connections to the community, shape the analytical lens I apply to the data. I strongly believe that I can use grounded theory methods and not attempt to suppress this influence – rather than acknowledging and integrating it into my methodological framework, which aligns with contemporary approaches to grounded theory. As a result, reflexivity is critical part of the process in addressing the potential influence of the researcher's positionality (Finlay, 2002).

Coding Strategy

I employed a three-phase coding strategy to facilitate a structured yet flexible process that is particularly effective for interpreting complex, nuanced data. This phased coding approach ensures that the analysis is both meticulous and responsive to the emergent themes in participants' narratives, allowing for a deep, layered understanding of their social and psychological realities. In the initial coding phase, line-by-line analysis captures rich, empirical insights directly from participant narratives (Glaser, 1978) that align with the psychosocial goal of capturing subjective experiences in detail. This micro-level coding identifies immediate issues and sentiments expressed by participants, creating a foundation that remains true to their voices. By breaking down data into smaller fragments, the initial coding process reflects the interpretivist framework's commitment to understanding the participants' perspectives in their own terms.

The subsequent phase, focused coding, involves selecting significant codes and organising them with a clearer theoretical orientation (Charmaz, 2002; 2003). This step aligns with the iterative, reflexive approach characteristic of both psychosocial methods and grounded theory. It allows researchers to proceed with an evolving understanding while remaining grounded in the data. As I found during this process, focused coding refines the analysis to conceptual paths relevant to the research question, helping to identify recurring themes that capture broader socio-psychological patterns and inform theory construction.

Finally, theoretical coding deepens the analysis by examining relationships between codes and abstracting these connections into theoretical constructs (Glaser, 2005). This phase integrates the nuanced, contextual understanding developed in previous phases, allowing the researcher to link themes into an overarching analytical framework that reflects both the interpretivist and psychosocial perspectives. Theoretical coding supports the creation of a cohesive, theory-driven narrative that encapsulates the relational and identity-based complexities faced by queer forced migrants.

This multi-phase grounded theory coding approach provides a robust structure that supports both psychosocial and interpretivist goals. By enabling an iterative exploration of emergent codes and themes, the coding process enhances the depth of insight into participants' experiences, capturing the nuances of their narratives and contributing to a reflective, theory-informed understanding of integration challenges.

This aspect of grounded theory has been essential for navigating the emotional intensity of my research topic - a topic inherently charged with distressing narratives and sensitive content. By following the systematic progression of coding, I was able to maintain a clear and organised analytical focus, which allowed me to establish strong emotional boundaries and focus on the data with objectivity. Each phase provided a form of “armour” against the emotional weight of the findings, enabling me to examine patterns and themes without becoming overwhelmed by the content. The line-by-line nature of initial coding allowed me to engage closely with each narrative fragment as isolated pieces, creating emotional distance that mitigated the impact of each individual experience. As I moved into focused and theoretical coding, the process became increasingly abstract, which further facilitated detachment and gave me room to analyse relationships and patterns within the data rather than remain immersed in the intensity of each story. This method thus served as a protective framework, helping me prioritize organization and clarity even in the face of emotionally challenging data.

Pilots

Pilot studies involve small-scale versions or trial runs of planned methods, providing insights into methodological questions and guiding the development of the research plan (Prescott and Soeken, 1989). Seidman (1998) advocates using pilot studies to test research designs and practicalities before beginning a full-scale study. For this research, the pilot phase was particularly vital, as it allowed me to fine-tune the interview process and ensure that the tools, such as active listening techniques, life narratives, and visual data collection, were well-suited to the unique needs of the participants. Although pilot studies are not intended to produce substantive results, they offer critical lessons and refinements for the main study (Jariath et al., 2000). Self-evaluation is a key aspect of pilot exercises, allowing researchers to assess their readiness, skills, and commitment (Beebe, 2007; Lancaster et al., 2004). Additionally, pilots enable the identification of ethical and practical issues that may impact the main project (Sampson, 2004). Through piloting, researchers can refine their project's conceptualisation and enhance their methodological approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

The decision to conduct a pilot exercise was driven by the primary objective of assessing the feasibility of the interview methods. Specifically, the aims of the pilot were to: (1) evaluate the suitability of the research methods for interviewing marginalised individuals who have experienced trauma, (2) test an interview protocol, and (3) address any practical issues before commencing the main project. Following ethical approval, two queer refugees residing in South Wales and a third sector policy maker were recruited for the pilot study. These participants were known to me prior to the pilot and were recruited through community group chats.

The data collection methods employed in this pilot included life narrative, visual data tasks, such as using household objects, and utilising the whiteboard function on zoom to create a rough participant timeline and semi-structured interviews, all conducted via Zoom. Each interview, conducted in English, as all participants are fluent English speakers, was tailored to accommodate the participant's pace, and lasted until they felt they had covered all relevant aspects. The life stories and semi-structured interviews were recorded using an MP3 player voice recorder. Prior to and following each interview, participants were informed about how their data would be used (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Additionally, at the conclusion of each interview, I provided a summary of the responses and solicited feedback on the pilot process.

By conducting these pilots, I was able to assess not only the feasibility of my approach but also my own preparedness as a researcher. The feedback from the participants, who had experienced significant trauma, was invaluable in gauging the emotional impact of the

questions and the pacing of the interviews. Moreover, the pilot allowed me to ensure that the setting and methods - conducting interviews via Zoom, using MP3 recorders, and providing feedback at the end - were conducive to a respectful and supportive atmosphere for participants. This gave me the opportunity to fine-tune both my approach and my ability to manage the complexities of working with queer forced migrants, ensuring that I was equipped to navigate sensitive material in a way that was both effective and ethically sound. I employed a journal log (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) to document my impressions, thoughts, and feelings before, during, and after the pilot study, facilitating a reflective practice that is central to the psychosocial method. Reflective journaling and supervisor debrief after each pilot interview were invaluable in helping me to understand the emotional and intellectual nuances of the research process.

Sharpening the Data Collection Tools

Seidman (1998) advocated for using pilot exercises to test research designs and address practicalities. I kept a journal log to record my ideas, impressions, reflections, and feelings before, during and after the pilot study (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This was purposed to aid me in perfecting the collaborative process I would use with interviewees.

To enhance this process, I scheduled supervisor debriefs after each pilot interview. I also I engaged in a pre-pilot exercise through organising a practice "guided interview" with my supervisor. As part of this exercise, we tested out the use and value of various methodological tools. We tested tools such as collecting visual data by drawing a timeline corresponding to the participant's life narrative, recreating a significant life event using household items and employing a phenomenological interview approach to explore the participant's experiences and feelings. Through this exercise, I developed and refined my plans for the processes I would use to collect data on participants' lived experiences. As a result of the "guided interview", my supervisor provided me with valuable guidance on my interview technique. My supervisor emphasised the importance of listening sensitively to catch nuances, allowing interviewees to dictate the interview time, as life stories often evolve with openness. They noted how this has the capacity to foster openness and trust, which are elements critical to successful psychosocial research. The pre-pilot exercise allowed me to adjust my use of methodological tools. Interestingly, the drawing of timelines and recreating life events did not fare well during the pilot interviews, as they seemed to hinder participants' focus and flow of thought. I made the decision not to incorporate these methods into my research. From my perspective, these tools felt more like "performative research", than effective methods of gathering data. This pilot exercise prompted a revaluation of the study's research tools by me and the supervisory team. This change in approach demonstrates the

importance of engaging in these pilot exercises before initiating the primary research interviews. Through refining my use of data collection techniques, I was able to ensure that the methods I used were tailored to the needs of my study, as well as fit an interpretivist framework through valuing participants' subjective meanings and experiences (Mack et al., 2005).

What I learned from the pilots

Through the pilot studies I learnt significant lessons. Pilot interviews participants displayed curiosity about the study, although they were aware that their life narratives would not be included in the findings. During the exercises, participants expressed that they were rarely given the space and opportunity to share their life narratives. They expressed appreciation for the opportunity to do so, echoing Atkinson and Flint's (2001) claim that sharing stories can relieve emotional burdens and improve self-esteem. Receiving this feedback reinforced the importance of participants feeling that their voice is heard and valued, through developing an open and collaborative interview environment.

A primary challenge encountered during the pilot exercises was navigating the power dynamics of the interview. Haraway (1991) proposes that instead of concentrating upon who controls the interview, we should consider who should hold power to produce diverse knowledge. This led to my reflection on issues of control and agency, acknowledging that interviewees are not passive subjects (Skeggs, 2001). Despite feeling initially overwhelmed, I embraced each participant's expertise, reframing the interaction as a collaborative dialogue (Alvesson, 2003). This experience highlighted the importance of creating a balanced power dynamic, empowering participants to share whilst alleviating researcher guilt about eliciting life narratives.

Throughout the pilot work, I demonstrated respect for participants' struggles, feelings, and identities through appropriate language use, such as using correct pronouns and avoiding dead-naming. Using gender and queer inclusive language was a conscious effort to represent myself as responsive as possible to the participants.

Reflecting on the Pilots

Self-reflection was an important element of the pilot process. Through this I developed my understandings of my position relative to participants, and how this might shape the research process (Hill, 2006). The pilots taught me to prioritise building rapport with interviewees, recognising its significance in establishing trust and achieving research objectives. When asked questions about my own life by participants, I provided genuine answers about my life experiences whilst redirecting the conversation back to them and the interview topic

(Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Padgett (2008) suggested that qualitative researchers bring into their research various identities such as professional, personal or political. She maintained that context and appropriateness determine how these identities influence the study. The pilot interviews taught me to modify my interviewing style and remind myself of my role as a researcher rather than a participant. One of the most valuable lessons I learned during this study, which has since become integral to my data collection approach, is the importance of active listening and researcher adaptability.

Through learnings from the pilot interviews, I adjusted the interview questions for the main study to ensure they were broad enough to allow participants to narrate their experiences at their own pace. It became evident that interviews should not steer participants toward certain responses, as this would prevent me from capturing the entirety of their experience.

3.7 Sampling and Recruitment

Sampling "Hard-to-Reach" Populations

To conduct meaningful research relating to high profile policymakers and marginalised groups such as queer forced migrants, it is essential to understanding the challenges of recruiting participants from hard-to-reach populations. The term "hard-to-reach" often denotes sub-groups within larger populations that are difficult to engage with, due to socio-economic, geographical, or institutional barriers (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). These barriers could include systemic discrimination, socio-economic marginalisation, or a history of mistrust towards authorities, making these groups appear uncooperative or inaccessible (Bilger & Van Liempt, 2009). Engagement with these populations might be further complicated through challenges such as distrust of researchers, fears of compromising legal status, and language barriers (Shaghaghi et al., 2011).

I would argue that the perception of hard-to-reach populations as uncooperative, especially by "outsider researchers" is often based on a limited understanding of the challenges and complexities these populations face. These groups are not necessarily uncooperative, but have legitimate reasons to be hesitant, such as fears that anonymity and confidentiality will not be respected, or previous negative experiences with authority. An additional concern for forced migrants is whether participating in research could lead to unwanted exposure or impact their legal status. Asylum sector professionals and CEOs are often subject to busy schedules and gatekeeping mechanisms, making them also potentially challenging to recruit (Brackerts et al., 2005). It is important to challenge the perception that the challenge in reaching these groups lies solely with their intentions and ensure that researchers address systemic issues and engage sensitively and with respect.

Language Considerations

English language proficiency varies amongst queer forced migrants in Wales. This diversity necessitated careful consideration of the implications of English proficiency upon the research process. This variability reflects broader linguistic challenges faced by forced migrants, who often encounter language as a barrier in both institutional and social settings (Piller, 2016). Given that many participants had been residing in Wales for over three years, a level of conversational fluency in English was a requirement for participation. As a result, I am unaware of any miscommunication or misinterpretation that arose due to language barriers. My sampling decisions intentionally prioritised participants who could engage in English, to ensure clarity and reduce reliance on interpreters, who can introduce additional layers of interpretation and potential bias (Temple & Young, 2004).

My familiarity with Arabic LGBTQ+ slang and cultural expressions commonly used in the Middle East and North Africa was an asset during the research. My cultural knowledge in this area minimised the potential for culturally specific language use to result in miscommunication. This also allowed for richer data collection as understanding participants' terminology and linguistic nuances fostered trust and rapport, aligning with best practices for culturally sensitive research (Block et al., 2013).

Whilst spoken language did not hinder communication during interviews, participants' attitudes toward written documentation were noteworthy. Forced migrants often associate forms and paperwork with asylum or welfare processes, which can be sources of anxiety or mistrust (Goodman & Speers, 2013). Reluctance to engage with written documentation might originate from negative experiences with bureaucratic systems or fear of unintended consequences. To address this, I obtained informed consent through electronic methods, and using simple and transparent explanations that ensured participants felt comfortable and reassured about the ethical handling of their data.

Implications for Research

The language proficiency and cultural context of participants directly influence the quality of data collected. In this study, participants' fluency in English facilitated effective communication, while the researcher's cultural and linguistic familiarity enriched the interpretative process. Nevertheless, these dynamics underscore the importance of considering language barriers and cultural factors in future research. For studies involving participants with lower English proficiency, strategies such as bilingual researchers or community interpreters may be required to ensure inclusivity without compromising data quality.

Queer Forced Migrants

Recruiting individuals who are queer forced migrants in Wales as participants for my study has presented unique opportunities. Queer forced migrants in Wales represent a community that, while still relatively small, has in recent years become increasingly visible, vocal, and present in media coverage. Despite this increased visibility, they are still considered a “hard to reach” group because of their marginalised status and the sensitive nature of their experiences. The participants who volunteered for this study are all vocal advocates for queer migration rights within their communities. They are role models, which implies a higher level of confidence and comfort in sharing their life narratives. It is crucial to remember that despite this, maintaining a high level of care and attention to their wellbeing is paramount.

For this study, I employed purposive deviant case sampling for participants. This method selects participants who deviate from population norms, as a vehicle to highlight issues specific to a particular group. My sampling criteria required participants to identify as queer and be forced migrants residing in Wales for at least one year. Silverman (2014) explains how purposive deviant case sampling can capture significant experiences and perspectives that general sampling methods could overlook. A criticism of this method is that it relies heavily on researcher judgement. As such, bias can become present in participant selection, and participants may be induced to align responses to perceived expectations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I minimised the risk of my expectations influencing responses through encouraging participants to only share experiences and ideas that they were comfortable with sharing. In sampling participants, I targeted individuals from Glitter Cymru. This is a grassroots organisation in Wales with members from relevant communities, including queer refugees and asylum seekers. This targeted approach was an intentional way of discovering individuals who would fulfil the criteria relevant to my study, and as such be able to share their vital insights into the experiences of queer forced migrants in Wales (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

My choice to recruit participants initially through Glitter Cymru is an example of convenience sampling. This method consists of accessing participants from a group who are readily available and accessible. (Shaghaghi et al., 2011). I also used snowball sampling, which is when participants will refer others who meet the study’s criteria. This helps the researcher to access hard to reach individuals who might otherwise have remained unknown to the study and expand the pool of participants (Bilger & Van Liempt, 2009). My study used this form of sampling in part, as I gained additional participants through encouraging referrals by word of mouth.

Queer Forced Migrants – Data Summary

Name	Age Range	Country of origin	Sexuality	Gender expression	Legal status	Time spent in Wales	Occupation/Volunteering	Involved with the local community?
Budi	Mid-twenties	Southeast Asia	Gay	Cisgender Man	Refugee	5+	Third Sector worker	Yes
Ade	Mid-twenties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Bisexual	Cisgender Man	Refugee	5+	Construction worker	Yes
Olamide	Late twenties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Bisexual	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	3+	NHS Support worker	Yes
Fatimah	Mid-twenties	GCC	Lesbian	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	1-2+	NHS Support worker	Yes
Amal	Mid-twenties	GCC	Bisexual	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	3+	NHS Support worker	Yes
King	Late twenties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Gay	Cisgender Man	Refugee	3+	Construction worker	Yes
Oluchi	Mid-twenties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Bisexual	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	3+	NHS Support worker	Yes
Usman	Late twenties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Bisexual	Cisgender Man	Refugee	5+	NHS Support worker	Yes
Mustafa	Early twenties	North Africa	Gay	Cisgender Man	Asylum Seeker	N/A	Journalist/Writer	Yes
Amina	Mid forties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Lesbian	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	1-2+	NHS Support worker	Yes
Sam	Early thirties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Lesbian	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	1-2+	NHS Support worker	Yes
Akua	Mid thirties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Bisexual	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	5+	HR officer	Yes
Omar	Early thirties	GCC	Bisexual	Transgender Man	Refugee	3+	Journalist	Yes
Hakim	Late twenties	Southeast Asia	Gay	Cisgender Man	Refugee	3+	Journalist	Yes

Malika	Mid-thirties	Southeast Asia	Bisexual	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	1-2+	Third Sector worker	Yes
Zoya	Late twenties	GCC	Bisexual	Transgender Woman	Asylum Seeker	5+	Third Sector worker	Yes
Aisha	Late thirties	Sub-Saharan Africa	Bisexual	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	3+	Third Sector worker	Yes
Sara	Mid-thirties	GCC	Bisexual	Cisgender Woman	Refugee	3+	Private Sector worker	Yes

(table 7)

A large proportion of asylum seekers in the UK are young adults, as younger individuals are more likely to seek asylum (Home Office, 2022). In 2022, approximately 71% of asylum seekers fell within the age range of 18-35 years old (Home Office, 2022; ONS, 2022). My data reflects this demographic trend, as a large proportion of my participants were in their mid-twenties (41.18%) and late twenties (23.53%). This high proportion of younger adults underscores the importance of tailoring support services, including education, employment and integration programmes, to the needs of this group.

A significant proportion of my participants originated from sub-Saharan Africa and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. A majority of 52.94% of my participants were from sub-Saharan Africa, with 32.29% originating from the GCC region. My data is consistent with the UK context. In the UK in 2022, 24% of asylum seekers were from sub-Saharan Africa (Home Office, 2022; ONS, 2022). This prevalence of forced migrants originating from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East indicates the impact that regional conflicts and socio-economic instability have had in forcing migration from these areas.

Most participants in my study (64%) self-identified as bisexual. A large proportion of my participants being bisexual, might suggest bisexuality to be more prevalent among certain populations of asylum seekers. This majority also advocates for further understanding and study of the needs and experiences of bisexual asylum seekers, who will face specific challenges such as bi-erasure and challenges to the legitimacy of their identity.

Out of all participants, a majority of 55.5% self-identified as cisgender women. Following this, 33% identified as cisgender men, 5.5% as transgender men and 5.5% as transgender women. In 2022, approximately 70% of asylum seekers in the UK were cisgender men (Home Office, 2022; ONS, 2022). The gender makeup of my participant group therefore differs starkly from the broader population. One explanation for this higher representation of cisgender women, could be that they have I have fostered a greater level of trust and

comfort with women, through sharing the same gender and building more meaningful connections with them over time. This may have encouraged them to volunteer to discuss their experiences and challenges with me, contributing to the community through their life narratives.

88.34% of the participants in my study are refugees. In 2022, out of a total of 359,018 refugees and asylum seekers, 35.5% were asylum seekers and 64.5% were refugees (UNHCR UK, 2022). Though having most refugees in my study reflects the majority present in the wider population, the percentage of asylum seekers in my study is still lower. Refugees experience a more stable status in comparison to individuals who are navigating the complexities of the asylum process. Asylum seekers can be a harder to reach population than refugees, stemming from fears that engaging in research or expressing dissatisfaction may negatively impact their immigration status. Throughout my research, I found that many asylum seekers were reluctant to discuss the Home Office, Clearsprings or Migrant Help in a negative light, even though I assured confidentiality. This hesitancy highlights the high importance of protecting asylum seeker's data and confidentiality, as well as maintaining trust, throughout the research process.

A majority of 72.2% of my participants have lived in Wales for over three years. England hosts most asylum seekers and refugees in the UK (around 90%), Wales hosts around 5-6%, Scotland 3-4% and Northern Ireland 1-2% (Home Office, 2022; Refugee Council, 2022). The large number of my participants who are long-term residents in Wales, could be attributed to Wales's small size providing more opportunity to build meaningful and sustainable communities. A strong sense of community and support significantly influence refugees' decisions to remain in Wales after obtaining refugee status.

A notable figure of 38.9% of my participants are in employment as an NHS Support Worker. A further 22.2% work in the Third Sector. This majority of individuals working in the third sector and public sector, reflects a trend where refugees find employment in these sectors, particularly in roles that offer stability and develop their skills. There are many barriers to refugee employment, including work permits, references and qualifications recognition. A lack of access to formal employment opportunities, lead many forced migrants in the UK to engage in volunteering or community work, as an alternative path to build skills and contribute to society. This highlight forced migrant's resourcefulness and resilience in adapting and integrating into UK job markers. There is a need for more inclusive employment policies for refugees and asylum seekers, that facilitates the utilisation of skills and aids integration across all sectors.

This prevalence of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK engaging in volunteering and community work, is reflected in the participants for my study. 100% of participants reported being actively engaged within their communities. Refugees and asylum seekers often use volunteering and community engagement as a vehicle to contribute to society, despite barriers to performing this through formal employment. Active participation aids individuals in building social and support networks, highlighting the significance of community connections in the integration process (Home Office 2022; Refugee Council, 2022).

Asylum Sector Professionals

In my study, I used non-probability targeted sampling for engaging with asylum sector professionals. This method is when a researcher chooses individuals for the sample, based upon the needs of the research. This allowed me to be strategic in choosing individuals with relevant knowledge, expertise and influence in the asylum sector in Wales. Robinson (2014) notes how this is important when dealing with specialised fields, where there is a limited number of key players. Target sampling allowed me to focus on the asylum professionals, CEOs and third sector practitioners with the most relevant expertise for this study. Through mapping out key individuals within the sector, I ensured participants had considerable knowledge and influence on asylum policy and practice. Targeted sampling allowed me to efficiently obtain detailed and relevant data. For instance, the individuals from Displaced People in Action were well placed to provide valuable insights, due to their relevant roles and experience working directly in this field.

A key criticism of targeted sampling is that it is inherently limited in reach. Although this method ensures that relevant participants are included, it is not suitable for individuals who are isolated or hard-to-reach, as they cannot be contacted without considerable use of time and resources. The process could also be halted by a chosen individual's lack of availability, or willingness to participate, or by the researchers' capacity to maintain rapport (Robinson, 2014).

I successfully recruited relevant professionals, with high levels of knowledge and influence. As such, this method was successful for me in obtaining high-quality data, despite the challenges. For example, representatives from Glitter Cymru and the Welsh Government with substantial relevant experience agreed to participate in this study. Each of the asylum sector professionals that I spoke to provide insights that show a deep understanding of the intricacies of the asylum sector, that are crucial in informing effective policy and practice.

Asylum Sector – Data Summary

Initials	**Organisation**	**Years in position**
M and K	Displaced People in Action	5
S and B	Micro Rainbow	3 / 3
N	Stonewall UK	2
H	Welsh Government	2
J	Glitter Cymru	7

(table 8)

Each of these individuals contributed critical insight into operational and advocacy elements of supporting forcibly displaced people. Each has a role in determining and enacting their organisational approach towards and support of queer forced migrants. Through sharing their knowledge, they have added an essential dimension to understanding the specialised needs of queer individuals within the asylum sector. Their direct involvement with the community indicates expertise in queer rights, a key component in understanding the intersection of sexual orientation and asylum. H's participation in an active role within the Welsh Government provides an additional level of nuanced perspective on policymaking and implementation challenges. All participants, regardless of years of tenure, offer extensive experience in supporting marginalised communities.

Given my long-standing involvement with queer asylum communities in Wales, participant recruitment for this study was straightforward. Glitter Cymru's niche membership base includes a substantial number of queer refugees and asylum seekers residing throughout Wales, many of whom actively engage with the group. I made my research objectives clear, and addressed all enquiries from potential participants, to emphasise a transparency that could facilitate recruitment. I sought approval from Glitter Cymru's committee members, before advertising the research to this group. A call for study participants was shared on Glitter Cymru's WhatsApp group chat. I then distributed the study's information sheet (Appendix D1), to give detailed information on the research's aims, as well as confidentiality and anonymity measures. I invited interested individuals to contact me directly through text message or email.

Twenty-seven individuals expressed interest in being a participant, over a three-month period. From this number, eighteen were recruited. I did not turn any participants away, but some participants withdrew due to scheduling conflicts or unspecified reasons. Each participant was given two to three weeks to review the study's information sheet. Despite being offered, no other language versions were requested, so the information sheet was only

provided in English. Participants were required to sign and return the e-consent form (Appendix E1, E2) prior to the interviews, to ensure informed consent.

Recruiting policymakers, CEOs, third sector practitioners proved to be more challenging than anticipated. I was unable to recruit any participants from local authorities, despite spending considerable effort in trying to connect. This absence has limited this study's comprehensiveness, particularly regarding meso-level insights into policy, processes and decision making. Initially, I attempted to go through gatekeepers, their secretaries, resulting in months of delays, communication chasing, and unanswered emails. The gatekeepers exhibited high suspicion toward my research and motives, making progress difficult and lengthy. This recruitment difficulty prompted a strategic shift in my approach when it came to engaging CEOs and other high-level stakeholders. Recognising the need for a more direct and effective method, I decided to leverage my existing professional relationships within the asylum sector and the Welsh Government. Fortunately, most responded promptly to my communications and expressed enthusiasm about participating. They requested to review the interview script in advance to prepare. This change in strategy allowed me to secure participation more efficiently and ensure that I obtained valuable perspectives from key decision-makers. I am aware of the privilege and unusual level of access I had to ministers and CEOs.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have meticulously outlined and justified the methodological approach I adopted in this study. This approach has been tailored to examine the experiences of queer forced migrants and perspectives of asylum sector professionals in Wales. Centering queer forced migrant voices through my methodological approach was particularly pertinent, due to the absence of these voices in both academic discourse and policy debates. Through this study, I hope to address this gap, and contribute to more inclusive and nuanced understandings of forced migration.

Queer forced migrants face a complex range of experiences that are shaped by the transection of their identities, making my use of an intersectional approach particularly relevant to the study. Through acknowledging the intersection of participants' identities such as gender, sexuality, race, and migration status, this study seeks to unravel the power dynamics that shape these individuals' lived experiences. I aim to use an intersectional lens in this study to challenge dominant narratives and highlight diverse experiences within the queer forced migrant communities.

This study's primary data comprises of in-depth interviews conducted with seven asylum sector professionals and eighteen refugees and asylum seekers residing in Wales. Through

my interviews with queer forced migrants I provide rich and nuanced insights into their lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations. Through interviewing key professional stakeholders, I can cover organisational perspectives and policy considerations emerging from the asylum sector. Through completing interviews with these two distinct groups, I aim to capture a comprehensive picture of the socio-political landscape.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for both research and practice. Through this research I aim to create contributions to policy discourse that are informed by the voices of queer forced migrants. Through understanding the perspectives of policymakers and practitioners, I hope to make recommendations that can enhance social inclusion in Wales. Importantly, this research contributes to discourses advocating for the rights of marginalised communities. Through contributing to understandings of the intersecting factors that shape the experiences of queer forced migrants, this research can pave the way for more targeted and effective interventions and support services.

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the methodological approach underpinning this study. Through adopting the discussed tools, concepts and strategies to collect and analyse research data, I aim to generate empirically rigorous theoretically grounded, and socially relevant, insights into this subject. Throughout the next three chapters, I will discuss these findings in detail.

4.Findings: Queer Forced Migrant Perspectives

Queer forced migrants' narratives are shaped by the profound challenges presented by navigating their intersectional identities throughout the complexities of the asylum journey. In this chapter, I explore the lived experiences of queer forced migrants in Wales. Through this, I illuminate the tensions and complications inherent in negotiating their existence within a new and unfamiliar environment. Their narratives form a rich tapestry of their experiences, and exhibit the acute hardships they face, and the arduous task of simply existing. This exploration seeks to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of integration. Through the lived experiences captured, I will offer a glimpse into the heart of their struggles, resilience, and aspirations, providing insight into what integration currently means to them. This chapter explores integration beyond mere survival and considers a holistic view that incorporates the hopes and dreams of queer forced migrants as they overcome challenges in their pursuit of a life free from persecution.

This chapter will discuss the persistent struggles and systemic injustices experienced by queer forced migrants, through a series of six thematic sections. Each section derives from themes that emerged from my data analysis. These categories provide a structured lens to explore the complex interplay of resilience, vulnerability, and systemic barriers faced by queer forced migrants. The six sections are as follows:

Section 1: Persistent Lack of Legal Protections & Legal Assistance

> Within this section I consider the stark reality queer forced migrants face within an asylum system rife with inadequacies in legal protections, assistance and support mechanisms. Furthermore, I address the egregious disregard for human rights exemplified by infringements on basic rights. I explore the contributions of a non-devolved governance areas to this dynamic. Deliberate dehumanisation and hate crimes within asylum processes underscore the urgent need for provision of comprehensive legal assistance and advocacy.

Section 2: Living with Housing Uncertainties

> Through this section I will explore the range of challenges in securing safe and inclusive housing options for queer forced migrants. Individuals within this community commonly struggle with housing instability, exacerbating vulnerabilities and perpetuating cycles of uncertainty and marginalisation.

Section 3: Unsuitable Healthcare Access:

The third section sheds light on the formidable barriers queer forced migrant encounter in accessing affirming healthcare. Navigating the UK healthcare system presents a multitude of challenges for this community, from dealing with ill-informed healthcare providers to facing hesitation and mistrust in seeking medical assistance. Uninformed HIV/AIDS campaigns further compound healthcare disparities and exacerbate health-related anxieties.

Section 4: Surviving the Mental Health Challenges

In this fourth section, I confront the profound mental health struggles endured by queer forced migrants. It is common for individuals within this group to have experienced acute trauma. Mental health services in Wales often lack the cultural competency, on both LGBTQ+ and immigration matters, that is necessary to provide adequate support. As such, amidst traumatic experiences of displacement and marginalisation, these individuals confront significant obstacles in attaining support for their wellbeing.

Section 5: Enduring Financial Insecurities

In this section, I uncover the enduring financial insecurities that plague queer forced migrants. These insecurities are characterised by elements such as limited employment opportunities, and restricted economic mobility. Financial precarity compounds existing vulnerabilities, perpetuating cycles of economic hardship and social marginalisation.

Section 6: Internalised Shame and Social Isolation

In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the internalised shame and social isolation faced by queer forced migrants. Challenges explored in this section include, navigating new identities within the asylum process, grappling with feelings of burdensomeness, and coping with substance misuse. Through exploring these challenges, I will underscore the urgent need for positive visibility, community support, and resilience-building initiatives.

These six sections encapsulate the crucial facets that queer forced migrants consider integral to their integration within Wales. Consideration of their lived experiences reinforces the urgent need for systemic reforms and comprehensive support mechanisms within these areas. As we navigate through queer forced migrant narratives, it becomes evident that integration is not a “one size fits all” concept, as sometimes projected by asylum professionals. Integration is a dynamic and evolving journey, shaped by individuals’ unique identities and the social, cultural, familial, and institutional landscapes they navigate. Queer

forced migrants' perspectives on integration provide a valuable guide, not only giving insight into challenges presented by current policy and practice landscapes, but also in shaping conceptualisations of routes to a future where their understanding of integration fully manifests. Through capturing lived experience, this chapter endeavours to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of what integration means to queer forced migrants. Their voices, struggles, and aspirations offer profound insights into the transformative potential of meaningful integration, highlighting the steps necessary to bridging the gap between the current reality and the ideals of integration in Wales.

4.1 Persistent Lack of Legal Protections and Legal Assistance

Lack of Devolved Powers

A key barrier to integration that participants highlighted was a lack of legal protections and disregard for human rights.

The lack of devolved powers in Wales poses a significant challenge to the integration of, exacerbating the already existing barriers stemming from the absence of legal protections and assistance. Devolved powers, or the delegation of certain legislative powers to regional governments, play a crucial role in shaping policies and frameworks that directly impact marginalised communities.

Budi says:

"I was given a lawyer by the Home Office. I had to chase him for updates, for everything. He wouldn't call me, and he was taking 2-3 months to respond to a single email. And when he did, his tone was condescending. I get it, they have more cases than they can handle, but it was clear that he didn't want to help."

Here, Budi expresses frustrations with the systemic inadequacies of legal and immigration systems. He emphasises in several areas the human impact that results from a legal system overburdened with asylum cases. Budi's statement, "I had to chase him for updates, for everything," underscores the inefficiencies and lack of accountability within the legal aid system. This reflects a broader systemic issue where lawyers handling asylum cases are overburdened, leading to delayed communication and inadequate support for clients. Budi's choice of the word "chase" highlights his frustrations at the energy that that he must expend in accessing basic legal rights. This demonstrates the unequal power dynamic inherent in the asylum process, as self-advocacy is required to access rights within a system that fails to accommodate for individual's needs.

Budi explains that an action as simple as responding to a “single email”, takes “2-3 months”. Budi juxtaposes the temporality of such a quick task taking such a long time, to highlight the absence of attention to his legal needs. The lack of timely updates as described by Budi likely exacerbate feelings of frustration, stress, and powerlessness, which are common amongst forced migrants navigating legal systems. Delays of “2-3 months” in responding to emails can jeopardize the success of asylum claims through leading to missed deadlines, incomplete documentation, or an inability to present the full complexity of the case. As such Budi indicates systemic inefficiencies that have the potential to endanger queer forced migrant’s sanctuary within Wales.

Budi’s observes multiple concerns regarding the lawyer’s willingness, sensitivity and cultural competence. He notes that the lawyer has a “condescending tone” and that “he didn’t want to help”. Through this, Budi highlights a failure to understand and empathise with the unique vulnerabilities of queer forced migrants. Such failures are grave when regarding duty of care towards those who may already be grappling with trauma and stigma related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Budi’s account sheds light on the systemic discrimination that queer forced migrants in Wales face. His experience highlights not only the inefficiencies and insensitivity of these systems but also the broader structural limitations imposed by the lack of devolved powers in Wales.

The broader context of Budi’s experience highlights the structural limitations imposed through Wales’s lack of devolved powers. This lack limits the Welsh Government’s ability to tailor immigration and legal assistance frameworks to the needs of queer forced migrants. Without devolved powers, Wales is unable to allocate sufficient resources for specialised legal aid or training programmes aimed at improving the cultural competence of legal professionals. Budi’s case demonstrates how standardised UK-wide immigration policies fail to account for the nuanced realities of queer forced migrants. This group faces distinct challenges, such having to proving their LGBTQ+ identity within a system that is unprepared for such complexities. Budi’s experience highlights the ways in which queer forced migrants’ integration is hindered through systemic inefficiencies in legal representation. Inadequate legal assistance and delays from the Home Office extend the period that asylum claims take. This resultantly extends the period of uncertainty experienced, and prevents individuals from accessing stable accommodation, education, and mental health services. Budi’s description of frustrations at the lack of support highlight how systemic inadequacies exacerbate mental health challenges and feelings of exclusion.

The Welsh government has limited autonomy in developing and implementing legal protections for queer forced migrants. This includes the ability to enact changes such as comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, and robust policies that can protect individuals based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The absence of devolved powers in this area results in queer forced migrants facing standardised UK wide immigration procedures that do not account for the nuances of their experiences. This leads to increased challenges and delays in queer forced migrants' journeys to achieving refugee status.

King says:

"My lawyer was based somewhere in England. I told them I live in Wales. There were a few times I needed to speak about my case, but I couldn't arrange a meeting and turn up. Why did the Home Office send me to Wales then, if we cannot access proper lawyers here?"

Through this statement, King stresses the barriers queer forced migrants face in accessing legal assistance, due to being placed in Wales. King's stresses these logistical and systemic challenges through remarking that "My lawyer was based somewhere in England". A lack of legal representation locally within Wales forces individuals to rely on services that are geographically distant and inaccessible. King's inability to meet with his legal representatives impedes effective communication and case preparation. Such factors diminish the likelihood of an asylum claim being successful. The logistical difficulties of traveling to England to access legal support, as described by King, creates barriers for asylum seekers, who often lack financial resources or access to transportation. Being assigned lawyers outside Wales can exacerbates queer forced migrant's feelings of alienation, as queer forced migrants may perceive themselves as marginalised even within the asylum system.

King's asks a rhetorical question, "Why did the Home Office send me to Wales then, if we cannot access proper lawyers here?". This question highlights his frustrations with a system that is not adequately able to cater for his needs. King also raises the broader systemic issue of the centralised nature of UK immigration policies. These policies often fail to consider regional variations and the unique needs of marginalised communities. UK-wide policies do not account for the specific socio-political and geographic context of Wales, where resources and services tailored to queer forced migrants are limited. Centralised policy frameworks leave little room for Wales's devolved government to address the distinct challenges faced by queer forced migrants. This lack of autonomy perpetuates systemic gaps in legal protections and support.

Through King's words, we can understand the psychological and social ramifications that inadequate legal support can have upon the individual. The frustration and helplessness King expressed indicate a deeper erosion of trust in legal systems and a growing sense of disenfranchisement. Fears of discrimination and lack of reliable legal resources contribute to self-isolation, preventing migrants from forming the social and community networks that are critical for integration. Where there are no locally available support structures, queer forced migrants are left feeling unsupported and unwelcome in their host communities. Such systemic neglect of their legal and social needs fosters a sense of exclusion. As such, King's observation indicates how structural barriers can hinder queer forced migrants' integration into Welsh society. This displays the mechanisms through which deficiencies in legal assistance can impede migrant's ability to build a sense of belonging or inclusion within the broader community.

Hate Incidents and Hate Crime

The constant fear of discrimination has profound implications for the mental well-being of queer forced migrants. The fear of being targeted based on sexual orientation or gender identity led to heightened stress, anxiety, and even depression. The cumulative impact of these mental health challenges erodes an individual's resilience and coping mechanisms, making it difficult to navigate the complexities of adapting to a new culture and society. The fear of discrimination acts as a barrier to queer forced migrants actively participating in community networks. This limitation extends to support groups, cultural events, and other communal activities where individuals could find camaraderie and a sense of belonging. The resulting isolation impedes the development of crucial connections that are vital for successful integration to minimise exposure to potential harm. While self-isolation might be viewed as a protective measure, it significantly hinders integration, as individuals miss opportunities to build relationships, establish support networks, and participate in the social fabric of their new environment.

Aima says:

"I was attacked in my Home Office accommodation by housemates when they found out I'm trans. They beat me up so much, kicked me, punched me. My eyes were swollen, my ribs were hurting for months. I went to the Police to report it. But they couldn't find a translator at the time. Back then my English was not as good. The Police officer told me to return the next day. I did. And then, they said that they cannot anything about it because it's a 'private dispute.' I felt hopeless. I was afraid to go back to my room. I thought they were going to kill me. I secretly packed my staff and moved out. I was sofa surfing for months and months. I'm lucky I have friends who could help, otherwise, I would be sleeping on the streets."

Hate crimes against queer forced migrants in Wales constitute a grave challenge that significantly compounds the difficulties they face during the integration process. These crimes, fuelled by prejudice and intolerance, exacerbate the vulnerabilities of this marginalised community, and further hinder their ability to adapt and contribute meaningfully to their new society. Hate crimes not only inflict immediate physical harm but also cause lasting emotional trauma. The fear of being targeted linger long after the incident, creating a pervasive sense of insecurity that profoundly impacts mental Ill-being.

Aima's interactions with the police expose significant institutional shortcomings, such as the lack of a translator— "They could not find a translator at the time"—highlights systemic inadequacies in accommodating non-English speakers, creating barriers to accessing justice. By framing the attack as an issue amongst housemates, the police minimised the severity of the incident, reflecting a broader institutional failure to recognize and address hate crimes against queer forced migrants. These institutional failures not only deny justice to victims but also erode trust in law enforcement, leaving individuals feeling unsupported and vulnerable.

Aima's statement, "I felt hopeless," underscores the emotional toll of the attack and the subsequent institutional neglect. The incident led to prolonged fear— "I thought they were going to kill me"—reflecting the long-lasting impact of hate crimes on mental well-being. Aima's decision to leave her accommodation and "sofa surf for months" reflects a survival strategy rooted in the need to avoid further harm but also exacerbates social and emotional isolation. The lack of safety in Home Office accommodations forced Aima to leave, resulting in precarious living conditions- "I secretly packed my stuff and moved out" illustrates how hate crimes displace individuals, leaving them to navigate unstable housing situations such as sofa surfing. Aima's reliance on friends to avoid homelessness— "I am lucky I have friends who could help"—highlights the absence of institutional safety nets for queer forced migrants. Aima's experience reveals how hate crimes disrupt the integration process for queer forced migrants -the inadequate police response and the fear of returning to her accommodation prevent engagement with institutions meant to support her.

Hakim says:

"When you look at me you know I'm a brown queen. Sometimes men on the street throw things at me, like bottles of water, cans. Some men even walk up to me and threaten me, whisper abuse, tell me to 'go back where I came from' and once someone spat on my face. I didn't expect to have to deal with this shit outside [my home country]. At least in [my home country] I know people are homophobic, here people are racist and homophobic, but they hide it well. When they get drunk, all the hate comes out."

Hakim's statement, "At least in [my home country] I know people are homophobic, here people are racist and homophobic," highlights the compounded prejudice he faces in the UK. The acts of violence and abuse Hakim describes— "throw things at me, like bottles of water, cans" and "spat on my face"—illustrate the racialised targeting he endures as a person of colour. The reference to being a "brown queen" emphasizes how his visible queerness amplifies his vulnerability to hostility, as it challenges societal norms and prejudices.

Hakim recounts experiences of verbal threats and abuse, as well as incidents of physical assault. During these physical instances items are thrown at him, and he is spat in the face. He notes how close the men are during the verbal abuse, by noting that "men even walk up to me", and that they are close enough to "whisper". This closeness highlights the perpetrators brazenness and that they feel entitled within their prejudices to invade his personal space. Such closeness enhances the potency of threats made to Hakim's person. Hakim suggests that the underlying motive for the abuse is racism, as indicated by his recounting that that he was told to 'go back where I came from". Such a phrase has a devastating impact upon individuals' sense of welcome and integration and illustrates the profound psychological toll that hate incidents can have. Such frequent threats of violence and verbal abuse can create pervasive feelings of insecurity, transforming public spaces into sources of distress rather than sources of inclusion. Hakim's statement reflects the long-term psychological scars of hate crimes, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Self-censorship often becomes a coping mechanism for queer forced migrants, as they may feel compelled to hide aspects of their identity to avoid further targeting. Threats and hate crimes such as those Hakim recounts, encourages forced migrants to minimise their visibility as queer individuals, reducing their risk of violence but also curtailing their authentic self-expression. This has devastating impacts on queer forced migrants' inclusion.

Hakim observes that "When they get drunk, all the hate comes out." Through this he suggests that within specific contexts underlying societal biases surface. Alcohol removes inhibitions. Alcohol-fuelled incidents can therefore reveal elements that are hidden within polite and sober society. Through sharing these experiences, Hakim suggests that discriminatory attitudes are pervasive but often hidden in UK society. These experiences reveal a reveal deeply ingrained racism and homophobia within society. He indicates the failure of societal structures to adequately challenge these biases. It is plain to see how experiencing this kind of persistent harassment and discrimination produces significant barriers to integration for Hakim. Experiences of racism and homophobia erode queer forced migrants' trust in local communities, perpetuating feelings isolation and exclusion.

Toby says:

“Reporting Hate Crime to the police is a ridiculous idea! We know it doesn't work because the police are incredibly racist. I had Hate Crime training and believe me, for them to take anyone seriously, you have to produce witnesses’ testimonies, which is almost impossible, and it has to be ‘serious’ based on their stupid definition. Otherwise, they won’t investigate. But would you trust a white man in uniform, who looks and sounds exactly the same as the one who harassed you the week before?”

The constant fear of hate crimes undermine trust in institutions and law enforcement agencies. If queer forced migrants perceive inadequate protection or indifference to these crimes, it erodes their confidence in seeking help or reporting incidents. This lack of trust further isolates individuals, reinforcing a sense of vulnerability and alienation. The fear of victimisation leads individuals to limit their interactions, avoiding public spaces or community events where they could otherwise forge connections. This exclusionary impact hinders the establishment of a sense of belonging and impedes efforts toward social integration.

Sam says:

“I was so happy the first time I wore my rainbow tote bag when I went to church here in Cardiff. I was so naïve. Clearly, the old ladies there did not like it and started asking me personal questions about my sexuality. I immediately lied and pretended that I didn’t know what the rainbow colours stood for. They believed me and left me alone. In that moment, I was back in the closet, I was back home. I hadn’t eaten that day, I needed food, and I was freezing, I needed a hot cup of tea. I knew that they were not going to give me food or tea if I told them that I’m a lesbian. I went back many times because I need to eat.”

The aftermath of a hate crime results in long-term psychological consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. These mental health challenges not only affect individual well-being but also present significant barriers to active participation in societal activities, hindering the overall integration process.

Deliberately Dehumanising Asylum Processes

The challenges stemming from navigating asylum processes and advocacy directly impact the overall integration of queer forced migrants into Welsh society. Delays and uncertainties in securing legal status create barriers to full engagement with the community. The lack of awareness about rights further impedes access to opportunities, services, and community involvement. These limitations collectively create formidable obstacles to a successful integration process, hindering the ability of queer forced migrants to contribute meaningfully to the diverse fabric of Welsh society.

Mustafa says:

“The worst part is that I have stopped dreaming. I told my GP to give me stronger anti-depressants, so I sleep all day. I don’t want to be awake. I have been waiting for my status for years now. I can’t study. I can’t work. I can’t live a decent life. How much longer can I take this?”

Here, Mustafa expresses frustrations and the deep mental health impact of being stuck within the asylum system. He notes that he has been waiting for years for his refugee status. He indicates that this waiting has put him in a space of stasis. Delays in receiving a decision result in him not being able to work or study. His exclamation that “I can’t live a decent life” highlights that his standard of living does not even meet bare minimums. Queer forced migrants often face additional complexities and challenges within immigration processes due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Understanding the nuances of immigration laws is challenging, especially for those without expert guidance. Shortages in access to free, quality legal assistance in Wales jeopardises asylum cases. Legal assistance is a fundamental prerequisite for integrating into Wales, as it can secure a secure immigration status. Without this stability, individuals exist within the limbo described by Mustafa. Uncertainties around immigration status psychologically hinders the establishment of a sense of permanence and belonging in Wales.

Usman says:

“*When I found out that my claim was rejected, I had the worst panic attack of my life. I thought ‘oh my god they’re going to send me back.’ And if they sent me back, I knew I was going to end up dead. A friend reached out, and through her I found a good private solicitor who appealed my case. My friend paid for the solicitor, and I paid her back. I’m one of the lucky ones.”*

Usman shows through this quote that failures in immigration cases can have deadly consequences for queer asylum seekers. Shortages in access to quality legal assistance significantly increases the risk of procedural errors during immigration processes. Usman calls himself “*one of the lucky ones”, noting that being able to appeal the rejection* was only base off his ability to access a private solicitor. Most asylum seekers lack the means to access this kind of legal support, relying upon the provisions from legal aid or legal charities. Whilst waiting to receive refugee status, asylum seekers such as Usman, experience fears for their life. Lack of competent legal assistance creates delays and uncertainties in obtaining a stable immigration status, prolonging this period of psychological stress for queer forced migrants. Such stress is a considerable barrier to integration.

Fatimah says:

"When I started my application, I didn't have a girlfriend. In fact, I never had an official girlfriend. Because you know, it was illegal! All my evidence was Glitter's supporting letter and my story. Usually, I love painting my nails and wearing make-up, but for the interview I decided to dress up more masculine, in case they didn't believe I am a lesbian."

Legal assistance extends beyond bureaucratic processes and should empower queer forced migrants with awareness of their rights and the ability to advocate for themselves. Lack of legal guidance leaves individuals unaware of the protections afforded to them against discriminatory practices. For example, within this quote Fatimah expresses that she believes she must appear in a certain way. This lack of awareness extends to essential aspects such as employment rights, protection against housing discrimination, and access to vital services. Without this knowledge, queer forced migrants struggle to assert themselves as active members of Welsh society, hindering their full participation and integration.

4.2 Living with Housing Uncertainties

Lack of safe and inclusive housing options

A primary topic throughout the interviews was discussions of the integration challenges presented by a lack of safe and inclusive housing options. Housing uncertainties were presented as increasing participant's vulnerabilities and exposing them to discrimination and violence. As a result, I found this to be a key factor impacting the wellbeing and integration of queer forced migrants in Wales.

Oluchi says:

"I have two girls. We all live together in a one bed flat. The lady downstairs, she's also a refugee. She's got two girls too, and they also live in a one bed flat. It's a converted house, very old. My girls want to paint the bedroom pink and get new furniture, because the sofa and the bed are almost broken. But I don't know how long we'll get to stay in that flat, I don't know where or when the Home Office will move us again. The uncertainty is exhausting."

The shortage of safe housing options magnifies the vulnerability of queer forced migrants, placing them at an elevated risk of discrimination. Shared accommodations, often chosen due to limited alternatives, become potential sites of hostility based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This vulnerability not only compromises personal safety but also runs counter to the principles of inclusion and acceptance, impeding the formation of a sense of security crucial for successful integration.

Mustafa says:

“Nobody in my house knows I’m gay! They are all very homophobic, but they are all I’ve got. So, I’ll keep my mouth shut and pretend I like girls for as long as I live here. I was in the closet for decades back in Egypt. A couple more years is nothing.”

Safe and supportive housing is not just a physical necessity but a foundational element for the mental well-being of queer forced migrants. Encountering discrimination or violence within shared living spaces exacerbates existing mental health challenges, contributing to heightened anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Aima says:

“The attack gave me severe PTSD. For months, I wouldn’t go outside or walk in the dark, I was afraid my old housemates would track me down and finish me off. I’m doing better now, but only because time has passed, not because I’ve healed.”

Aima describes the impacts that violence within shared living arrangements has upon her mental health, and sense of safety. She describes how these fears of hostility led her to self-isolation. Such isolation impedes individuals’ ability to develop social networks and meaningful relationships. This instance displays the devastating impact that discrimination can have on establishing connections within the local community. Social isolation such as this restricts opportunities for queer forced migrants to actively participate in essential integration activities such as community events, support networks, and social meetings. Through this quote we can therefore see how access to safe and inclusive housing is essential for queer forced migrants to be able to integrate.

Oluchi says:

“The neighbourhood is very rough. I think people have figured out that this is an asylum accommodation. Often, they throw eggs on out windows, or empty rubbish bags by the door. I’m on the first floor so I don’t hear it, but my downstairs neighbour gets very stressed. I wish my girls could play in the garden but I’m too afraid to let them.”

Addressing this challenge necessitates the provision of safe and supportive housing options that affirm diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Safe spaces are indispensable, contributing not only to the physical safety of queer forced migrants but also to their mental Well-being and sense of belonging. Establishing an environment free from discrimination allows individuals to focus on their integration journey, fostering a positive connection with the local community and facilitating active participation in all aspects of Welsh society.

4.3 Unsuitable Healthcare Access

Challenges in Seeking Affirming Healthcare

Access to suitable healthcare was a primary barrier to integration raised by participants. Participants shared numerous experiences of healthcare settings ill equipped to attend to the needs of queer forced migrants. This includes healthcare professionals who lack sensitivities or cultural knowledge to provide affirming healthcare. Importantly, this conversation included trans and HIV positive participants, who experience particularly heightened vulnerability and need surrounding affirming healthcare. Their experiences highlight the formidable challenges in accessing essential services, as well as the stigma and discrimination these services can perpetuate. Their stories underscore the impact that failures of the healthcare system has on queer forced migrants. It is clear to see that these failures impede their ability to feel fully accepted and integrated within Wales. Their experiences emphasise the urgent need to addressing these challenges and create empathic inclusive and culturally informed healthcare services in Wales. They call for equitable healthcare access that ensures every individual, irrespective of their background, feels seen, respected and cared for.

Lack of GP Knowledge on Trans-inclusive Healthcare, and HIV+ Related Issues

Malika says:

“Being HIV+ is not a death sentence anymore. But there is still so much stigma. I have lost friends and family because of it. On the surface, things are better here but I added my status on one of the apps and people ghosted me.”

As Malika notes, the impacts of HIV have changed drastically due to medical advancements. She contrasts this with a lack of change in the stigma relating to HIV. Within Wales, there is a noticeable lack of knowledge on trans-inclusive healthcare and HIV+-related issues among general practitioners in Wales, especially older GPs. These gaps are particularly concerning as early detection and receiving medication are critical in managing HIV+ effectively. Malika describes how her HIV+ status has isolated her, noting that when open about the fact “people ghosted me”. Lack of action from healthcare professionals in educating the public, contributes to keeping damaging stigma alive. This stigma leads to poor mental health and isolation of individuals such as Malika. This has a rippling impact on across the broader community of queer forced migrants, as they feel unwelcome and unsupported within healthcare settings.

Sam says:

"The GPs have no idea how to speak to us (trans people) what names, what pronouns to use, what I need, to whom I should be referred to, being transphobic. When I first arrived in Cardiff, I was anxious and crying before and after each GP appointment. I pray I don't get sick because I don't want to deal with them and their prejudices. When I get ill, I rely on friends and paracetamol."

Trans people require specialised gender-affirming healthcare, including hormone therapy and gender confirmation surgeries, to align their physical appearance with their gender identity. The limited availability of gender clinics in Wales exacerbates the challenges faced by trans forced migrants, forcing them to endure extended periods of uncertainty and discomfort as they wait for essential services to become available. The presence of only one gender clinic in Wales, based in Cardiff poses a substantial obstacle to the integration of trans forced migrants, especially those who have been displaced in rural Wales. While the waiting list is shorter compared to the rest of the UK, it is not sufficient to meet the diverse needs of the queer community, particularly forced migrants who usually have unique healthcare requirements. The prolonged waiting times, which double because of COVID-19, significantly impact their healthcare experiences and overall Ill-being. This delay not only impedes their ability to access timely medical interventions crucial for their mental health and gender dysphoria but also contributes to a sense of isolation and frustration, hindering their integration into the new community.

Sam says:

"I wasn't sure whether I should tell the Home Office that I'm a trans woman. I thought they are going to discriminate against me and send me back. So, I decided to hide it. In my application I said I'm a gay man. I stopped taking my hormones a few months before I left for the UK. It was the most horrible months of my life. The changes in my appearance Ire almost immediate but I thought, this is for my own good. I was naïve, and I believed that when I'm in the UK I will be able to get my hormones right away, but this was not the case. I have been in the waiting list for a while now. There is a lot of back and forth, lots of admin, lots of calls, it's exhausting! I do not pass as a woman anymore. All the hard work that I did, all the money I spent on the black-market back home was a waste. I want to crawl out of my skin every time I look at myself in the mirror. I don't recognise that person."

Lack of Trust in the Healthcare System

The inadequacy of gender clinic to meet the diverse needs of the queer forced migrants, underscores systemic issues in the provision of inclusive healthcare services. Forced

migrants bring unique healthcare requirements shaped by their migration experiences, which include trauma, cultural nuances, and linguistic diversity. The limited options further marginalise trans forced migrants, hindering their access to comprehensive and culturally sensitive healthcare. In the absence of tailored services, their integration process is hindered, as they grapple with unmet health needs that impact their ability to engage fully in social, and community activities within their new environment.

Malika says:

"The staff (at the gender clinic) are nice and helpful. They try their best to support the trans community. But I feel that sometimes they don't understand our urgency - I fight more battles. I fight for our asylum status, and I fight to become who I truly are."

Here, Malika explains her feeling that the medical staff do not understand the challenges faced by asylum seekers. She notes that gaps in their support are presented, not through lack of willing, but through these fundamental gaps in knowledge of queer forced migrant experiences. Negative experiences, such as ignorance and insensitivity, decrease the trust that individuals have in healthcare professionals' ability to sufficiently address health concerns. This erosion of trust in healthcare systems can profoundly impact the health and wellbeing of queer forced migrants. Individuals may fear encountering further discrimination or misunderstandings from healthcare professionals and avoid seeking medical support. When health issues are unaddressed, this can lead to further complications and a deterioration of overall health. Consequently, lack of cultural competence and dismissive attitudes within healthcare settings is fundamentally damaging to queer forced migrants' wellbeing.

Sam explains:

"I don't trust doctors. In my appointments, I always bring a white, British friend with me. Only when my symptoms are verified by my white, British friend the doctors take me seriously. Even though my English is perfect, and my symptoms are clear, I'm not taken seriously because I'm a trans woman of colour and a refugee."

Here Sam notes her experience of discriminatory practices within the UK healthcare system. She recognises that doctors do not take her seriously, and notes that her treatment is different when accompanied by a white British friend. Sam considers this treatment to be due to her intersecting identities of being a "trans woman of colour and a refugee." Sam uses her experiences of discrimination to justify her lack of trust in doctors. Lack of lack of trust in healthcare systems not only impacts directly on health but can impact other areas of the individual's life. Facing medical discrimination affects the individual's overall sense of

security and integration, as they feel rejected by authoritative members of their new community. Negative experiences of discrimination in healthcare settings forms apprehensions in seeking help, that can extend to the wider host community. This is a key contributing factor in socially isolating queer forced migrants and creating barriers to their successful integration.

Uninformed HIV+/AIDS Campaigns

Sam says:

"At this point, there are no excuses for not creating a campaign specifically for breaking down the HIV+/AIDS stigma amongst queer refugees and asylum seekers. People in these big AIDS organisations are out of touch if they still think that HIV+ is a health issue for cis, white gay men! They are responsible for gatekeeping and not advancing public dialogue that can save the lives of queer refugees and asylum seekers".

Discussions with HIV+ participants such as Sam brought into attention the exclusionary nature of HIV+/AIDS campaigns such as Fast Track Cardiff. These campaigns have primarily targeted white cisgender gay men from British and European backgrounds. Participants pointed out that "shortsighted and out-of-touch campaigns" contribute to the wider marginalisation of HIV+ individuals and impede their integration. Through disregarding the specific challenges that HIV+ individuals face within queer forced migrant communities, these campaigns exemplify systematic exclusion. Through prioritising the needs of a specific demographic, these campaigns have ignored the diversity of HIV+ individuals. This perpetuates a narrative that marginalises those who do not fit into the perceived mainstream representation. As such, queer forced migrants are made to feel that they are excluded, amplifying feelings of isolation and damaging integration.

Queer forced migrants face unique challenges and vulnerabilities related to HIV+ risk and prevention. These are influenced through the presence of diverse cultural backgrounds, migration experiences, and socio-economic factors. Neglecting to consider these aspects within prevention efforts fails to address the needs of queer forced migrants. Through these oversights, queer forced migrants not only face greater health risks, but damages integration attempts through exclusion.

4.4 Surviving the Mental Health Challenges

Throughout the interviews, participants noted the psychological impacts resulting from their lived experience as a queer forced migrants. They described the devastating mental health impacts of discrimination. Queer forced migrants are resilient. They arrive from their host countries already carrying the traumatic impacts of persecution. Continuing stigma and

discrimination create significant mental challenges in integrating into a new community. Successful integration requires queer forced migrants' mental health needs to be recognised and addressed. I call for increased empathy, and understandings of the intersections of their identities and the unique traumas they have endured. Only through this is it possible to develop an environment that promotes healing, understanding, and a sense of belonging.

Living with Acute Trauma

Amina says:

"I didn't know anything about mental health. Where I come from if you 'have mental health' you are crazy. Since I claimed asylum, I have been struggling a lot. I'm not my normal self. I don't leave my room during the day, I cry a lot, I have bad thoughts. I was told that I am depressed, and I was given strong medication by the GP. Now, I sleep all the time, I'm like a plant. I don't want to feel like this."

Amina describes her lack of understanding of mental health before arriving in the UK. She shares the mental health struggles she has experienced because of the asylum system. Amina explains that the only support that she has received is strong medication, and that this has not been effective in addressing her needs. Migration processes forcibly separate individuals from familiar cultural and social networks. A lack in community support and feelings of belonging can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and alienation poor mental health. This isolation is compounded in situations where cultural and language differences create barriers to forming immediate connections. Many queer forced migrants are left to manage their poor mental health in isolation. Deficiencies in adequate support systems hinders queer force migrants' ability to cope with the stressors of migration and can result in heightened vulnerability to mental health issues. Forming mental health services that are tailored to the needs of queer forced migrants and facilitating community support are crucial ways to addressing these mental health challenges.

Amal says:

"No, I don't have any friends. I don't want any friends; I don't want people to see me like this. This is not who I am. When I'm awake I read, and I pray."

The mental health challenges faced by queer forced migrants, including discrimination, stigma, and isolation, have profound implications for their integration into the new society. The pre-existing trauma from discrimination in their home countries, coupled with the additional stressors of migration, hinder the process of adaptation and adjustment. Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD function as significant barriers to engagement in social, economic, and community activities. Discrimination and stigma

contribute to a sense of exclusion, making it difficult for queer forced migrants to feel fully accepted within their new community, resulting from severed social networks further compounds these challenges, limiting opportunities for meaningful connections and support that are vital for successful integration.

Lack of Culturally Competent Mental Health Services

Participants commented upon the challenges presented through lack of access to culturally competent mental health services. They noted a lack of mental health support workers and counsellors with finding professionals who could understand and support their unique experiences. There are shortages in Wales of counsellors with shared lived experience or specialism in supporting the complex traumas of queer forced migrants. This systemic gap in culturally sensitive mental health support, means that queer forced migrants struggle to access services tailored to their needs. Consequently, queer forced migrants are alienated from services that are essential to successful integration within Welsh society.

Hakim says:

"I used to love watching people walk by. And I used to think what goes on in their lives, and I end up comparing my life with theirs. I quickly realised that I started having strong resentment for strangers and my mental health deteriorated. Queer asylum seekers are not on the same 'human' category as everyone else in the UK."

Here Hakim shares the profound negative impact that seeking asylum has had on his mental health. He shares the dehumanising impact of seeking asylum through the suggestion that they are "not on the same 'human' category". Experiencing such profound discrimination has led to resentment of others within the UK. This is devastating to the individuals' ability to feel included and integrate into society.

Ayat says:

"I cut myself from time to time. I haven't in a while now, which is positive, I guess. I know of a couple of people who have attempted suicide and one who succeeded. We are under so much pressure; we are being treated like dirt, and no one is there to support us. What else can we do?"

Systemic shortcomings in mental health support have life-threatening implications for queer forced migrants. Ayat displays the physical results of a hostile asylum system upon queer forced migrant's bodies. She shows that unmet mental health needs can result in self-harm and suicide. There is a notable absence of NHS resources tailored towards queer forced migrant communities. Even emergency mental health helplines often lack knowledge or

capacities to confront their specific challenges. A lack of preventative or reactive solutions contributes to long waiting lists for mental health services. Ayat notes this lack of support and says, “what can we do?”. Through this she highlights that suicide and self-harm become direct consequences of not accessing support for such overwhelming mental health issues. This devastating reality emphasises the urgent need for comprehensive mental health services that address the specific challenges faced by queer forced migrants. The provision of timely and culturally competent mental health services has the capacity to prevent such tragic outcomes. It is therefore vital that these are put in place.

4.5 Enduring Financial Insecurities

Limited and Restricted Employment Opportunities

The participants strongly highlighted the enduring financial challenges they experience as queer forced migrants in Wales, especially in the realm of limited employment opportunities, which present formidable hurdles that deeply affect their journey toward integration into the new society. The pervasive discrimination in the job market based on their legal status goes beyond just financial stability; it profoundly influences multiple facets of an individual's life, shaping their ability to actively participate and engage as valued members of the community.

Olamide says:

“I have an MBA. I was a Business Executive for the oil industry. Now, I make minimum wage working as a Support Worker. 5 years waiting for my refugee status, destroyed all my ambitions… All we are good for is low-paying jobs that no one else wants. We are support workers, and cleaners. Don’t get me wrong, these are important jobs, and some people like doing them, but we have so many talents that go to waste.”

Here, Olamide expresses frustration with his employment prospects. He notes that he is highly skilled, with both a degree and experience as a business executive. This is contrasted against his employment prospects in the UK, which consist of low skilled and low paying jobs. Olamide shares that his experience in the UK has made him feel that “all we are good for is jobs […] that no one else wants”. Employment can have profound effects upon integration. Olamide experiences rejection through not being permitted to apply his skills through employment. He does not centre the impact of employment discrimination on lack of personal finances but prioritises the impact this has had on his feelings of being valued by the host society. This demonstrates the importance of employability to successful integration.

Olamide explains:

“No one hires refugees with a 5-year gap in their resume. If we were allowed to work, even part time while waiting for the refugee status, we would have ‘one foot through the door.’ We are being given plenty of volunteering opportunities from so many organisations, but those never turn into full-time employment when we get our status. Because they want free labour. And there are always more asylum seekers to offer them free labour”.

Olamide explains the impact that long waits for asylum decision have upon employability. As previously discussed, queer forced migrants often face long waits within the asylum system, due to the complexities in their cases. As such, queer refugees’ employability is harmed once they gain permission to work. Olamide notes how volunteering opportunities are often offered in place of paid labour. She highlights a culture in which migrant’s labour is easily exploited, which additionally compounds shortages in paid employment prospects. She suggests that this would be solved through being given the right to work throughout the asylum process. Employability would be improved through getting “one foot in the door”. This can be interpreted as relating to building networks and UK work experience. Olamide expresses frustrations with systematic challenges contributing to forced migrant’s employability prospects.

Olamide continues:

“I got kids. I must be realistic. I will take the low paying job because my daughter needs new trainers. But what I make is not enough. I rely on food banks, Glitter’s food vouchers, clothes, and toys donations. In the winter I never turn the heating on. Many nights I cry myself to sleep, I wish they had a better mother.”

Here Olamide displays how struggles with employability create an obstacle to social inclusion. Because only low paying jobs are available to her, she cannot fulfil the standards expected of her as a mother. She displays mental anguish at not being able to heat the house, provide her daughter with new trainers, and being forced to rely upon charity for essentials. As a result, she notes that “many nights I cry myself to sleep”. In Olamide’s case, employability has had a direct impact upon her mental health. Although refugee status has accorded her the right to work, she has been unable to engage in rewarding employment that can cater for her families’ needs. This highlights a fundamental barrier to inclusion and integration.

4.6 Internalised Shame and Social Isolation

The participants indicate that their journey is marked by intricate intersections of identity, where cultural, social, and familial expectations intertwine with the challenges of being a forced migrant and a member of the queer community. There are numerous nuanced dynamics surrounding these expectations, which have profound impact on the integration process of individuals who find themselves navigating multiple layers of identity. Specifically, the participants discuss the intricate connection between the internalised stigma related to one's queer identity and the external pressures emanating from cultural, social, and familial contexts. The interplay between internalised stigma and external pressures becomes a pivotal point of understanding, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by individuals navigating multifaceted identities. The participants elaborate on these complexities, how they seek to foster empathy, awareness, and contribute to the creation of inclusive environments that honour their experiences and help those who will come after them.

Ayat says:

"I live in North Wales. There is nothing here for people like me. No groups for queer refugees, or queer people of colour. I'm a very sociable person; I love meeting new people and making friends. I went to a couple of queer meet ups in my city, but they were horrible! They were looking at me like I was an alien! Now, I rarely leave my flat, I'm depressed, I can't sleep, I have no friends, I don't talk to anyone- except online. I can't wait to move away from here."

This statement highlights the social isolation that queer forced migrants face, especially within rural communities. Aysha notes that "there is nothing here for people like me." She remarks on North Wales's lack of services and community infrastructure that can cater towards queer forced migrants. Through highlighting what is not present, Ayat suggests what she needs. Importantly, this includes social spaces and groups catered to queer refugees and queer people of colour. The presence of these services would make a marked improvement in catering for Ayat's integration needs. Through this statement, Ayat highlights the geographical disparities in queer forced migrants' integration journeys. Asylum accommodation is provided on a "no choice basis". Even following receiving refugee status, many forced migrants must remain in the same area because of local authorities "local connection" rules for council housing. Geographic isolation creates barriers to accessing support networks, thus perpetuating a sense of exclusion and alienation. Queer forced migrants are at particular risk of facing isolation in these areas, due to their unique and complex needs.

Ayat recounts experiences of discrimination at queer meetups. She says, “They were looking at me like I was an alien”. She feels dehumanised by the group’s reaction to her otherness. This points to the layered discrimination faced by queer forced migrants within white British LGBTQ+ spaces. Many predominantly white queer spaces will lack the inclusivity needed to welcome diverse identities. As such, Ayat faced racialised prejudice when trying to engage with such a group. Queer forced migrants often navigate compounded marginalisation, where identities as forced migrants, people of colour, and queer individuals intersect in a way that amplifies exclusion.

Ayat’s experience of marginalisation within a supposed safe space, can be seen to further erode her trust in community networks and exacerbate feelings of isolation. She states that “Now, I rarely leave my flat […] I have no friends, I don’t talk to anyone- except online.” This indicates that her experiences with failing to access appropriate social networks have resulted in her loneliness and isolation. Importantly, it is only those online and outside of her geographical area that she is in communication with. Her assertion that she is “a very sociable person” juxtaposes her current situation. This provides us with the strong sense that her isolation is a direct impact of her geographical circumstances. The lack of supportive networks and experiences of discrimination contribute to severe mental health challenges, including depression and sleep disturbances. Ayat’s decision to self-isolate is a form of self-protection but also hinders opportunities for integration. The psychological ramifications of exclusion limit her ability to integrate and thrive within the host society.

Ayat’s experiences reflect systemic failures to address the needs of queer forced migrants, particularly those in rural or underserved areas. Absences of spaces that celebrate and support intersectional identities creates significant barriers to queer force migrant’s integration. Services and organisations tailored to queer forced migrants are often centralised in cities. This leaves queer forced migrants in rural areas without access to critical support systems.

King says:

“My colleagues don’t know I’m gay. They don’t need to know. I’m a construction worker, black and a refugee. I stand out enough.”

The expectations ingrained within socio-cultural backgrounds and familial ties form an intricate web that queer forced migrants in Wales must navigate. Cultural norms, often deeply rooted in tradition, and familial expectations clash with the authentic expression of one's queer identity. The fear of being perceived as a burden intensifies as individuals grapple with the internalised pressure to conform to societal norms. The weight of these expectations creates a complex emotional landscape where shame and inadequacy become

powerful forces shaping the lived experiences of queer forced migrants. This internalised pressure to conform and avoid burdening others becomes a formidable obstacle to integration. The fear of falling short of cultural or familial expectations lead queer forced migrants to withdraw from active participation in local communities. The reluctance to fully engage in Welsh society impedes the development of social connections, hindering the building of a support network that is crucial for a successful integration process. As a result, individuals find themselves on the periphery, struggling to find a sense of belonging.

King says:

"In different (social) scenarios, I'm a different person. I don't lie about who I am, but I don't always show all of me to everyone. In the community centre for example, it's easier to be a refugee. At work, it's easier to a male. With Glitter, it's easier to be gay. And with my friends it's easier to be black. I don't think there is a scenario where I can fully be myself."

King displays the challenges he experiences in navigating his intersectional identities. He notes that he prioritises certain identities contextually. However, he reflects that there is no context in which "I can fully be myself", highlighting the socially isolating nature of these identities. Queer forced migrants experience intersectional identities. As with King's experience, support spaces often cater towards a particular identity but will not cover all of these. As such, queer forced migrants face greater difficulties in accessing spaces catering to them.

Ade says:

"When I reach out for help, I really need it. I'm not a greedy person. So, when they turn me down because I don't fit in with their criteria, it breaks my heart. I have stopped asking [Various organisations] for help because it's always a negotiation with them. It's draining. "

Here Ade highlights the barriers he has experience in accessing support services. He notes that when trying to access support, he is denied because "I do not fit in with their criteria". Institutional frameworks often lack the flexibility to accommodate for the nuanced realities of queer forced migrants. Such rigidity can exclude marginalised individuals, isolating them from essential services and exacerbating their vulnerabilities. As such, feelings of rejection and helplessness are reinforced. The emotional impact of these rejections is reflected in Ade's statements that "it breaks my heart". He notes that these rejections have led him to stop seeking help. His complete disengagement conveys a profound disillusionment with support systems that should be able to provide relief. This disengagement not only reflects individual coping mechanisms but also signals a systemic failure to build trust and provide equitable support.

Ade's assertion, "I am not a greedy person", and insistence that he would only seek help when strictly necessary, reveals an internalised need to justify asking for support. This justification is likely formed through societal stigmas around dependency. These stigmas are borne of social narratives that denounce forced migrants as burdensome. These social narratives discourage vulnerable individuals from seeking assistance, perpetuating cycles of isolation and unmet needs.

Negotiation and Power Imbalances

My participants brought up the subject of power imbalances between queer forced migrants and support organisations. Crucially, there was discussions of negotiations. A dynamic of negotiation reflects the conditional nature of assistance. In such a context, individuals are required to justify their worthiness to those in positions of authority to be able to access support. This is a dehumanising process that does not uphold dignity. As such, power imbalances can further alienate queer forced migrants from essential services.

Many queer forced migrants experience internalised stigma relating to their queer identity. This can form a deeply ingrained emotional burden. The media, colonialism and historical prejudices have perpetuated the societal stigmatisation of queer identities. This has led to queer individuals internalising negative perceptions about their identity. Internalised stigma creates a pervasive sense of shame. As a result, individuals with internalised stigma view their queer identity as a source of burden, both to themselves and those around them.

Ade says:

"All I want is a normal life. But I'm away from my country, away from my family and friends. I didn't want to leave but I need to be safe. I don't belong here. I don't know where I belong."

Internalised shame, as caused by social stigma, can have profound implications for the integration of queer forced migrants. The fear of burdening others with their identity develops into a significant barrier to forming authentic connections. This sense of shame leads individuals to conceal or downplay their queer identity, limiting their ability to engage openly and authentically in social interactions. Consequently, feelings of shame hinder the development of meaningful relationships and support networks, crucial components of a successful integration process.

Usman says:

"I don't want to tell people I'm bi. It's none of their business. People in the (community) centre already know I'm a refugee and they can see I'm black. I want to have a part of me

that is only just for me. I don't lie to my friends, but I don't know how they would react to be honest."

Internalised shame impacts queer forced migrants' self-perception and their ability to self-advocate for their rights and needs. Fears of burdening others can prevent individuals from assertively seeking support, further isolating themselves. As such their capacity to address challenges and access resources is inhibited. Consequently, it is apparent that internalised shame can become a barrier to queer forced migrant's active participation in integration initiatives.

Sam says:

"I don't open up about how I feel, or about what I'm going through. I prefer to keep all this to myself. I don't want people to think I'm burdening them with my problems. Everyone has their own worries and at the end of the day, I chose to be a refugee, so I have to deal with the consequences."

Here Sam explains the psychological impact that her refugee status has had upon her. She shares that she does not share her problems with others. The reasoning behind her self-isolation is fears that others will perceive her as a burden. Shidlo & Ahola (2013) suggested that a fear of burdening others is a common among forced migrants, particularly those with intersecting stigmatised identities. As such, queer forced migrants are at particular risk of experiencing these fears and isolating themselves. It could be suggested that such actions reluctance to seek help is rooted in internalised shame, perpetuated by negative narratives and unjust stereotypes about migrants being a burden on UK society. This self-imposed isolation leaves individuals to navigate their emotional challenges alone and perpetuates a cycle of unmet needs. Sam's statement, "I chose to be a refugee, so I must deal with the consequences," displays a sense of personal responsibility for her circumstances. This reflects an internalisation of societal stigmas that frame refugees as responsible for their own plight. This self-perspective, while factually inaccurate, exacerbates feelings of guilt, shame, and low self-worth, contributing to heightened mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011). This behaviour aligns with broader evidence that queer forced migrants avoid discussing their mental health due to perceived stigma, both within their communities and broader circles (Alessi et al., 2016). Interestingly, a significant majority of my participants (approximately 10 out of 12) reported similar feelings of reluctance to seek support due to internalised stigma and a fear of burdening others. This highlights the prevalence of this issue. Consequently, it is evident how internalised shame and social isolation is able to have a devastating impact on queer forced migrants' ability to integrate.

The data from this study corroborates findings from broader research, where queer forced migrants frequently report heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation linked to internalized stigma (Alessi et al., 2016; Shidlo & Ahola, 2013). The stigma associated with being perceived as a burden creates a barrier to seeking assistance, perpetuating a cycle of isolation. Queer forced migrants internalise a reluctance to reach out for help, fearing judgment or disappointment from both their cultural communities and the wider society. This hesitancy limits their access to vital resources, hindering their ability to address mental health concerns, engage with community services, and fully participate in integration programmes designed to support their journey.

Sam continues:

"Of course I'm ashamed for being a refugee, who wouldn't be! I'm ashamed for being a lesbian too. I'm ashamed of a lot of things. This plays up a lot in my mind, shame."

Sam indicates the intense shame she feels at her identity as a queer forced migrant. This reveals a deep internalisation of societal stigmas surrounding both refugee status and sexual orientation. Her phrase "who wouldn't be!", suggests her feeling that these identities are inherently shameful. Her shame relating to being both a refugee and a lesbian indicates the dual marginalisation that is faced by queer forced migrants. This layering of shame is a common experience amongst those whose intersecting identities are stigmatised in multiple ways (Jaspal, 2018). Sam notes that shame "plays up a lot in my mind," emphasising the extent to which shame preoccupies her. This can contribute to psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem. A majority of queer forced migrants have endured discrimination, persecution, or violence in their home country, due to sexual orientation or gender identity (Alessi et al., 2016). Migration is often an attempt to leave these factors behind. These stigmas are not only carried from home cultures, but as previously explored, can be reinforced by the host society. Building supportive social networks is essential for accessing resources, navigating unfamiliar systems, and fostering a sense of belonging. Internalised stigma and trauma can obstruct these processes (Alessi et al., 2016). As such, the internalised stigma described in the quote highlights a significant barrier to integration.

Ayat says:

"When they found out about me and my girlfriend, my brothers and neighbours broke the door during the night. I was asleep. They pulled me out of my bed and stripped me naked. They dragged me through the village, threw oil at me and hit me with sticks. They dug out a shallow grave and left me there. I thought I was going to die. I always lock my door during the night, and I avoid all men, if I can."

Ayat recounts details of a brutal homophobic attack. The attack is violent and clearly details the serious threat to her life. These acts of violence are emblematic of the extreme stigma and hatred directed at LGBTQ+ individuals in many regions. Traumatically, these actions are not perpetrated by strangers, but “brothers and neighbours”. That individuals close to her would commit such violence and leave her in “a shallow grave” indicates the extent of the vitriol, and perceived expendability, of queer individuals within that community. Such a traumatic event is life-altering, as it not only causes immediate physical harm but also inflicts long-term psychological damage (Alessi et al., 2016). The statement, “I always lock my door during the night, and I avoid all men, if I can,” demonstrates the lingering effect of trauma in the Ayat’s life. These behaviours reflect hypervigilance, a heightened sensitivity to potential threats, which is a characteristic symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), (Herman, 2015). Continuing such defensive actions in this new environment, signifies an ongoing sense of danger. Whilst a survival mechanism, constant vigilance, can severely hinder social interactions and opportunities for integration. The participant’s traumatic experiences have fundamentally altered their ability to trust others. Fear of judgment, sensitivity to perceived harm, and mistrust can hinder the ability to form meaningful relationships or seek support. Participation in community activities or accessing support services becomes fraught with anxiety, as past experiences shape perceptions of risks in the present. As such, it can be seen how queer forced migrants’ experiences of violence can directly cause social isolation, thereby damaging efforts to establish a sense of belonging in the host society (Alessi et al., 2016).

Ade says:

“My ‘friends’ told them where we lived. I was coming back from work late that night. I saw them setting my boyfriend on fire. I was hiding behind a car. I will never forget his screams. I still have nightmares. I don’t have any friends here. I rarely go to (community) events. I keep to myself. I’m safer this way.”

Here Ade shares his devastation at the betrayal he experienced through sharing that, “My ‘friends’ told them where we lived”. For queer forced migrants, experiences like this can make it difficult to trust others, even within immediate social circles. Ade’s statement, “I do not have any friends” here reenforces his difficulties in rebuilding trust and remaining feelings of alienation. Through not connecting with others, individuals like Ade are deprived of vital emotional support. His ongoing concerns display the how past trauma can have ongoing ramifications on perceptions of danger within the present.

Ade describes an intensely traumatic event. He recalls that “I saw them setting my boyfriend on fire”. Here he describes an extreme act of violence that indicates the heightened levels of persecution LGBTQ+ individuals face within countries where it is unsafe or illegal to be LGBTQ. Witnessing such extreme violence leaves enduring psychological scars. This can particularly create ongoing feelings of loss guilt and powerlessness when the violence is inflicted upon a loved one (Herman, 2015).

Ade’s statement, “I will never forget his screams. I still have nightmares,” illustrates the deep and lasting impact of trauma. The presence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is indicated through the vivid recollection of sensory details. PTSD symptoms are shown through Ade’s recollection of the screams, intrusive memories and nightmares. These symptoms create significant barriers to daily function and social engagement through serious disruption to the individual’s wellbeing. Unprocessed trauma produces long-term mental health challenges within queer forced migrant populations and can hinder their ability to integrate into new communities (Shidlo & Ahola, 2013).

Ade shares his isolation. He notes that, “I rarely go to (community) events. I keep to myself. I am safer this way”. Self-isolation is a coping mechanism that is rooted in hypervigilance and self-preservation. Although Ade creates a sense of safety through isolating himself, this can perpetuate a cycle of loneliness. Through lack of community connections and engagement, opportunities for support and integration are limited. Self-imposed isolation is a common response to severe trauma, as fears of vulnerability outweigh the perceived benefits of connection (Alessi et al., 2016). Reluctance to attend community events or form friendships create significant barriers to integration. Social engagement is essential to building support networks, accessing resources, and fostering a sense of belonging. Ade’s experience of betrayals and violence has reshaped his ability to trust others, hindering his capacity to fully participate in society. Feelings of isolation reinforce the mental and emotional toll of traumatic experiences. As such, queer forced migrants in Ade’s position will struggle to build a sense of belonging or safety.

4.7 Coping Strategies – Resilience and Substance Misuse

Olamide says:

“I’m a very proud woman and the Home Office and the ‘community’ here in Wales has made me feel like shit about myself, feeling like a beggar. I write short stories and poetry to cope with how angry and negative this country makes me feel. Sometimes I read them to the (Glitter) group because I feel like people don’t judge me there.”

My study displayed various strategies that queer forced migrants employ to cope with "feeling like a burden". For Olamide, creativity is an outlet for expressing emotions, processing trauma, and finding moments of solace amid adversity. She notes that she feels able to share these feelings with Glitter members. This displays a crucial function of creative expression, as she can develop a sense of identity, empowerment, and connection with others who empathise or may even share similar experiences. Although creativity can be a powerful coping mechanism, it has a nuanced impact upon integration. Where creativity is not shared with others to create social bonds, it can inadvertently become a means of self-isolation, hindering integration efforts. Balancing the benefits of creative coping mechanisms with active engagement in community life is essential in a holistic approach to integration.

King says:

"I never used to drink. I was raised Muslim. But dealing with the Home Office for so many years and with the British people, I started drinking and smoking hash. How else I'm supposed to cope with this low life they force on us?"

King takes an alternative approach to Olamide, using drugs and alcohol as a survival strategy. He frames these as a mechanism to cope with the stresses of the asylum system and UK society. It is not uncommon for queer forced migrants to resort to substance misuse as a means of coping with trauma, stress, or the uncertainties of their situation. Although such substances can provide temporary relief, they can have a long-term impact on mental health, physical wellbeing, and social life. Substance use can become a barrier to forming connections, engaging in community activities, and actively participating in initiatives that support integration. As such, dependency on drugs and alcohol can hinder the development of a stable and fulfilling life in Wales. Addressing the root causes of substance use and providing comprehensive support for mental health and wellbeing is crucial for mitigating the negative impact upon integration journey.

Mustafa says:

"I'm not going to cry or complain about it. There is no point. I have to sort things out by myself, no one else is going to help me. And I don't like asking for help. Everyone here is very selfish; they only care about themselves."

Mustafa expresses that he feels he must cope by himself, and that there is not help available when needed. Similar sentiments were shared by many of the participants. This displays the self-reliance forced migrants often adopt due to a lack of tailored support structures. Although resilience and self-sufficiency are admirable qualities, this feeling that there is not support available hinders integration. Without adequate support, queer forced migrants face

challenges in accessing essential services, advocating for their rights and navigating complex systems. Self-reliance narrative can lead to isolation when individuals hesitate to seek assistance, believing that they must navigate the integration journey independently. Such beliefs are expressed by Mustafa. Emphasising community support and providing accessible services can counteract the perception that individuals must go through the integration process alone. It is therefore essential to foster supportive environments and develop services that are informed on queer forced migrants' unique challenges. Only through these provisions it is possible to promote integration, through dismantling the attitude that "do it yourself" is the single option.

Lack of Positive Visibility

There is a lack of awareness campaigns and representation in Wales of queer forced migrants. Positive representation in the media, public spaces, and community events is a powerful tool for challenging stereotypes and fostering an inclusive environment. The absence of positive visibility has negative implications for the integration of queer forced migrants. Positive visibility and representation are crucial affirmations of queer identities. This is particularly relevant to queer forced migrants who commonly grapple with the burden of shame and societal expectations. Where adequate representation is lacking, forced migrants experience a sense of erasure and invisibility. This hinders the development of a positive self-image, impacting individuals' confidence to express their identities openly.

Amina says:

"You don't see many of us around here and no one knows what to do with us. We are too few for organisations to justify running things 'just for us,' but you know what we've been through so much more than others and we deserve to have our own spaces and our own programmes. So far, they don't really care. I hope this will change."

Amina notes the invisibility of queer forced migrants within their host communities with the statement "You do not see many of us around here". This invisibility is not only because of queer forced migrant's relatively small numbers but also results from this group self-isolating or remaining inconspicuous due to safety concerns and societal stigma. Amina's notes that "no one knows what to do with us," and that there are no organisations targeted towards this group's unique needs. Amina's observation, "We are too few for organisations to justify running things 'just for us,'" reflects the systemic barriers faced by minority subgroups within larger marginalised populations. Because of limited resources, more visible or numerous groups are often prioritised, leaving smaller populations like queer forced migrants without adequate support. This sense of being overlooked contributes to feelings of alienation and reinforces their marginalisation.

Amina asserts the need for specialised spaces and programmes, stating, “we deserve to have our own spaces and our own programmes.” She highlights that generalised services are unable to support the distinct challenges faced by queer forced migrants, and advocates for improved provision. Amina’s words convey resilience and a desire for change. Her statement demonstrates the need for advocacy and systemic reform. For real integration to occur, services must become informed on intersectional discrimination, trauma, and identity. She also demonstrates an awareness of the community’s value and the importance of carving out safe, affirming spaces to address their unique needs and develop collective empowerment.

Lack of Community and Social Support

Establishing robust community support networks support is vitally important to queer forced migrants’ integration in Wales. Many participants recounted experiences of grappling with burdens of shame and societal expectations. Community support networks such as support groups, community centres, and mentorship programmes, play a vital role in providing queer forced migrants with valuable connections and assistance. These spaces allow individuals to share experiences, acquire understanding, and access resources that can assist in navigating the complexities of integration. Through fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance, such networks have the capacity to counteract internalised shame and fear of being a burden. Participants noted a lack of sufficient social support networks in Wales. They shared how this formed barriers to building meaningful connections in their new environment, impacting their ability to integrate.

Oluchi says:

“We need more people like me to be heard, to be seen. But I don’t know who’s going to do it, because probably is exhausting and we have a lot going on. It takes energy and effort to share our stories and to re-live everything. But someone need to do it, so we don’t always exist in the shadows”.

The participant’s desire to be “heard” and “seen” reflects the importance of representation and recognition for queer forced migrants. Visibility serves as a counter to the marginalization and invisibility many individuals experience, both in their home countries and within host communities. The phrase, “so we do not always exist in the shadows,” underscores the transformative potential of advocacy in shifting societal attitudes and policies. However, the participant’s acknowledgment of the difficulties— “it is exhausting, and we have a lot going on”—points to the emotional labour involved in storytelling and advocacy. For many queer forced migrants, recounting their experiences requires revisiting trauma, which can be both draining and retraumatizing (Herman, 2015).

The statement, “It takes energy and effort to share our stories and to re-live everything,” underscores the psychological cost of advocacy for queer forced migrants. While sharing personal narratives can be empowering and serve as a catalyst for change, it also involves reliving painful memories. This tension reflects the dual-edged nature of advocacy: while it can amplify voices and foster understanding, it also places a significant burden on individuals already navigating complex challenges (Alessi et al., 2016). The broader context of the participant’s quote aligns with the lived reality of many queer forced migrants who experience profound feelings of isolation. Rejection by family, friends, and even broader social networks due to their sexual orientation or gender identity often leaves individuals without critical emotional and practical support systems (Alessi et al., 2016). The participant’s statement implicitly points to the necessity of community-led initiatives, such as support groups and mentorship programmes, that provide spaces for connection and solidarity. These programmes not only combat isolation but also validate the experiences of queer forced migrants, reducing the stigma and shame that often accompany their identities.

The participant’s recognition of the need for collective visibility ties directly to combatting the shame often internalized by queer forced migrants. By sharing their stories, individuals not only raise awareness but also challenge the perception of their identities as burdensome or invalid. Community support and solidarity play a crucial role in this process, helping individuals realise that their struggles are shared, and that seeking help is a sign of resilience, not weakness.

Budi says:

“I don’t have many people left. I want to make friends with other men like me, but I don’t want to be talking to them about my struggles. I want happy friendships, and I want to enjoy being myself. But that’s hard when all you have in common is pain.”

Establishing connections within the queer community and broader society is integral to overcoming the shame associated with being a burden. Support networks provide spaces where individuals build trust, share vulnerabilities, and receive encouragement. This trust is essential for encouraging forced migrants to seek assistance when needed, breaking down the barriers created by internalised shame. Through community centres and mentorship programmes, individuals access guidance on various aspects of integration, from navigating healthcare systems to finding employment opportunities. Building trust within these networks is not only empowering for the individual but also contributes to a more inclusive and supportive community environment.

Budi continues:

"Having the (Glitter) group has helped me realise that I need someone to take me by the hand and show me a softer side of life. I want to reach a point where I live like a normal person, without any headaches or feeling bad about myself."

Here Budi displays the importance of having community support. Specialised and intersectional groups such as Glitter can provide a safe space for individuals to share experiences, receive validation, and access emotional resources. He notes that only on receiving this kind of support did he really realise how much this was needed. As noted previously, internalised shame can be a powerful motivator in preventing queer forced migrants from seeking support. Budy shows the power of non-judgemental and destigmatising environments in being able to break down barriers where queer forced migrants feel that they are not deserving of support and must deal with issues alone. Budi's assertation that he wants to "live like a normal person", highlights that he does not currently feel like a "normal person". This highlights the disconnection from society he has experienced because of his mental health struggles and his immigration journey. Here, he expresses a wish to live a life free from the burdens of trauma and marginalisation. This statement suggests that compassionate and informed support could provide him with this life. Through centering emotional wellbeing in his discussion of improving quality of life, Budi suggests that successful integration not only involves socio-economic factors, but also self-acceptance and positive mental health. Consequently, he makes a strong argument for the importance of integration frameworks that include considerations of these psychological factors through holistic support.

Budi:

"I guess I'm lucky I'm not in North Wales or in the countryside. I don't know how people survive there. There are no jobs, no (community) groups, nothing, just trees. They have been sent there for punishment!"

From Budi's previous statements, he has experienced a difficult journey. It is therefore poignant that he considers himself to be lucky in comparison with queer forced migrants living in rural areas and North Wales. His exclamation that "I don't know how people survive there" highlights the extents to which he believes people in that area are experiencing difficulties. As discussed previously, these geographical areas of Wales present additional barriers to queer forced migrant's successful integration. Namely, this is because of a complete lack of services that are equipped to cater for the specialised needs of queer forced migrants. Budi reinforces this sense through his comments. He notes that there "There are no jobs, no (community) groups, nothing, just trees," underscoring this absence

of essential resources, including appropriate services, social networks and opportunities. The few resources that are targeted towards queer forced migrants are centralised in cities, where density of this population is higher. This creates a divide in the lived experiences of queer forced migrants, with those in rural areas facing compounded isolation, marginalisation and deficiencies in support. Budi asserts that queer forced migrants in those areas “have been sent there for punishment!” Through this statement he struggles to find an explanation for this inequality other than penance. As such, Budi displays an intense frustration with the high level of systemic neglect faced by queer forced migrants. Though rural placements are intended to evenly distribute asylum seekers, shortages in infrastructure and support in these areas create a punitive experience.

Budi’s mention that there are “no jobs” in these areas highlights the intersection of geographic isolation and economic insecurity. Being placed in a rural areas’ limits queer forced migrants’ access to employment. This further marginalises and decreases employability building opportunities. A lack of job opportunities reinforces financial dependence. This creates barriers to forced migrants achieving autonomy, contributing to feelings of powerlessness and exclusion. Economic precarity not only affects material well-being but also hinders broader integration efforts by limiting the ability of queer forced migrants to contribute to society. Building skills and employability can provide a counterbalance to feelings of shame and burdensomeness, fostering resilience and a sense of belonging. As such, consideration should be taken in placing queer forced migrants in areas with limited opportunity for economic and social stability.

4.8 Conclusion

The thematic findings in this chapter demonstrate that for queer forced migrants in Wales, integration is not a linear process, but a contested and highly uneven terrain shaped by intersecting systems of oppression. Within the field of queer migration studies, integration is increasingly critiqued as a concept that can reproduce normativity, conditionality, and exclusion (Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005; Giametta, 2017). For queer migrants, integration is rarely about smooth inclusion into a welcoming society, it is instead an ongoing process of negotiating survival, recognition, and rights within institutional systems that are often structured against them. The experiences recounted by participants in this study, experiences of legal neglect, hate crime, institutional indifference, and conditional belonging, underscore the urgency of rethinking integration as a structurally embedded and politically charged process.

Budi and King’s accounts of inadequate legal support reveal how immigration systems and legal infrastructures actively hinder integration by denying timely and culturally competent

assistance. These barriers are not simply service delivery failures, they are structural exclusions that reproduce marginalisation, especially for racialised queer migrants in a devolved Welsh context where immigration remains a reserved UK-wide matter. The limited powers of the Welsh Government to intervene in immigration policy or legal aid provision result in a disjuncture between progressive rhetoric (e.g., Nation of Sanctuary) and material realities, where queer migrants remain legally and socially insecure. Integration, in this context, is delayed, suspended, or entirely foreclosed, not because of a lack of willingness to integrate, but due to institutional structures that inhibit belonging and participation.

Participants such as Aima, Hakim, and Toby provide testimonies of racism, homophobia, and transphobia that show how public and private spaces often remain hostile for queer migrants. These are not just experiences of interpersonal violence, they are instances where the promise of integration is violently withdrawn, replaced by fear, displacement, and mistrust. Hate crimes and inadequate police responses illustrate what Yuval-Davis (2011) calls the stratification of belonging, where certain individuals are systematically denied the right to feel safe and included. These narratives affirm queer migration scholars' critiques that liberal models of integration often rely on an imagined universal subject, white, cisgender, able-bodied, apolitical, into which queer, racialised, and precarious migrants cannot easily assimilate (Chávez, 2013; Murray, 2014).

Fatimah's strategic navigation of the asylum interview process, altering her presentation to fit the expectations of "authentic" lesbian identity, exposes how integration is often predicated on performances of legibility. As Danisi et al. (2021) and Giametta (2017) argue, queer migrants are frequently required to prove their sexual or gender identity in narrow, Western-defined ways in order to access rights. These performances are not only dehumanising; they condition access to integration pathways. If one fails to conform to state expectations, one may be denied status, protection, and ultimately inclusion. In this way, integration becomes conditional and disciplinary, reinforcing hierarchies of deservingness and excluding those who resist or fall outside dominant scripts.

In the Welsh context of integration, the lack of devolved powers over immigration law further constrains the potential to design integration strategies that are responsive to the lived realities of queer forced migrants. The result is a mismatch between the symbolic gestures of sanctuary and the material failures to provide safety, stability, and support.

This chapter therefore calls for a critical reconceptualisation of integration: not as a process of assimilation or bureaucratic settlement, but as a relational, negotiated, and power-laden process shaped by the agency and resistance of queer migrants themselves. Integration must be reimagined not as a state-defined outcome, but as an ongoing collective project that

centres the knowledges, needs, and desires of those most marginalised by current systems (Lewis, 2014). Integration is often framed as a one-sided process. The expectation to adapt to the host society is placed upon the migrate. As such, migrants are left to independently navigate complex systems without adequate support, exacerbating isolation and marginalisation. Through addressing systemic inequalities, it is possible to move the burden of integration off migrant's shoulders. Through providing effective and tailored services, migrants will reach out for support, sharing integrational responsibilities. Framing integration as a collective societal effort increases the potential for meaningful inclusion. This section therefore ultimately highlights the urgent need for a paradigm shift in how integration is conceptualised and implemented.

5. Findings Chapter: Professionals Perspectives

I made the deliberate choice in structuring this chapter, to focus on primarily on one participant per section. Presenting practitioner interviews thematically per participant was a deliberate methodological choice rooted in both epistemological and analytical considerations, aimed at foregrounding the individual perspectives and situated knowledges of each practitioner. Given the diversity of roles, ranging from government officials to third sector CEOs and local practitioners, this approach enables the unique insights, priorities, and tensions within each actor's standpoint to emerge with clarity. Rather than flattening these views into abstracted categories or homogenising divergent perspectives under umbrella themes, presenting interviews thematically per individual preserves the integrity and coherence of each participant's narrative. Focusing on a single voice per section, has allowed me to provide a more nuanced understanding of each specific issue addressed, as articulated through participants' expertise and experience. Through this method, I can provide a clear and coherent narrative that highlights the unique insights and contributions of each participant. This method ensures that each complex topic is explored in depth, through the lens of individuals directly involved in the respective areas. I have provided a focused analysis of the challenges, successes, strategies and solutions of each participant and their respective organisations. These when added together, form a cohesive narrative that addresses the broader themes of this research. I intentionally chose to interview organisations across Wales that provide different services. This was to reduce overlap in discussed issues and thus provide a broader perspective on the strategies and effectiveness of various initiatives across the nation. Each organisation has a unique approach and strategies, that reflect their unique mandate and operational context. I have provided a comprehensive analysis of these diverse methods employed by different organisations. This has allowed me to offer a rich understanding of the challenges and successes in supporting forced migrants in Wales.

This approach is not intended to reduce the complexity or diversity of the responses across the sample but to provide a focused, illustrative lens for each theme. While each theme reflects a range of individual experiences, there was significant uniformity across responses, with participants frequently identifying almost identical barriers and challenges regarding the queer forced migrant's integration into Welsh society. This approach serves as a representative illustration of the broader themes derived from the data, allowing readers to engage with the emotional depth and nuances of each barrier, rather than a comprehensive summary of every response.

By selecting one narrative per theme, I highlight a specific individual's experience that best encapsulates the shared elements of that barrier - each theme thus serves as an entry point into the larger issue, representing a collective experience shared by the sample while allowing for a detailed and relatable perspective. This method facilitates a deeper understanding of the theme's impact without conflating it with the notion of a complete summary of all experiences. The selected narratives were chosen because they vividly encapsulate commonalities and patterns that emerged across participants, making them powerful illustrations that resonate with the predominant issues faced by queer forced migrants. Moreover, this approach does not imply that there was absolute homogeneity across responses. Nuanced differences did emerge, influenced by factors such as individual backgrounds, regions within Wales, and varying personal circumstances. However, despite these variations, the core barriers within each theme were commonly reported across the sample, affirming the uniformity of the primary issues encountered. The decision to structure each theme with a representative narrative acknowledges both the individual and collective dimensions of the responses, ensuring that readers can appreciate the shared challenges while recognizing the diversity within the sample. This methodology allows me to emphasise individual voices within the analysis while ensuring that the narratives are not viewed as outliers but as emblematic of the overarching themes. In this way, the use of one person per theme is an intentional strategy to deepen engagement with each barrier through focused, illustrative storytelling, while maintaining the integrity of the shared experiences that surfaced in the research.

Practitioners are understood not as neutral informants, but as co-constructors of knowledge, whose perspectives are deeply informed by their institutional roles, professional histories, values, and socio-political contexts. This structure allows the reader to trace how each participant interprets, enacts, and navigates integration policy and practice within their own domain—whether that be through the lens of bureaucratic compliance, advocacy, systemic critique, or relational care. It also reveals the tensions, contradictions, and silences within and between accounts, offering insights into the power dynamics, constraints, and forms of agency that shape the Welsh asylum and integration sector.

Practically, this structure facilitates comparative reading across the sector, allowing recurring issues, such as policy incoherence, resource limitations, or the lack of cultural competence, to be examined not as isolated flaws, but as structurally embedded challenges interpreted differently depending on institutional vantage point. In doing so, the chapter honours the plurality and complexity of the integration landscape in Wales, offering a more textured and critical understanding of how integration is practiced, resisted, and reimagined on the ground.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to Cultural Diversity, as asylum sector professionals unanimously emphasised the celebration of cultural diversity as a fundamental aspect of integration. They advocate for Strategy such as cultural orientation programmes, trauma-informed well-being training, and collaboration with faith organisations to foster inclusivity. However, an in-depth analysis reveals inherent flaws in these initiatives, ranging from the inadvertent promotion of cultural assimilation to the reactive nature of services and the lack of intersectional understanding. The second section is centered on Equality and Inclusion, as the importance of equal opportunities and representation is highlighted by asylum sector professionals as crucial for integration. They advocate for policies and practices that promote inclusivity, such as representation in decision-making processes and actively promoting policies safeguarding queer forced migrant families. Yet, challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, performative gestures, and a lack of engagement with grassroots organisations highlight a disconnect between policy rhetoric and meaningful action.

The third section discusses Social Justice and addresses issues related to poverty and discrimination as fundamental for integration. The asylum sector professionals unanimously emphasise holistic approaches to asylum and immigration through legal advocacy, community outreach programmes promoting social justice, and collaboration with large transnational humanitarian organisations. However, systemic biases within transnational humanitarian agencies, selective collaboration, and a focus on assimilation over genuine integration reveal challenges in understanding and addressing the complex needs of queer forced migrants. The fourth section on Community Engagement highlights the importance of engagement activities in fostering a sense of belonging. Strategy such as bridging cultural gaps through art and storytelling, queer cultural competency workshops, and organising sport events and outdoor activities are seen as avenues for promoting integration. Yet, a narrow approach to community engagement and a lack of diverse perspectives may limit the agency of queer forced migrants and perpetuate stereotypes. Educational Opportunities comprises the fifth section and stress the importance of providing equal educational opportunities as essential for integration. They advocate for Strategy such as gender and sexuality programmes, language exchange, and orientation programmes to promote understanding and tolerance. However, challenges such as a lack of depth and inclusivity in programme implementation may hinder efforts to address the specific needs of queer forced migrants.

The sixth section refers to Public Safety, as asylum sector professionals recognise the importance of ensuring a secure and safe environment for integration. Strategy such as law enforcement agencies training on queer cultural competency and sensitivity, educating queer forced migrants on hate crime, and creating community policing initiatives are

highlighted as crucial for fostering trust and safety within communities. Access to Healthcare is the seventh and last section, where asylum sector professionals unanimously stress the importance of equal access to healthcare services for promoting individual well-being and collective health. Strategy such as specialised health services, hiring trained queer medical professionals, and signposting to the Welsh Gender Clinic are advocated for. However, challenges such as navigating healthcare systems and addressing specific health needs remain.

5.1 Cultural Diversity

The asylum sector professionals described Wales as historically diverse, and proud to be celebrating this diversity by fostering an inclusive society where people from diverse backgrounds can co-exist harmoniously.

M. works for Displaced People in Action, an all-Wales organisation that focuses on refugee and asylum integration.

M. says:

"Our strength as a nation lies in the cultural diversity that defines us. Integration, at its core, is recognising the beauty in our differences and weaving them into the fabric of an inclusive society where respect and celebration merge."

M.'s perspective aligns with academic literature on multiculturalism, and it gives a Welsh context to a part of British History that is nuanced. Kymlicka (1995) argues that multiculturalism supports the rights of minority groups to maintain their distinct cultural identities while participating fully in the social, political, and economic life of the host country. This approach contrasts with assimilation, where minority groups are expected to conform to the dominant culture. By recognising "the beauty in our differences," S. emphasises the value of diversity in creating a vibrant, inclusive community.

Organisational Struggles

Organisations supporting forced migrants, face significant challenges in addressing the specific needs of queer individuals within this population. Understanding these issues is crucial, as they highlight wider key topics in providing support, such as cultural diversity, inclusivity and intersectionality. I will discuss these challenges to the organisation, and illustrate how prioritising services for queer forced migrants, can be viewed as a strategic approach to promoting cultural diversity.

M. explains that their organisation was set up by refugee women from Sub-Saharan Africa who centered the organisational ethos around cultural diversity. M. highlights that prioritising

services and reframing processes and policies to be friendly towards queer refugees and asylum seekers has not always been easy, due to funding cuts, nor was it gradual. M. explains that not many of the people they support are open about their sexuality and /or gender. This makes things more challenging for Third Sector organisations who are willing to support LGBT+ forced migrants but are not capable of "*throwing money into queer projects before there is a solid ask."* As a result, most of the services and projects that are set up for queer forced migrants come to fruition primarily due to individuals reaching *"a crisis points and their only option is to come out, in order to ask/receive help."* Those services are usually pilots, one-offs or short-term intense projects directed at needs and are used as *"plasters.*" M. says that it's also *"easier to ask for small pots of money here and there, instead for a big pot overtime."* Their organisation has a strong presence in organising and celebrating cultural events that highlight the diversity within the queer community, such Pride celebrations, cultural festivals, and gatherings. They have created safe spaces where queer asylum seekers and refugees can express their cultural identities without fear of discrimination, by getting involved and supporting queer cultural clubs, art exhibitions, and performances.

M. says:

"*Cultural diversity in Wales is key for integration. Each event we sponsor, or we put together represents a unique story, a distinct voice in the collective narrative that teaches us that our shared journey is enriched by the colours of many cultures, and faiths."*

M. explains that they were made aware of the lack of openly queer service users from one new service user in 2019, who attended one of their events and complained afterwards for the lack of mention of the queer community. M. and their CEO took the complaint very seriously. Alongside the service user, M.'s organisation started co-producing more inclusive policies and procedures. Since then, they have set up a group of ambassadors who lead the collaborations with queer cultural organisations that focus on specific, racial, or cultural communities. These collaborations ensure that the unique needs of queer individuals from diverse backgrounds are addressed. They also ensure representation and visibility of queer individuals from various cultural backgrounds in safe spaces, events, and organisations. This fosters a sense of inclusion and recognition for everyone within the queer community. This allows the queer forced migrants to re-gain confidence, cultivate important skills, such as public speaking, as well as gain volunteer experience, whilst waiting for their asylum status. Through these programmes they encourage storytelling initiatives that allow queer asylum seekers and refugees to share their cultural backgrounds and experiences. "*This is done*

through written narratives, oral storytelling events, or digital platforms that amplify diverse voices – depending on the event."

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise in media attention on the lives of queer forced migrants in Wales, the LGBQT+ forced migrant members have been working on an Inclusive Educational Programme, by developing inclusive curricula that reflect the cultural diversity within the queer community. This includes recognising queer contributions from various cultural and historical perspectives and its attempt to "*decolonise education."* These programmes are funded by the Welsh Government and the National Lottery Fund, and S. is worried about not only the impact of cutting funds but also the changes in political landscape.

Cultural Orientation and Trauma-Informed Training

M.'s organisation offers Wales-wide awareness training programmes for Local Authorities, third and private sector organisations to help them *"integrate cultural orientation programmes into support services for queer asylum seekers and refugees. These programmes provide information about the cultural nuances of the queer community and help individuals navigate new cultural landscapes. And they are delivered by people with lived experiences."*
Investing in cultural orientation and training programmes that focus on queer cultural competency, trauma-informed care, related to asylum is key to integration. These capacity-building initiatives empower Local Authorities with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide culturally sensitive and equitable services, promoting social justice by addressing the specific needs of queer asylum seekers. Queer cultural competency training is particularly crucial in ensuring that local organisations, Local Authorities, and healthcare services have a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges faced by queer asylum seekers. These programmes also help service providers develop the cultural awareness necessary to provide sensitive and affirming care, mitigating the risk of unintentional discrimination.

Trauma-informed well-being training is another essential component of capacity building, acknowledging the potential trauma experienced by queer asylum seekers due to persecution and displacement. Equipping healthcare and support services with the skills to provide trauma-informed well-being training not only addresses the mental health needs of the community but also underscores a commitment to social justice. This approach recognises the historical and systemic injustices faced by queer asylum seekers and ensures that the services they receive are sensitive, empowering, and conducive to healing, contributing to a more just and equitable society.

M. says:

"The strength of our societal bond lies in the recognition that our differences are not dividers. Cultural diversity is the cornerstone of integration, and we should all appreciate, respect, and celebrate the many identities that make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary."

Queer Forced Migrant - Specific Services

M. says that the most difficult journey they faced whilst trying to establish the queer services and projects has been the lack of support for the queer community from religious leaders and various faith communities. Based on M.'s experience, such communities remain closed off and some even hostile to not only to queer people but also to newcomers *"even though those communities were set up by immigrants."* For a lot of queer forced migrants, according to M., faith is the only constant in their lives and being shunned by the local religious leaders contributes to social isolation. Over the course of the years, M. has built bridges with the local faith communities and has incorporated the support that such communities offer to their queer members, even though *"many of them are not out to their faith community".* M. recognises and supports the religious diversity within the queer community through annual celebrations and dedicated festivals, run and hosted by the service users. This also includes providing spaces for queer individuals from various religious backgrounds to practice their faith freely and without judgment, in the organisation's grounds, which has contributed to a sharp increase in membership since COVID-19.

To further support, the ever-growing queer membership, M. started running networking events for queer refugee professionals, hosted by the organisation's ambassadors. These networking events specifically for queer professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds, has created unique opportunities for professional connections, mentorship, and the exchange of cultural insights.

M. says:

"Networking events tailored for queer refugee professionals are not only vital for individual growth but contribute significantly to integration within the queer community. By hosting these gatherings, we not only open gateways for meaningful professional relationships but also cultivate a sense of interconnectedness, nurturing mentorship bonds, and facilitating the invaluable exchange of cultural insights. These events transcend conventional networking, providing a crucial space where the intersections of diverse identities within the queer refugee community converge, enriching the professional landscape and reinforcing social bonds. Through intentional inclusivity, we empower professionals not just as individuals but as contributors to a collective success story, leveraging the strength found in the diversity of their experiences. In these spaces, they create a powerful narrative of belonging, and empowerment for queer refugees which extends beyond professional realms."

This endeavour has taken a long time to get off the ground, as queer refugees do not always want to associate themselves as “queer refugees”. “M. says “*the group keeps changing and keeps evolving because people contribute what they have to offer, create their own little networks, partnerships and move on. This is why we are here for, to nurture agency”.* One of the things that has come out of the networking events is how proud S. is that they have supported research initiatives that explore and document the cultural diversity within the queer refugee community, highlighting the intersections of identity and culture.

M. explains that:

"*Spearheading collaborative research on and for queer cultural diversity within the refugee community is not just an academic pursuit; it's a commitment to understanding, celebrating, and fostering integration. By supporting research initiatives that delve into the rich identities and cultures within the queer refugee community, we illuminate the intersections that make each story unique. This exploration serves as a bridge, connecting individuals through shared experiences, enriching our collective understanding, and we lay the foundation for integration, creating pathways for inclusivity, understanding, and shared narratives that empower."*

My findings display flaws in the Wales’s third sector development and implementation of cultural diversity projects and strategy. Supporting queer forced migrants is often only a superficial element, and this specialised support is an afterthought, marred by inherent flaws and contradictions. Many such initiatives claim to celebrate diversity but fall short of genuine inclusion. As such, a pattern of lip service is perpetuated rather than substantive support for the queer community.

A major issue revealed is the unintended promotion of cultural assimilation under the appearance of cultural diversity. A lack of proactive engagement with the community lies beneath services’ reactive nature. Many programmes and projects materialise only in response to crisis points. This forces individuals to reveal their queer identity, and the intense challenges they are experiencing, to access essential support. Reactive approaches, with fragmented and short-term services, therefore, compromise the privacy and agency of queer asylum seekers.

There is a dichotomy between the proclaimed celebration of diversity and the actual implementation of policies. This results in the practice of prioritising cultural assimilation. Such practices push for a homogenised understanding of queer experiences. This then takes the place of inclusive environments in which queer individuals can authentically express their intersectional identities. As discussed previously, the need for queer individuals to reach a "crisis point" before receiving help reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the

community's needs. Cultural assimilation strategies reduce cultural diversity to occasional cultural events rather than an intrinsic aspect of daily life. Top-down approaches are implemented when projects are imposed rather than co-created with queer forced migrants. Authentic integration processes allow community members to actively participate in developing and running the initiatives that impact them. Cultural assimilation is evident in projects that are driven by external agendas, such as sporadic funding opportunities, and do not include any elements of co-production. Through this, the third sector in Wales unintentionally reinforces stereotypes and neglects to truly cater for the diverse needs of queer refugees and asylum seekers.

The failure of the Third Sector to provide successfully integration opportunities is compounded by their lack of understanding around intersectionality. As previously mentioned, queer forced migrants inherently carry multiple intersecting identities, which shape their integration needs. Third Sector organisations must provide services to a diverse range of communities and identities. As such, services provided can be general and ignore vital nuances such as the experiences of queer forced migrants. The Welsh Government and UK Government lack policies on cultural diversity that can support Wales to promote authentic integration rather than inadvertently promote cultural assimilation. The lip service paid to diversity, the reactive nature of services, and the confusion between cultural diversity and assimilation collectively contributes to an environment where the queer forced migrant community is hurt rather than helped. Wales needs to develop informed, community-led and co-produced initiatives that genuinely celebrate diversity and can bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and the lived experiences of queer forced migrants.

5.2 Equality and Inclusion

Asylum Sector processionals highlighted that ensuring equal opportunities and treatment for all individuals, regardless of their background, is crucial for integration. Policies and practices that promote inclusivity help bridge societal gaps and reduce disparities.

H. says:

"We can’t think of integration, without focusing on Equality and Inclusion, as they are the cornerstones that pave the path towards a unified society. When we ensure that every individual, irrespective of background, is afforded equal opportunities, we not only bridge gaps but build bridges that connect us all, fostering a community where disparity is replaced by shared aspirations."

Representation in the Decision-Making Processes

For H., who is a high rank official within the Welsh Government, Equality and Inclusion looks like representation in the decision-making processes to ensure the representation of queer forced migrants in intersectional policies related to refugee and asylum. This often involves the inclusion of queer representatives in advisory committees and forums. H. agrees that queer forced migrants were not part of the Welsh Governments' 2019 Nation of Sanctuary Report, and that was a serious oversight on their part. That report was "*not as intersectional as it should have been."* H. says that she is thankful that there is research in Wales around queer forced migrants, thanks "*to organisations like Glitter Cymru who brought this to our attention. We need to foster the open dialogue with grassroots organisations to help us steer research, policy, and campaigns."*

H. highlights that the officials are aware that there is a lot of progress to be made regarding Equality and Inclusion for queer forced migrants from a policy perspective, and we *"need to keep in mind that migration is not devolved to Wales. We can only do so much, given the constant challenges by Westminster."* The non-devolved nature of migration policies in the UK poses a challenge for timely actions by the Welsh government. The bureaucratic process and the required collaboration with Westminster and the Home Office slow down the implementation of policies tailored to address the unique vulnerabilities of this community. This underscores the need for coordinated efforts and streamlined processes between Devolved Administrations and the Central Government to ensure more efficient responses to the needs of queer forced migrants in Wales.

A section was included within the Welsh Government's LGBTQ+ Action Plan that specifically addresses queer forced migrants. This marks a significant and commendable step towards true equality and inclusivity. Through dedicating a section to the unique challenges this group faces, Welsh Government demonstrates a strong commitment to recognising and responding to the vulnerabilities of this community. The policy section acknowledges the distinct issues experienced by queer forced migrants and signals a broader understanding of the importance of tailored support. Through including this group within the plan, Welsh Government sends a powerful message of Equality and Inclusion. Through this they acknowledge the diversity of the queer community in Wales is diverse. The reinforce that each member, regardless of their identity, deserves equal consideration and protection. In doing so, the Welsh Government contributes queer forced migrants' sense of inclusion and wellbeing of but also to broader goals of fostering a society founded on principles of empathy, equality, and integration.

H. explained that Welsh Government officials recognise that queer forced migrants often experience fatigue due to continual forums and focus groups. They are aware that

discussions of their lived experience and repeated self-advocacy can be emotionally draining and, at times, retraumatising. Though it is important to include lived experience voices in policy development, this must be balanced to reduce the burden on individuals. Asylum sector professionals are actively exploring alternative means of gathering valuable insights, that respect the wellbeing and mental health of queer forced migrants.

The financial constraints faced by the Welsh Government and the third sector can limit their ability to compensate participants for their time and input. This leads to a lower number of number of individuals willing or able to engage, thereby reducing the overall representation of queer forced migrants in policy discussions. Officials recognise this as a significant challenge and actively seek new options to address these financial constraints, such as time vouchers.

Immigration policymaking should be "evidence-based" (Boswell, 2009). Many programmes and policies are delivered with no consultation of queer forced migrants. Some from bodies such as the Home Office are delivered with no input from any forced migrant voices. It is essential that queer forced migrants are consulted and involvement with policymaking, if they are to create inclusive policies that can successfully support these communities.

Safeguarding Queer Forced Migrant Families

H. says:

"*In the discourse of integration, addressing Equality and Inclusion plays a crucial role. This narrative evolves as policies and practices act as catalysts, propelling us towards a future characterised by inclusivity and fairness, where unity takes precedence. In this context, we should talk more about queer forced migrant families."*

H. continues by arguing that supporting and recognising queer forced migrant families is vital. Queer forced migrant families are an often-overlooked aspect of integration. There is an absence of specific policies or measures in this area, highlighting a huge gap in understanding the diverse needs of this community. H noted that a more harmonious and equitable society can be achieved through ensuring that queer parents have equal rights and protections for their families. H. asked that the Welsh Government develops policies that safeguard the rights of queer forced migrant families, acknowledging their distinct challenges and needs. Equality and Inclusion is very important to the Welsh Government, but there is a stark difference between rhetoric and reality. To achieve equality and inclusion, support frameworks must be developed that target queer forced migrant families. Through implementing anti-discrimination measures and codifying equal rights for queer parents, the Welsh Government can ensure that all families in Wales can thrive. Through proactively creating measures to protect diverse groups, it is possible to ensure every family unit feels

respected and valued. Through this, Welsh Government could uphold fundamental human rights and become a powerful example of inclusion for other nations. Welsh Government must move beyond “Nation of Sanctuary” rhetoric and truly enact this vision through implementing policies that safeguard and support queer forced migrant families.
H emphasised that equality and inclusion should be cornerstones of integration. This aligns with widely accepted principles of social justice. The non-devolved nature of migration policies in the UK present bureaucratic hurdles to the Welsh Government’s ability to create comprehensive and timely actions. Delays in collaboration with Westminster and the Home Office impedes the ability to efficiently implement policies. As such, even when policies informed on catering to the queer forced migrant communities are suggested and desired, these may not actualise. The inclusion of a dedicated policy section on queer forced migrants within the LGBTQ+ Action Plan is commendable. However, there are notable challenges in turning recommendations into actions. For effective implementation, there is a need for more streamlined processes and collaboration between devolved administrations and central government.

There is a significant gap between policy rhetoric and the lived experiences of queer forced migrants. This could be addressed through the development of proactive, community-led initiatives, that focus on queer families. Some policies that claim to prioritise equality and inclusion fall incredibly short in their approach. This raises questions about whether those policies are genuine attempts to facilitate integration or whether their intention is to mitigate criticism and charges of racism. Fears of negative public opinion or backlash could render integration policies a mere checkbox exercise for high ranked asylum professionals. If queer forced migrants are included merely as a checkbox exercise, this would explain the lack of care and attention to their specific challenges. My research showed a justified concern that their complex experiences will be oversimplified or instrumentalised for political gain, without genuine consideration for their welfare. Queer forced migrants are not willing to be reduced to checkmarks in the government's efforts to appear progressive. I noted through my research a reluctance from the queer forced migrant community to become poster children for the Welsh Government's Nation of Sanctuary Plan. Policies within this plan were well-intentioned but included no mention of queer forced migrants or their needs. The plan’s policy rhetoric strongly advocated for the value of inclusion yet excluded this marginalised group. To create effective and authentic integration efforts, gaps in policy rhetoric and action must be bridged. Currently a power imbalance exists, where community voices are selectively heard based on political expediency rather than a genuine commitment to addressing their needs. The Welsh Government's must move beyond rhetoric and engage in meaningful, community-led initiatives is critical if they wish to fulfil their commitments.

5.3 Social Justice

Within the interviews, asylum sector professionals agreed that addressing social justice issues is fundamental to successful integration. It was highlighted that within a society that strives for social justice, basic needs should be met, and discrimination challenged.

B., says:

"Social justice stands as the ethical compass guiding the journey towards integration in the Wales. It's the unwavering commitment to dismantle the barriers of poverty, inequality, and discrimination, crafting a society where access to basic needs, education, and healthcare becomes the birthright of every individual."

Legal Advocacy

B.'s organisation is the first point of contact for legal advice for queer forced migrants in Wales. They have a holistic approach to asylum and immigration. They are the first and only provider of this kind in Wales, and even though they still operate from a small office they are well-established. As part of their holistic approach, they offer legal advocacy, which they see as the cornerstone in the fight for social justice for queer forced migrants, addressing discriminatory policies and practices head-on. They lobby the Welsh Government to play a pivotal role by engaging in legal advocacy initiatives that challenge systemic injustices faced by this vulnerable community. B.'s involvement encompasses supporting legal cases that specifically address discriminatory policies, practices, or instances of persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity. By actively participating in legal battles, they send a clear message that they stand against any form of discrimination faced by queer asylum seekers and refugees. Providing pro bono legal services is another crucial facet of legal advocacy, as queer forced migrants usually lack the financial means to secure representation, this approach not only upholds the principles of justice but also ensures that queer asylum voices are heard, and their rights protected. This commitment reflects their dedication to levelling the playing field, acknowledging that access to legal representation should not be contingent on one's financial resources, particularly for those seeking asylum due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

B, says that because asylum and immigration is not devolved in Wales, they find it challenging to collaborate with established Transnational Humanitarian Organisations and as a result, they fail to create strategic alliances in the realm of legal advocacy. This lack of collaborative effort discourages staff, and they have a high turnover, as they feel "*they cannot challenge systemic injustices to their core.*"

B explains that as a result, "*Wales fails to foster a society where Human Rights are universal, transcending national borders and ensuring the fair treatment of queer individuals seeking refuge."* In championing legal advocacy, B's organisation's proactive stance safeguards the rights of queer asylum seekers but also sends a powerful message that Wales is dedicated to upholding Human Rights and ensuring justice for all, regardless of one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

B. adds that COVID-19, had a significant impact on their services:
"The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted legal advocacy efforts affecting queer asylum seekers. The practicalities of engaging in legal cases and providing pro bono legal services have been hampered by disruptions in legal proceedings, court closures, and delays. The shift towards remote work has posed challenges in maintaining the same level of client interaction and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable populations such as queer asylum seekers who may already face barriers to communication and support. Travel restrictions and limitations on in-person meetings have impeded the traditional modes of collaboration, requiring a pivot towards virtual engagements. While technology has facilitated some aspects of collaboration, the loss of face-to-face interactions may impact the depth of coordination and strategic planning needed to challenge unjust immigration policies effectively. The strain on resources during the pandemic has meant that both legal advocacy organisations and Human Rights groups are stretched thin, potentially limiting their capacity to take on new cases or initiatives."

B. explains that the pandemic exposed and exacerbated systemic inequalities, making the work of challenging discriminatory policies even more crucial. Legal advocates and Transnational Humanitarian Organisations adapting to the new normal by exploring innovative solutions, utilising digital platforms, and finding alternative methods to ensure that the rights of queer asylum seekers are protected and upheld even in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Community Outreach Programmes

For B.'s organisation community outreach programmes play a crucial role in promoting social justice and integration, as then they actively engage with and supporting queer asylum seekers. These initiatives bridge gaps in information and assistance, empowering individuals to access their rights and available support services. These programmes become a lifeline for individuals navigating complex legal systems, providing them with essential information about their rights and avenues for legal assistance. This outreach is particularly important for queer asylum seekers, who may face additional challenges due to their unique experiences of persecution. B. recognises that intersectional legal advocacy is an imperative approach in

recognising the diverse and interconnected identities within the queer asylum seeker community, as it involves a nuanced understanding that individuals within the community face compounded challenges due to the intersection of factors such as race, gender, sexuality, legal and socio-economic status. *"By adopting an intersectional lens, we can create more effective and inclusive legal advocacy efforts that address the multifaceted needs of queer asylum seekers."* According to B., advocacy efforts must, therefore, be tailored to address these specific intersections, recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach may not adequately capture the nuanced experiences and needs of all queer asylum seekers. This approach not only contributes to social justice by acknowledging and rectifying systemic inequalities but also centres integration by ensuring that legal advocacy efforts are truly inclusive and representative of the entire queer asylum-seeking community.

B, says:

"Our legal community outreach programmes promote integration by creating connections between queer asylum seekers and local queer organisations and community hubs. These collaborations not only enhance the visibility of support services but also facilitate a sense of belonging and community. Through such partnerships, we have built a network of support that goes beyond legal assistance as it includes integration in the heart of the Welsh community."

Despite the vital role that these community outreach programmes play in connecting with queer asylum seekers and advancing social justice, they are not without challenges, especially in the face of funding cuts. Funding cuts significantly impact the reach and effectiveness of these initiatives, limiting the resources available to support vulnerable communities. With reduced funding, community outreach programmes struggle to maintain their scope, hindering their ability to provide comprehensive information about rights, support services, and legal assistance to queer asylum seekers.

B. says:

"Funding cuts have led to a reduction in the frequency and intensity of outreach efforts, impacting the program's ability to establish meaningful connections with queer asylum seekers. The limited availability of resources results in fewer outreach events, diminishing the chances of reaching those who may be isolated or unaware of the available support. This reduction in outreach efforts exacerbates the challenges faced by queer asylum seekers, making it harder for them to access crucial information that could aid in their legal processes and overall well-being."

Furthermore, funding cuts strain collaborations between community outreach programmes, local queer organisations, and community centres, and it also hampers the immediate

effectiveness of community outreach but also undermines the broader goal of fostering integration by weakening the bonds between support entities and the queer asylum seeker community. B. explains that funding cuts have also de-established their crisis intervention services and as a result the support networks for queer asylum seekers are facing immediate safety concerns from hate groups. B and his organisation cannot always ensure the well-being and protection of this community.

B. says:

"Pre-covid we were planning on the creation of dedicated hotlines to provide a lifeline for queer forced migrant individuals encountering urgent safety issues and offering immediate assistance and guidance. These crisis intervention services would serve as a vital resource for queer forced migrant community, navigating challenging circumstances, such as threats of violence or discrimination, ensuring they have access to timely and specialised support. Unfortunately, we had to re-direct the money to other services that bled dry during Covid. We try to do our best with what little we got left, and we try to support a community that is suffering. Without the proper funds I fear that we further fail our service users. We cannot offer them sustainable solutions in combating isolation and positively contribute to their emotional and psychological well-being."

The planned creation of dedicated hotlines underscores their importance as a vital resource for queer forced migrants, offering a direct line to assistance in cases of hate crimes, threats, or urgent safety concerns, serving as a critical lifeline for individuals in crisis. The absence of such services leaves queer forced migrants vulnerable during critical moments, with no clear path to safety or support in emergencies.

The pandemic's financial impact— "We had to re-direct the money to other services that bled dry during COVID-19"—reflects the strain placed on organizations supporting marginalized communities. The redirection of funds highlights the precarious nature of funding for specialized services, where crises force difficult trade-offs between immediate and long-term needs, which further marginalise an already underserved population.

The absence of crisis intervention services has far-reaching consequences for queer forced migrants. The inability to address urgent needs contributes to feelings of abandonment, exacerbating the mental health challenges of forced migrants already grappling with isolation and trauma. The statement, "Without the proper funds I fear that we further fail our service users," reveals the systemic challenges faced by organizations working with queer forced migrants - limited funding restricts the scope and quality of services, preventing the implementation of sustainable programmes that address long-term needs.

Transnational Humanitarian Organisations

Partnering with large Transnational Humanitarian Organisations (THOs) specialising in queer rights represents a strategic and impactful approach to advancing the rights of queer asylum seekers in Wales. These collaborations merge the specialized knowledge and expertise of THOs with the practical, on-the-ground experience of local agencies focused on queer forced migration, amplifying the reach and impact of advocacy and fostering a more cohesive approach to addressing the needs and rights of queer asylum seekers.

B. says:

"Large Transnational Humanitarian Organisations bring a nuanced understanding of the legal frameworks and Human Rights principles crucial for protecting queer individuals, complementing the work of Agencies engaged in the practical aspects of asylum-seeking and resettlement."

Collaboration brings strength through its ability to amplify and unite queer forced migrant voices in the face of systemic challenges. Through partnership, it becomes possible to pool resources to navigate complex legal landscapes, challenge discriminatory policies, and work towards systemic changes that benefit the broader queer community. A holistic approach that addresses both immediate needs, and advocates for long term policy changes promoting inclusivity and protection, is possible through this shared commitment to human rights. Collaborating with large Transnational Humanitarian Organisations (TSOs) would contribute to a global collective effort to advance queer rights. These partnerships, through sharing best practice and developing connections across borders, could contribute to a more interconnected and supportive International Human Rights Framework. A framework that can tackle the root causes of persecution, discrimination, and violence against queer communities globally. (Hannerz, 1990; Roth, 2014).

Agencies such as the UNHCR play a critical role in resettlement and policy making, in terms of connecting persecuted individuals with countries offering protection. However, organisational values, often rooted in western perspectives, can conflict with local cultures. As such, Western homonormativity is imposed on local queer communities, who struggle to balance societal heteronormativity with their identity (Roth, 2014). Hannerz (1990) suggests that though physically present in conflict zones, THOs often hold Western ideals that conflict with the socio-legal context. This creates a transient existence for forced migrants navigating their identities within these policies. Understanding how diverse humanitarian aspects are addressed by THOs and host country organisations, especially within "gay internationalism", is a key ethical consideration (Chouliaraki, 2012). Chouliaraki reports a shift from "other-centred" to "self-centred" within humanitarian ethics, that marginalises non-western subject

and favours western voices. Additionally, according to Klein (2007), THOs often engage in "disaster capitalism" by exploiting conflict zones for their own gain. Host country organisations can profit from conflict under the guise of social responsibility (Krause, 2014). Through political frameworks and Service Level Agreements, these organisations are connected to neo-colonial ideas. The prioritisation of neo-colonial and neo-capitalist restraints over genuine compassion, displays a conditional humanitarianism. There is a significant gap in research that studies the SLAs between host-country organisations and THOs, especially in terms of how queer forced migrants are impacted by "cherry-picking" methods.

N. is the former CEO of a host-country organisation which is the largest LGBTQ+ charity in the UK. She explains the multi-layered SLAs and the intricacy of operations, focusing on the Middle East and the Afghan War, and introducing support phases offered to queer forced migrants:

"*The work that we're doing around queer forced migrants at the minute really falls into two categories. We've been part of a successful resettlement of queer Afghans. That's part of the "Emergency Response phase." This is a group of high-risk queer Afghan people that we've been working with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Home Office to support them and their dependents to leave Afghanistan. But not only leave Afghanistan but be able to come to the UK and resettle. And that work has been very successful, most of that original cohort are already in the UK."*

N, refers to the various phases and solutions they use. The Emergency Response Phase focuses on the immediate resettlement of high-risk queer Afghan individuals, undertaken with the FCO and the Home Office, to provide safety and support in leaving Afghanistan and resettling in the U.K. This provision of targeted support to vulnerable groups in crisis situations, is an achievement that has highlighted the effectiveness of coordinated efforts between governmental bodies (UNHCR, 2021; Alessi et al., 2016). The objective of "Medium-Term Solutions" initiatives is to develop sustainable support mechanisms for queer people, both in Afghanistan and globally. The project focuses upon creating a safer environment, through collaborating with the UNHCR and other THOs. Queer Afghans continue to face severe persecution, despite international efforts to influence policy frameworks, and address specific vulnerabilities (UNHCR, 2021; LaViolette, 2014). It is critical that local organisations can address dangers from the state, families and communities, by providing safe spaces, psychological support, and resources for queer individuals. (Murray, 2016; Jahangir & Abdul-latif (2016).

N says:

We know that they are at incredibly elevated risk. So, the people that are on the ground, with money, with food, with shelter, can help. But we want to develop programming that supports the community that chooses not to resettle. Alongside that work, we're also working with a small NGO that specialises in Atrocity Prevention, to try make sure that the UK, and other governments, when they think about the need for atrocity prevention work in conflict zones, they include the need to do atrocity prevention work for queer people."

Direct assistance to queer people remaining in Afghanistan is provided by the "On-the-Ground Support" initiative. This covers gaps created by systemic discrimination, addressing immediate needs such as food, money and shelter. Programmes such as these recognise that for many, resettlement is not viable. As such, they include safe spaces, vocational training and community-building activities to improve quality of life and build resilience (Ayoub & Bauman, 2019; UNHCR, 2021; Miller, 2015; International Rescue Committee, 2020). The "Atrocity Prevention" initiative collaborates with a specialised NGO to integrate queer protection into wider atrocity prevention frameworks. They emphasise the importance of inclusive policy and targeted measures. Historically, queer individuals have been overlooked within the context of conflict and mass violence. Governments are urged through advocacy to incorporate queer protection into atrocity prevention strategies and policy (UNHCR, 2021). This protection includes elements such as developing sage havens, emergency evacuation protocols, and specialised support services (Mertus, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2021).
N. discusses the intricate dynamics at play, such as political climate, relations between THOs and local organizations, and global connectivity required for safe intervention. THOs often engage selectively, which can exclude smaller, specialized NGOs dedicated to queer rights, reinforcing a hierarchical advocacy model and limiting integration effectiveness (International Rescue Committee, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

N. says:
"We work with different NGOs to provide different levels of support, such as case work, take care of people's physical health and mental health, provide them with reassurance orientation, give them access to full housing and support package for them during their early phases of rebuilding a life here in the UK. We didn't ask the UK government to solve the problem. We came with a solution. The only thing I asked them to do is to provide queer forced migrants with Indefinite Leave to Remain. We need to ask for what makes sense, so it

means that we can work very quickly, especially since queer people come through emergency evacuations."

Intersecting identities generate new communities in host countries that would not be possible in-home countries. THAs often struggle to grasp queer identity complexity, leading to inadequate and sometimes discriminatory practices (Ayoub & Bauman, 2019; LaViolette, 2014). N. highlights systemic biases within THAs, rooted in misconceptions and a limited understanding of diverse needs, advocating for a re-evaluation of organisational approaches to integration that respect and embrace the complexity of queer identity (Mertus, 2007; Miller, 2015). This highlights the complex and sometimes arbitrary nature of the refugee inclusion and assistance process, emphasising the urgent need for more systematic and equitable methods of determining and providing support (Murray, 2016; Jahangir & Abdul-latif (2016).

These issues outlined above, namely collaboration with THOs, the complexities of resettlement, and the complex challenges faces by the queer community, intersect with the integration of queer forced migrants in Wales. The strategies and challenges encountered in collaboration with TSOs profoundly influence this integration. A strategic and impactful approach to advancing the rights of queer asylum seekers, is offered through partnering TSOs with organisations who specialise in queer rights. Through such partnerships, it is possible to combine the legal frameworks and human rights expertise of THOs, with the practical, grassroots experience of local organisations. As such, these partnerships enhance advocacy efforts and build a cohesive approach to addressing queer forced migrants needs, ultimately ensuring that integration is informed by global best practice and international human rights standards.

5.4 Community Engagement

Asylum sector professionals discussed actively involving forced migrants in community activities that foster a sense of belonging. They discuss how strong community ties and grassroots initiatives contribute to a cohesive society where individuals feel connected to one another.

J. says:

"Community engagement is the heartbeat of integration, queer forced migrants become active participants in shaping their lives through shared activities they bridge the gap between themselves and the broader society. As they actively participate in community activities their sense of belonging flourishes. This requires consistency and it takes years, decades to build. Community engagement isn't a mere activity; it's where the strength of

community ties and grassroots initiatives transforms strangers into neighbours, and neighbours into a community."

J's organisation has been at the forefront of queer forced migrant integration in Wales for a decade now. They provide a safe space for community engagement events, collaborative workshops, putlocks, sport activities, and community-based art projects. J. says that this is what others in the sector consider as *"fluffy activities but we know they mean so much to people."*

Community engagement events play a pivotal role in fostering inclusivity and understanding between queer asylum seekers and refugees and the local community. These events, carefully organised to facilitate meaningful interactions, provide a platform for both groups to come together in an atmosphere of celebration and mutual respect. Art exhibitions, showcasing the diverse talents and expressions within the queer community, serve as a powerful means of breaking down stereotypes and bridging cultural gaps.

Art and Storytelling

Creative exhibitions contribute to queer forced migrants' empowerment through allowing them to develop skills, mental wellbeing and sense of identity. Additionally, they give the local community an interact to engage with a diverse range of artistic expressions and show their appreciation and respect for queer forced migrant's skills and resilience. Film screenings similarly represent an impactful means of community engagement. Through films made by and relating to queer forced migrants, local community members are offered a window into their unique experiences and perspectives. This window can build community empathy and understanding and could even inspire community members to create groups that are able to support with the presented issues. Communal viewing experiences, like films, promote dialogue and discussion that contribute towards dismantling misconceptions. Creative performances, ranging from theatrical productions to live music events, offer platforms for cultural celebration and connection. Such artistic expressions can become a form of dialogue that transcend language barriers. Performances enable local communities to witness queer forced migrant's resilience, strength, and diversity. As such, preconceived negative stereotypes or bias can be challenged, and appreciation for this community fostered. Cultural exchange events can use artistic expression as powerful medium for creating connections and building a more inclusive community that values and celebrates diversity. Through such means, the various creative forms of storytelling become a catalyst for positive change, and greater awareness of queer asylum seekers within the broader Welsh community.

J. says:

"We are a volunteer-run organisation, and all of us in the steering group have personal or familial experiences with seeking refuge. We know how it feels like to carry our culture with us, and for most of us it is our only connection to the friends and family that we've left behind. As humans, we are soothed and learn about each other through art. The workshops that we put together are not about art being perfect, we don't care about that, we care about the connections that art allows to make."

Cultural Competency Workshops and Potlucks

J. says:

"Through these workshops, community members, service providers, and organisations gain valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by queer asylum seekers, cultivating a deeper understanding of the specific needs and experiences within this community."

Collaborative on queer cultural competency workshops are effective spaces in creating a more inclusive and supportive host community. During such workshops, participants are given the tools and knowledge needed to understand and interact sensitively with queer forced migrants. These sessions include elements such as understanding the nuances of gender identity, sexual orientation, the asylum system, as well as the importance of intersectionality. Through partnering queer forced migrants with local organisations, such sessions become a valuable platform to inform and develop cultural competency for local community members. Through such methods, greater allyship can be developed within the local community, and creating an environment where individuals feel seen, respected, and supported.

J. says:

"Incorporating active allyship into these collaborative workshops extends the impact beyond the queer community, by encouraging support and advocacy from allies across Wales. By engaging community members, and service providers in allyship training, a network of informed and compassionate supporters is established."

This network becomes an essential resource for queer asylum seekers, providing a sense of belonging and solidarity. Collaborative workshops and training sessions contribute to building a more cohesive and understanding community that actively works towards the well-being and integration of queer asylum seekers.

Hosting dinners and potluck events also serve as a powerful avenue for fostering connections and understanding between queer forced migrants and members of the local Welsh community. These gatherings provide a unique platform for cultural exchange as

individuals come together to share their diverse culinary traditions. By creating a space centred around the universal act of sharing a meal, these events break down barriers and facilitate meaningful connections between individuals from diverse backgrounds. The act of sharing cultural cuisines becomes a deep expression of identity, allowing queer asylum seekers and refugees to showcase a vital aspect of their heritage. Through the exchange of recipes, cooking techniques, and stories behind the dishes, these events become a celebration of diversity, reinforcing the idea that cultural differences should be embraced and appreciated. This shared experience of preparing, serving, and enjoying a meal together fosters a sense of belonging and community, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

J. says:

"The potluck started as an annual celebration of Amazigh cuisine, and it has been going on 8 years now. People want to feel connected to their culture and share that love with fellow queer asylum seekers and refugees and local Welsh people. We pay for the ingredients from a small pot of funding, and we usually have 5-6 people volunteering cooking and serving. It's a very simple idea but meaningful".

The atmosphere of hosted dinners and potlucks encourages open dialogue and the forging of connections beyond the dinner table. As local community members and queer forced migrants engage in conversations over a shared meal, they discover commonalities, dispel stereotypes, and build mutual understanding. These gatherings contribute to the creation of a supportive and welcoming community for queer asylum seekers, promoting integration through the simple yet powerful act of breaking bread together.

J. says:

"All of our events are ideas that come from the community. They approach us with an idea for an event, and we find funding and provide organisation. 3 years ago, a group of queer women set up a small sports group that has expanded. They partner up with local women's groups and they go hiking around Wales, caving, kayaking. For many women especially, being involved in sports in their home countries is a no-go. Here they can explore that side of themselves and break down stereotypes too. Queer women of colour wearing burkinis love cold water swimming too!"

Sports Events and Outdoor Activities

Sports and recreational activities are an effective integration activity. These can create a space shared between queer forced migrants and local community members. Within that space, a sense of unity and teamwork is fostered through mutual engagement in physical

activities. Sporting activities can break down barriers and offer a platform for collaboration and mutual support. Camaraderie formed on the field contributes to queer forced migrants' sense of belonging and inclusion. The competitive yet friendly nature of sport provides a context in which individuals can bond over a common interest, thereby transcending cultural and social differences. Mutual engagement in recreational activities creates a supportive environment for individuals to connect on a personal level and create a sense of shared community. This has the potential to persist outside the contexts of the activity, allowing queer forced migrants a greater sense of belonging in Wales. Such activities can also assist with mental health through mutual endeavours and encouragement. As such, sports and recreational activities have the potential to be a powerful tool for integration.

J. says:

"Beyond the physical benefits, these sports contribute to the mental and the emotional well-being of queer forced migrants. The activities offer an opportunity to build positive connections and friendships within the local community."

Many third sector and asylum sector teams exhibit a lack of diversity and lived experience, despite emphasises on community engagement. This makes it more challenging for those organisations to adopt an intersectional lens. Understanding lived experience and intersectionality is fundamental to creating meaningful community engagement. Most professionals occupying decision-making roles within Welsh Government and the policy sector are white, cisgender British or European individuals. These individual lack personal encounters with asylum, queer discrimination, or racial issues. As such, the demographic makeup of asylum sector organisations can be seen to contribute to failures in applying an intersectional lens to asylum policies and initiatives. Homogeneity results in unconscious bias that can impede decision makers' ability to understand the distinct experiences of queer forced migrants. There is a need in Wales for higher levels of diversity and lived experience amongst asylum sector professionals. This would help develop initiatives that are able to address the realities faced by queer forced migrants and ultimately improve integration strategies.

J. described how her organisation successfully implemented meaningful engagement. She noted that this included a range of activities, such as cultural events, collaborative workshops, potlucks, and sports. The significance of this engagement is undermined by the emphasis on more superficial "fluffy activities". Importantly, we must acknowledge the constraints faced by asylum sector professionals. They work to promote integration and positive change within a framework of limited resources, bureaucratic processes and institutional mandates. Initiatives and projects are required to be presented in a way that

aligns with their organisational perspectives and objectives. Therefore, asylum sector professional's ability to comprehensively address the integration needs of queer forced migrants is severely limited. Organisations' failure to recognise and support a wide range of community engagement activities highlights a narrow approach to addressing the needs of forced migrants. Through not considering intersectional identities, and choosing activities without consulting communities, decision makers limit queer forced migrant's agency within the integration journey. Stereotypes about queer forced migrants are inadvertently reinforced when asylum sector professionals and their non-diverse teams fixate upon what they consider to be meaningful integration activities. Such approaches that prioritise imposed cultural exposure and celebration, neglect the multifaceted identities and aspirations of the community. This reduces individuals to passive recipients of initiatives rather than active contributors to their community.

Collaborative workshops can be a useful vehicle for integration. However, the content and impact of these workshops are at risk when facilitators lack lived experience or diverse identities. Workshops risk being generic if they do not include intersectional discussion, such as on the challenges faced by queer forced migrants. This generality results in workshops that are insufficient in addressing the needs of marginalised identities within forced migrant communities. When workshops are not co-produced, a power dynamic is perpetuated that undermines the agency of queer forced migrants. This renders them passive recipients rather than partners in the integration process. Through such means, these events are reduced to mere performative gestures, rather than meaningful interactions that can build senses of belonging within communities.

5.5 Educational Opportunities

This is another aspect of integration the asylum sector professionals focus on. They all agreed that providing equal educational opportunities for everyone is essential for integration. Accessible and quality education helps break down barriers, promoting understanding and tolerance among people from diverse backgrounds.

F. says:

"Access to education is the key that unlocks the doors of integration, ensuring that every individual, regardless of background, can access knowledge. Providing equal educational opportunities is not just an investment in intellect but a commitment to breaking down barriers. In the classroom, understanding and tolerance become the curriculum, shaping a society where diversity is celebrated, and unity is learned."

Gender & Sexuality and Language Exchange Programmes

F. works for an All-Wales organisation that provides various language exchange and orientation programmes for forced migrants. They are collaborating primarily with the dispersal areas Local Authorities to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers do not fall through the education cracks.

F. says:

"Lots of service users started disengaging with the peer support programmes, for example. We were alarmed. When we investigated, we realised that all those who disengaged early on were part of the queer community. They said loud and clear that what we offer is not for them. This forced us to examine how inclusive we have been. We reached out to many of them ex-service users and asked them to work with us on making our services 'for them'. The results are impressive, as one of the first programmes they set up was "Gender and Sexuality Education."

Gender and Sexuality Education (GSE) stands as a crucial component of inclusive and equitable educational programmes, offering comprehensive information about various aspects of gender identity and sexual orientation. These programmes play a pivotal role in fostering understanding and awareness among diverse communities, contributing to the creation of more inclusive environments. For queer asylum seekers and refugees, GSE becomes particularly significant as it addresses the unique challenges and experiences faced by individuals navigating distinct cultural, societal, and legal landscapes.

F. says:

"Most if not all queer forced migrants have faced sexual or gender-based trauma. Re-learning about periods, busting myths around masturbation for example, and introducing the benefits of Test Pap or HIV are crucial to their physical and mental health."

Through this quote, F notes how common sexual and gender-based trauma is within queer forced migrant communities. These forms of trauma have lasting impacts on individuals' ability to trust others and can result in lasting mental health impacts such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As such, this trauma can present a substantial barrier to wellbeing and the ability to integrate within a new community. F. asserts the importance of teaching about elements relating to sexual health. Queer forced migrants will often lack comprehensive sexual health education within their home country. Additionally, sexual health stigma and taboos in conservative societies perpetuate misinformation. H's references to "introducing the benefits of Test Pap", "busting myths around masturbation" and "re-learning about periods", highlight the wide range of areas

within this subject that need to be covered. Becoming informed on such matters gives individuals the tools needed to manage their health effectively.

F.'s teachings about "the benefits of Smear Test or HIV" is a crucial way in which he persuades queer forced migrants to engage with essential preventative healthcare services. Many individuals from these communities are unaware or hesitant to access these services due to sexual health stigmas, and distrust of healthcare settings. When individuals do not access preventative care, they are put at higher risk of treatable or preventable conditions. This exacerbates health inequalities within this population.

F. says:

"The peer support programmes for queer asylum seekers and refugees represent another vital initiative in creating a sense of community and providing practical assistance in navigating the complexities of both the asylum process and integration into a new society."

Peer support programmes work by established members of the community offering their firsthand knowledge and empathetic support to newly arrived individuals. The asylum process is complex and can present emotionally draining challenges. Through peers sharing mutual experience, newcomers can experience a sense of solidarity and learn valuable lessons through informed insights and guidance. This is particularly relevant for queer forced migrants, who face unique barriers that are largely unaddressed by mainstream support services. Peer-to-peer approaches not only assist with practical aspects, such as navigating legal systems, but also emotional dimensions of seeking asylum as a queer individual. The lack of queer community that many individuals experience in their home country makes the community bonds offered by peer support programmes particularly impactful. Ultimately, peer support models support new arrivals' to successfully overcome challenges and feel that they belong within the community. Peer support is an empowering inclusion vehicle, as it harnesses the queer community's own unique strengths and assets to reach integrational goals.

F. says:

"*Queer asylum seekers often face isolation and unfamiliarity in their new environments, and these guides create a sense of belonging. By consolidating information in an accessible format, resource guides and toolkits empower queer asylum seekers to make informed decisions, access necessary resources, and build connections that contribute to a more successful and fulfilling integration process."*

Here F. is commenting upon the guides his organisation created to specifically address the unique needs and concerns of queer forced migrants. Such guides can provide individuals

with essential knowledge on elements including local queer groups, support services, legal resources, and healthcare options. As previously explored, queer forced migrants have distinct healthcare needs. Resource guides can indicate local queer inclusive healthcare providers, mental health services, and support groups. This can prevent individuals from experiencing discrimination from unsuitable healthcare provision and ensure that individuals swiftly find appropriate and informed care. As such, these guides provide vital avenues to empower migrants through knowledge that aids integration.

F. says:

"*We also offer resource guides and toolkits tailored for queer asylum seekers and refugees. We weren't sure whether they would be popular at first, but we couldn't print them quickly enough! Since the pandemic, we started creating e-versions too, because we know that not all queer asylum seekers live in queer-friendly accommodation, where they can leave such material around their rooms."*

The success of the resources and toolkits is shown through F's remarks that "we couldn't print them quickly enough!". Here he reports a large uptake of the offer, which indicates the widespread need for such resources within the queer forced migrant community. Importantly, F. notes that their organisation was reactive to the challenges presented by the pandemic, and by risks of housemates seeing LGBTQ+ related material. To overcome these challenges, they create online versions of the resources. As such, not only is creating such resources important but listening and being flexible to community needs.

F. says:

"All asylum seekers and refugees are enrolled in English courses in various local colleges, but the language exchange programmes offer the community connection that the colleges lack."

Language exchange programmes involve migrants and members of the local community meeting together to talk in English, which can be a useful language learning tool. Such programmes also offer the opportunity for individuals to make connections and develop a sense of belonging. These programmes offer a supportive environment in which individuals can share their experiences and perspectives. This can be especially valuable to queer forced migrants, who may otherwise lack spaces where this is possible. Language learning becomes a bridge between individuals from diverse backgrounds, as they share experiences of working together towards a common goal. Through these programmes individuals gain language proficiency, as well as insights into local culture, customs, and values. This can be especially valuable for queer forced migrants, who may take time to adjust to societal

expectations and cultural norms that are more accepting of openly LGBTQ+ identities. Language exchange programmes are an example of how grassroots initiatives can build bridges between communities and develop a more interconnected and understanding society. Consequently, language exchange programmes are a useful tool in achieving integration for queer forced migrants.

F. criticised mainstream educational methods in the interview. Asylum sector professionals and colleges express a commendable commitment to promoting educational opportunities for migrants. However, many of their perspectives and approaches are based off a western homonationalistic lens. This is a notable shortcoming. Emphasis on standardised, Western-centric educational models can contribute to assimilation, rather than the genuine integration of migrants. Many educational initiatives currently available to migrants in Wales prioritise a specific vision of integration through traditional classroom settings and standardised curricula. Such an approach assumes the universal applicability of Western-style education. This also ignores the diversity of student's backgrounds, levels of specialisation, and pre-existing skills. F. highlights these inadequacies in current educational approaches, and notes that colleges lack "community connection". He realised that queer individuals were disengaging from peer support programmes due to a lack of inclusivity. This recognition prompted a re-evaluation of services that resulted in the more tailored language exchange programmes. As seen previously, professionals' flexibility and recognition of community needs, is essential in providing effective integration opportunities.

Broader educational opportunities discussed by asylum sector professionals lacked the nuance expressed by F. One-size-fits-all approaches prioritise assimilation into Western norms, rather than respecting and valuing the unique identities and backgrounds of forced migrants. Tailored educational programmes reduce the risk of imposing Western-centric perspectives, through recognising and building on pre-existing skills and experiences. If asylum sector professionals wish to fulfil expressed commitments to equal educational opportunities, they must adopt flexible and reactive approaches that can adapt to presented needs. F. displays a standard of good practice through the thoughtful and tailored approach of his initiatives, including gender and sexual education, peer support programmes, resource guides, and language exchange programmes. He forms an inclusive approach that can adapt to the unique needs and strengths of queer forced migrants. As such, he creates initiatives that have the potential to foster genuine integration rather than assimilating individuals into a Western homonationalistic framework.

5.6 Public Safety

Public safety is another element of integration that the asylum sector professionals agreed on. They highlighted that a secure and safe environment is crucial for integration and the efforts to address hate crime primarily contribute to a sense of trust within communities.

H. says:

"The Welsh Government's efforts to ensure public safety are the keystones of integration. Addressing hate crime, and antisocial behaviours directed at queer forced migrants is not just a measure of Law Enforcement Agencies; it's an investment in the collective safety of communities across Wales. Law Enforcement Agencies training on queer cultural competency is a proactive measure to bridge understanding and build bridges of trust. It goes beyond policies; it's about creating a culture within Law Enforcement Agencies that values diversity, actively listens, and responds with sensitivity to the needs of queer individuals."

Law Enforcement Training

Law Enforcement Agencies training on queer cultural competency and sensitivity helps ensure that officers respond appropriately to the needs of queer forced migrant individuals. This training currently includes information on recognising and addressing hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents. In many instances, there has been a historical lack of awareness and understanding within Law Enforcement Agencies regarding the unique challenges faced by the queer community.

Law Enforcement Agencies training programmes on queer cultural competency and sensitivity are essential for fostering an environment where Law Enforcement Agencies officers can effectively respond to the diverse needs of queer individuals. Cultural competency training addresses this gap by providing officers with the knowledge and skills needed to engage respectfully and empathetically with queer individuals. This training involves education on queer history, terminology, and the specific issues faced by community members, promoting a more inclusive and informed approach in their interactions.

B. says:

"You know the issues with the police and the queer community. But you also know the issues around racism within the police too. When you combine race and the queer issues in one community, the queer forced migrants, you have the perfect storm."

Educating Queer Forced Migrants on Hate Crime

A key aspect of Law Enforcement Agencies training in this context is the recognition and appropriate response to hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents targeting queer forced migrant individuals. Many queer forced migrants are disproportionately affected by hate crimes, and Law Enforcement Agencies plays a crucial role in addressing and preventing such incidents. Training programmes should equip officers with the tools to identify and investigate hate crimes, ensuring that victims receive the support they need and that perpetrators are held accountable. Additionally, officers can learn about de-escalation techniques that are sensitive to queer issues, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings or exacerbation of tensions during encounters.

K. says:

“The number of times that my organisation reached out to the police to report a hate crime incident on our members behalf…They know they will not be taken seriously if they report the hate crime themselves, but this takes away their agency. This is not on us to fix is on the police”.

By implementing comprehensive training, Law Enforcement Agencies can contribute to building trust between the queer community and Law Enforcement Agencies. This, in turn, can foster a sense of safety and confidence within the queer community, encouraging individuals to engage with Law Enforcement Agencies when needed without fear of prejudice or discrimination.

K. says:

"*Pre-Covid, community policing initiatives were a vital priority for the South Wales Police. They did two years of a lot of outreaches and in those two years, leading up to covid, they recognised that fostering positive interactions with the queer asylum-seeking community is foundational to building trust and cooperation. Unfortunately, the commitment disappeared post-Covid. Which is a shame, as it meant a lot to a lot of people.”*

Community Policing Initiatives

Establishing community policing initiatives that encourage positive interactions between Law Enforcement Agencies and the queer asylum-seeking community fosters trust and cooperation were a priority pre-COVID-19. Community policing initiatives played a crucial role in started building positive relationships between Law Enforcement Agencies and the queer community. By establishing these initiatives, Law Enforcement Agencies actively engage with community members in a collaborative and respectful manner. This approach involved officers working closely with queer asylum seekers to address concerns and build trust. For queer asylum seekers, who may already be navigating unfamiliar environments,

community policing initiatives provided an avenue for establishing connections that go beyond Law Enforcement Agencies interactions.

B. says:

“In the pre-Covid era, community policing initiatives were set up to build active engagement. We haven’t heard a word about it since then”.

During this section of the interview, B. discussed the successes of community policing initiatives. He noted that through the active engagement, officers could gain awareness and insight into the unique challenges that queer forced migrants face. Through this method, officers are encouraged to take a more culturally competent and sensitive approach to migrant communities. As such, community policing initiatives created a vital avenue through which the safety outcomes of queer forced migrant communities could be improved. B notes that they “haven’t heard a word”, about these initiatives since they stopped during covid. It is disappointing to see the disappearance of these proactive measures that could aid queer forced migrants’ safety and integration.

H. says:

"Confidential reporting is key for queer forced migrants—providing a safe space to report hate crimes without fear of retaliation. When Law Enforcement Agencies investigate promptly, it not only addresses individual incidents but sends a clear message that discrimination will not be tolerated."

Here, H. expresses how valuable and confidential reporting mechanisms are for queer forced migrants. These can assist with the reporting of incidents, including discrimination and hate crime, through making this process safe and accessible. Most queer forced migrants have fled persecution based off their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. As such, they may experience heightened fears of retaliation that dissuade them from reporting incidents. Having secure and confidential reporting mechanism empowers queer forced migrants to come forward and report incidents. The ability to report incidents that impact them can make queer forced migrants safer in their communities and allow punitive measures to inhibit further perpetration.

B. says:

“In my organisation we are all trained on how to deal with Hate Crime and how to report Hate Crime. We have seen a massive spike since 2017 in queer asylum seekers and refugees being targeted across Wales. And unfortunately, not everyone who’s targeted gives us permission to report the hate crime. I would say we report 1 in 5 hate crimes. But we hear

through the grapevine of incidents that happen, that we would classify as hate crimes that never reach us."

S. says:

"We did a big campaign and service user training, just before Covid, on Hate Crime Awareness. It was as if we opened the floodgates. The general sentiment was that the queer asylum seekers and refugees do not trust the police to deal with Hate Crime and they very rarely report it."

The confluence of queer issues and racial discrimination is characterised as a "perfect storm" within the Law Enforcement Agencies context, as microaggressions and tone policing persist, indicating a lack of awareness and understanding within the police force regarding the unique challenges faced by queer forced migrants, particularly those who are people of colour. The reluctance of Law Enforcement Agencies to earnestly address reported hate crimes is attributed to structural racism and Islamophobia. This structural bias perpetuates barriers for queer forced migrants, especially those of colour, in accessing justice and protection. The mistrust in Law Enforcement Agencies is further entrenched when reports are dismissed or inadequately addressed, reinforcing the perception that the system is inherently biased against them.

It is evident form the above that the policymakers' emphasis on public safety suggesting that the focus is not genuinely on the well-being of queer forced migrants. But the utilisation of public safety to regulate the behaviour of people of colour is seen as a mechanism of control rather than a sincere effort to ensure the security and integration of queer individuals. While community policing initiatives were recognised as instrumental in building trust pre-Covid, the cessation of these efforts post-pandemic has resulted in a notable erosion of trust. The discontinuation of positive interactions and engagement initiatives has created a sense of abandonment and distrust among community members, impeding the potential for effective collaboration between Law Enforcement Agencies and the queer community.

Confidential reporting mechanisms, acknowledged as pivotal for queer forced migrants, exhibit concerns regarding their efficacy. Fear of retaliation and scepticism about the seriousness of their complaints contribute to a systemic issue that necessitates attention to ensure the accessibility and effectiveness of reporting mechanisms.

5.7 Access to Healthcare

All asylum sector professionals said that ensuring that all members of society have equal access to healthcare services is not only a matter of individual well-being but also a fundamental aspect of promoting collective health and integration. When healthcare is

accessible to all, it fosters a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the entire community, transcending socio-economic, cultural, and demographic differences.

H. says:

"Free healthcare is ensuring that every member has this access, and it is not just a matter of policy; it's a commitment to an equitable healthcare system that is designed to dismantle disparities and it's an investment to the overall resilience and integration of the entire society. A free access healthcare system is an investment in the collective health of Wales."

An equitable healthcare system plays a crucial role in addressing health disparities that often disproportionately affect marginalised and vulnerable populations, such as queer forced migrants. When healthcare is accessible to all, it becomes a unifying factor that emphasises the interrelation of society. The understanding that the health of one individual is linked to the health of the entire community promotes a sense of shared purpose. In times of public health challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, this connection becomes even more evident, underscoring the importance of collective action and solidarity. By prioritising equitable access to healthcare for queer asylum seekers and refugees, Wales built a foundation for integration.

S. says:

"We are lucky here in Wales. All forced migrants have free access to the NHS, unlike England where they must pay for secondary health care. Over the years, we have worked closely with the various NHS boards to ensure that forced migrants are receiving appropriate and timely care. Currently, we are collaborating with a few organisations, to create a specific NHS queue for forced migrants to access mental health support quicker. Things are slow moving, but they are moving".

Specialised Health Services

Specialised queer health services play a crucial role in promoting both individual well-being and integration, particularly for LGBTQ forced migrants. There is only one dedicated healthcare centre in Wales that recognises the unique needs and challenges faced by the queer community, creating a supportive environment that goes beyond conventional healthcare settings. By offering specialised services tailored to the specific health concerns of queer individuals, including asylum seekers and refugees, these centres contribute to a sense of inclusivity and understanding, fostering integration in the broader community.

F. says:

"The asylum seekers see a GP, as part of their asylum and dispersal process. There is only one LGBQ+ clinic in Wales, which is incredibly unfair, as there are 4, soon to be 6, asylum dispersal areas in Wales. Those queer asylum seekers who are not displaced in Cardiff, must either travel for hours to reach the clinic or do not access it all."

In the one region of Wales where specialised queer health services are available, individuals, queer forced migrants, have access to healthcare providers who are trained to address their unique health needs with sensitivity and cultural competency. This specialised care is especially important for queer asylum seekers who may have experienced trauma or discrimination in their home countries and for all of them it is the very first time that they receive such specialised care.

S. says:

"We provide lots of cultural training to various NHS health boards, GP surgeries across Wales, to ensure all LGBTQ+ forced migrants receive LGBTQ+ friendly treatment. The funding is running out though, and we are worried that new surgeries will fall through the cracks."

Here S. notes measures that are in place to improve healthcare provision for queer forced migrants. They note that through training, providers are informed on how they can provide sensitive and affirming care to members of this community. This increases the availability of healthcare services that queer forced migrants can access without fear of judgment or misunderstanding. Through improving queer forced migrants' experiences of healthcare provision, greater trust can be built. This is a fundamental element of integration, as it allows for equitable access to services, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or immigration status.

Hire Trained Queer Medical Professionals

S. days:

"Lots of queer forced migrants are trained medical professionals. And even though there are different operational standards across countries, they know what good care should look like."

Here S. notes the wealth of skills and experiences within forced migrant populations. There are substantial barriers to forced migrant health professionals returning to practice within the UK. Revalidating qualifications and gaining the appropriate licences can be a long, complicated and expensive process. In Wales, the Wales Asylum Seeker and Refugee Doctor's (WARD) Group supports forced migrant medical professionals into GMC registration. S. noted that forced migrants "know what good care looks like". Through

supporting forced migrant medical professionals into the NHS, there is an increase of doctors who are informed through experience in providing care that is sensitive to forced migrant issues.

F. says:

"Mental health is our big challenge. We deal with people with complex and deep-rooted trauma, who fled their home countries under difficult conditions. We need more queer-specific health services, across Wales and in all dispersal areas."

F notes the harsh impacts that trauma and negative mental health has on queer forced migrants. He notes the need for services across Wales that have specialised training on providing care for this group. This is reinforced by experiences shared in the first section, where we saw the devastating impacts to queer forced migrant mental health when healthcare services were discriminatory or ill-informed.

Signpost to the Welsh Gender Clinic

For transgender forced migrants, access to hormone therapy and gender-affirming care can be critical. Without provision of sensitive and appropriate healthcare, this group's outcomes are severely impacted. For many transgender individuals, medical interventions and gender affirming surgeries are a key part of their journey, and ability to combat feelings of gender dysphoria. As such, gender affirming care is important to both physical and mental wellbeing.

K. says:

"We signpost many of our members to the gender clinic. We have a fantastic working relationship with them, and we have a working group that looks after the needs of trans asylum seekers and refugees. We are lucky in Wales that the waiting lists are only 6 months or less, unlike England and Scotland which is minimum 2 years. We are incredibly grateful that our members trust us and reach out to ask for gender affirming care. For most of them it's the first time they have access to hormones or testosterone in a safe way. Most of them have tried hormones and T in their home countries but they had to pay crazy money in the black market, which is unregulated and incredibly risky."

In Wales, healthcare providers are actively working to ensure that transgender asylum seekers have equal access to hormone therapy and gender-affirming care. This involves understanding and addressing the unique healthcare needs of transgender individuals, providing them with the necessary resources, and fostering an environment where their gender identity is respected and affirmed. Integration into the broader healthcare system is a

critical component of this effort, as it ensures that gender-affirming care is seamlessly woven into the overall healthcare provision for asylum seekers and refugees.

K. says:

"Obviously, the Gender Clinic is not the answer to all our problems. We have a dedicated budget that helps our members when they must travel to London for top or bottom surgery or facial surgeries. We allocate money for transportation, hotel, food, and pocket money. Unfortunately, over the last few months, we have been unsuccessful to secure further funding, and our reserves are drying out. I don't know for how long we'll be able to keep offering this."

When transgender asylum seekers and refugees have access to gender-affirming care, it contributes to their integration into the host community by affirming their identities and fostering a sense of belonging. A healthcare system that recognises and supports transgender individuals contributes to a more inclusive society that values diversity and respects the rights and dignity of all its members. Integration, in this context, becomes a two-fold process: the integration of gender-affirming care into healthcare services and the integration of transgender asylum seekers into the social fabric of the host community.

K. says:

"Lots of our members are also HIV+ positive. They get tested upon arrival and they are given their medication but there is such a stigma attached to being HIV positive, within the queer community and the forced migrant community.

We must keep reminding people to attend their appointments. For most of them, this is the first time they have stable and consistent care and because of the volatile nature of the asylum process, some of them find it challenging to keep on top of things. Sometimes, we even join them in their appointments, just so they know we are present, and we care."

In terms of medical care, it is imperative that Wales continues to offer specialised services tailored to the needs of queer individuals who HIV+ are positive. This includes access to antiretroviral therapy (ART), regular monitoring of viral loads, and comprehensive healthcare that addresses the physical and mental health aspects associated with HIV. Culturally competent healthcare providers play a pivotal role in ensuring that the unique experiences and challenges faced by HIV+ positive asylum seekers are understood and addressed with sensitivity.

K. says:

“We run annual training sessions for our old and our new members on HIV-related issues and we try to ensure that people have access to the most up to date research. We invite HIV researchers and campaigners to these events. We create a safe space where no questions are stupid, and the experts debunk outrageous myths.”

My discussions with K. revealed the stark reality that queer forced migrants face formidable barriers when accessing healthcare in Wales. Many asylum sector professionals advocate for free and equitable healthcare as an investment in integration. Welsh Government has even demonstrated this through providing free access to primary and secondary care for asylum seekers, unlike England. However, equitable healthcare is not experienced by queer forced migrants. In addition to widespread experiences of discrimination and ill-informed services, queer forced migrants in rural areas face further barriers to healthcare provision. Queer health services in Wales are concentrated in Cardiff. Queer forced migrants outside of the capital have less access to tailored healthcare provision, exacerbating pre-existing geographical disparities. Challenges faced by transgender forced migrants expose the Wales’s failings to its commitment to inclusive healthcare provision. These individuals face long waiting lists and shortages in funding to support travel to surgeries. Individuals must travel to London to receive gender affirming surgeries, as these are not available within Wales. This shows that the intention to provide comprehensive care within Wales is not fully realised. The slow progress in addressing these concerns raises questions about the sincerity of Welsh Government’s commitment to healthcare inclusion.

Queer awareness training is being provided to health boards and GP surgeries. However, these trainings may be seen as tokenistic when considering that the provision is not equal to the need. To truly foster inclusive healthcare, funding needs to be increased in this area to ensure all healthcare providers are equipped with the necessary training to care for diverse patients. Cuts in funding to this area raise concerns about the depth of asylum professionals' commitments to developing truly inclusive healthcare in Wales.

5.8 Conclusion

My interviews with asylum sector professionals revealed the complexities of integrating queer forced migrants in Wales. My examination included consideration of a wide range of themes that they considered important, and the strategies they are taking to combat inequalities. Their discussions represented concentrated and measured efforts to address the diverse needs and challenges faced by queer forced migrants throughout their integration journey. However, it is important to note that although there were commonalities, there was a disconnect between primary topics brought up by queer forced migrants, and those discussed by professionals.

Throughout interviews with the professionals, culture was discussed as an aspect fundamental to integration efforts. For example, mentions of cultural orientation programmes and collaborations with faith organisations. This leads to an inadvertent prioritisation of cultural assimilation over true integration. Additionally, in some instances service provision was shown to be reactive rather than proactive, waiting until obvious need before being implemented. Distinctions between assimilation and integration are fundamental to this discussion. Assimilation requires individuals to dispose of elements of their identity to fit into the expectations of the host society. Integration celebrates diverse identities and promotes their active inclusion. Where policies and initiatives encourage conformity to dominant cultural norms, they foster assimilation, rather than a genuinely inclusive environment for queer forced migrants.

The disconnect between professional intent and policy constraint illustrates the systemic misalignment between inclusive aspirations and the political economy of the asylum sector. Integration, as currently practised, is often shaped by top-down, funding-driven imperatives rather than co-produced, community-led models. This reinforces what queer migration theorists critique as assimilationist frameworks, those which demand conformity to host society norms, rather than creating space for diverse epistemologies, identities, and lived experiences (Chávez, 2013; Giametta, 2017).

Moreover, this chapter shows that many integration initiatives fail to distinguish between tokenistic diversity rhetoric and authentic inclusion. The frequent reliance on cultural festivals, symbolic visibility, and "tick-box" consultations undermines the relational and systemic work required for genuine integration. In doing so, these initiatives risk reinforcing homonationalist logics—where LGBTQ+ inclusion is deployed to mask deeper structural exclusions, especially of racialised and migrant communities (Puar, 2007).

In discussions, professionals advocated for the importance of equality and inclusion within integration. However, within Wales there is a gap between policy rhetoric and meaningful action. This is highlighted by bureaucratic hurdles and the performative nature of many integration initiatives. Performative inclusivity commonly masks the reality that queer forced migrants face, where policies and initiatives are not designed for, or capable of, supporting their specific needs. The reality for many queer forced migrants is experiencing systemic barriers that limit their ability to integrate fully within Wales. Many integration initiatives are more focused on optics than substantive change, which ultimately harms the marginalised communities that they allege to support.

Social justice was identified by the professionals as another crucial theme. Throughout interviews they emphasised the importance of addressing issues related to the asylum

system, poverty and discrimination. However, I noted the presence of systemic biases within organisations which prioritised assimilation over integration. This revealed challenges in organisational abilities to understand and address the complex needs of queer forced migrants. Professionals working within the integration policy landscape shared their recognition that discourses surrounding social justice are not adequately translated into effective practice. Often, discourse surrounding integration fall into the trap of producing generalised solutions which overlook specific contexts and the needs of marginalised groups. If they fail to adopt an inclusive approach, integration initiatives, such as educational opportunities and community engagement, inadvertently perpetuate exclusion. Integration efforts are hindered when their design focuses too narrowly on predominant narratives or stereotypes about forced migrants. Consequently, the integration outcomes of queer forced migrants are damaged.

Building on this, the findings also reveal how integration efforts are increasingly entangled with securitisation and bordering practices, even in ostensibly progressive contexts like Wales. As queer migrants are folded into broader narratives of national inclusion, their recognition often hinges on their ability to align with state-friendly narratives of vulnerability, resilience, or cultural capital (Shakhsari, 2014; Lewis, 2014). This conditional recognition functions as what Giametta (2017) terms “sexual humanitarianism”, a framework in which protection is granted not as a right but as a reward for performing acceptable queerness within the confines of Euro-American liberalism. In this schema, queer migrants are required to perform trauma, legibility, and gratitude in exchange for protection, further marginalising those whose expressions of gender, sexuality, or cultural identity fall outside Western norms.

These dynamics are further complicated by the persistent racialisation of integration, where Black and brown queer bodies remain suspect, hyper-visible, or invisible altogether. Participants’ testimonies reflect a pattern in which whiteness remains the unspoken baseline of both queer community belonging and state acceptance. This racialised landscape of integration often intersects with Islamophobia, anti-Blackness, and xenophobic tropes, shaping who is seen as ‘integrable’ and who is perpetually cast as a threat or burden (Puar, 2007; El-Tayeb, 2011). Within such regimes, the very concept of “queer integration” becomes problematic: it is offered selectively, policed rigidly, and experienced unevenly depending on how closely individuals conform to state-sanctioned ideals of sexuality, behaviour, and respectability.

At a structural level, the asylum sector’s implementation of integration policy remains tied to performance metrics that prioritise economic productivity, language acquisition, and civic compliance over well-being, belonging, or relational repair. This chapter’s findings show how

queer forced migrants are rarely consulted in shaping what integration should look like—raising critical concerns about epistemic injustice and the erasure of subaltern knowledges in policymaking processes (Fricker, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Even when queer voices are included, they are often instrumentalised—reduced to evidence of progressive state credentials rather than meaningfully shaping the goals, language, or infrastructure of integration.

The absence of sustained, co-produced, and intersectional frameworks means that integration continues to operate through assimilationist logics, wrapped in the language of inclusivity. Cultural events, symbolic gestures, and diversity statements are not substitutes for structural redistribution of resources or power. To address these gaps, integration must be reimagined as a radically inclusive and redistributive practice, one that centres the knowledges of queer forced migrants and works to dismantle the institutional hierarchies that render them marginal.

This requires more than adding “LGBTQ+” to existing frameworks it demands a fundamental transformation of how integration is defined, funded, and evaluated. It involves reframing integration as a reciprocal and relational process, rooted in mutual care, political accountability, and the dismantling of intersecting oppressions. It also requires a commitment to redistributive justice, where resources, representation, and recognition are not simply symbolic but materially transformative.

Professionals recognised access to healthcare and public safety as foundational to successful integration. However, the experiences shared by queer forced migrants within the previous chapter revealed significant shortcomings in these areas. Where present, awareness training supplied to healthcare providers often lacked the depth needed for these services to effectively address the needs and intersectionality of queer forced migrants. The disconnect between professionals and queer forced migrant experiences emphasises the need for the development of a holistic approach. This approach must not only consider access to services, but the quality of those services, and their ability to cater to a wide range of marginalised groups. This can help to ensure that queer forced migrant needs are met within this critical domain. Lip service is damaging to integration. Statements of diversity, inclusion, and shared values must be backed up by substantive action. Where assimilation is prioritised, integration initiatives risk becoming a tool of conformity, suppressing identities that do not align with the norm. Queer forced migrants must be consulted on integration initiatives, to ensure professionals commitments to inclusion are actualised.

My primary insight from this chapter is that although asylum sector professionals are genuinely motivated to effectively support queer forced migrants, existing integration policies

significantly constrain their ability to do this. Most frameworks governing integration are shaped by funding priorities and political agendas that do not prioritise delivery for queer forced migrants. As a result, integration initiatives are misaligned with the actual needs of this population, leaving service providers in a precarious position where their hands are effectively tied. The disparity between professionals' intentions and the reality of integration policies is heightened by a lack of representation within the sector. As professionals noted within the interviews, there exceedingly few queer forced migrants working in key roles within asylum organisations and grassroots initiatives. This absence of diverse perspectives both hinders the development of inclusive policies and limits the effectiveness of service delivery. Consequently, the quality of support available to queer forced migrants is compromised from the outset. Professionals are often forced to operate with limited time, funding and resources, while being acutely aware that they are falling short of adequately meeting the needs of their clients.

Building on this, the findings also reveal how integration efforts are increasingly entangled with securitisation and bordering practices, even in ostensibly progressive contexts like Wales. As queer migrants are folded into broader narratives of national inclusion, their recognition often hinges on their ability to align with state-friendly narratives of vulnerability, resilience, or cultural capital (Shakhsari, 2014; Lewis, 2014). This conditional recognition functions as what Giametta (2017) terms "sexual humanitarianism"—a framework in which protection is granted not as a right but as a reward for performing acceptable queerness within the confines of Euro-American liberalism. In this schema, queer migrants are required to perform trauma, legibility, and gratitude in exchange for protection, further marginalising those whose expressions of gender, sexuality, or cultural identity fall outside Western norms.

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This requires more than adding "LGBTQ+" to existing frameworks, it demands a fundamental transformation of how integration is defined, funded, and evaluated. It involves reframing integration as a reciprocal and relational process, rooted in mutual care, political accountability, and the dismantling of intersecting oppressions. It also requires a commitment to redistributive justice, where resources, representation, and recognition are not simply symbolic but materially transformative.

Throughout the interviews professionals suggested that integration initiatives in Wales are hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and reactive approaches to service provision. Funding structures dictate that asylum organisations prioritise short-term outcomes over long-term, sustainable solutions. Professionals explained that funding is often dependent upon achieving measurable outcomes such as employment rates, language proficiency or number of individuals supported. As such, focus is directed towards immediate service delivery actions rather than development of holistic support through a comprehensively understanding the challenges faced by marginalised groups such as queer forced migrants. High staff turnover and burnout rates further exacerbate the problem, as professionals are unable to dedicate the necessary time and energy to implement systemic changes. Pressures from funders to conform to predetermined metrics leaves little room for professionals to implement support tailored towards queer forced migrants' experiences. Consequently, organisations that purport to promote inclusion and integration exclude queer forced migrants from their support structures. This leads to a cycle of disillusionment and frustration amongst queer forced migrants. Queer forced migrants' needs are often

neglected by asylum organisations, leaving them vulnerable to further social isolation and mental health struggles.

Integration initiative failures are indicative of a bigger picture within the asylum system, where inequalities are systemically perpetuated, and biases are reinforced. The voices and experiences of queer forced migrants cannot continue to be marginalised in policy discussion if meaningful change is desired. The disconnect between purported values and reality not only affects queer forced migrants' immediate wellbeing but also has significant ramifications on the efficacy and credibility of the asylum system.

In conclusion, although asylum sector professionals may have intentions to support queer forced migrants, the constraints imposed by integration policies significantly limit their capacity to enact this. Funding-driven agendas within organisations, and the lack of queer forced migrants in positions of power within the sector, create an environment where service delivery is not suited to this community. Through this, integration opportunities are stymied for queer forced migrants. This chapter has highlighted the need for a fundamental reassessment of the integration policies and initiatives in Wales.

6. Discussion

As the findings indicate, the integration of queer forced migrants in Wales is a complex process shaped by both intentional strategies and structural limitations. Wales has demonstrated a commitment to supporting forced migrants and fostering inclusivity, yet the unique experiences of queer forced migrants reveal gaps between policy intentions and outcomes. Through a range of integration efforts across community programmes, healthcare, legal advocacy, and cultural initiatives, the Welsh approach to integration seeks to create a safe and supportive environment for these individuals. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is hindered by practical challenges, including resource constraints, centralised services, and non-devolved policy powers.

In this section, I will address my central research question: How is the integration of queer forced migrants strategically created and driven in Wales? Through an analysis of policy frameworks, migrant experiences, and sectoral insights, I will explore the nuanced dynamics influencing the integration processes for queer forced migrants in Wales. To deepen this examination, I will address four interrelated questions: firstly, how Welsh initiatives and policies facilitate or hinder integration and shape the lived experiences of queer forced migrants; secondly, the specific integration opportunities and limitations that emerge as a result of these frameworks; thirdly, the broader implications of queer forced migrants' attempts at integration within Welsh policy and their potential to inform inclusive practices; and finally, the perspectives of both queer forced migrants and migration professionals on the effectiveness and inclusivity of current integration policies and initiatives. At the end of this chapter, I will offer policy reforms, based on the findings and governed by intersectionality.

6.1 Answering the Research Questions

How is the integration of queer forced migrants strategically created and driven in Wales?

Wales approaches the strategic integration of queer forced migrants through a variety of policies and targeted initiatives. There are driven by numerous actors, including Welsh Government, the Home Office, asylum and refugee charities and grassroots organisations. A major aspect of integration strategies in Wales is the development of support, which is culturally sensitive and informed, in a way that can assist queer forced migrants with their specific needs and unique challenges. This is delivered through various means, such as awareness training sessions. Another prominent element is implementations of cultural orientation and community cohesion initiatives. Through these initiatives, individuals are briefed on local culture and norms and provides opportunities to create networks and bonds

with local community members. These programmes are designed to create an environment that respects and celebrates diversity. However, as I have discussed there is a risk for such programmes to prioritise cultural assimilation. As such, although such initiatives may be well intentioned, they can be damaging to the integration process. Asylum professionals often note that they wany Wales to be a culturally inclusive society. However, integration policies and initiatives are often generalised, and do not include consideration of queer forced migrant communities, and the distinct integrational needs presented by their intersectional identities.

My findings suggest that healthcare is an important area of integration strategy in Wales. For successful inclusive integration strategies, the distinct mental and physical health needs of queer forced migrants must be addressed. Attempts to address these needs could be seen through the professionals' depictions of specialised LGBTQ+ healthcare, including mental health services, sex and gender education, and culturally informed and sensitive medical practitioners. However, it was noted that specialised healthcare is concentrated in urban areas such as Cardiff. Queer forced migrants placed in other geographical areas of Wales have limited access to this kind of support catered to their needs. Wales's comprehensive healthcare provision and inclusivity is therefore reduced, as access to this is dependent upon the area an individual is placed. Centralising initiatives and services support certain members of the queer forced migrant community but leaves others unseen and unsupported. The geographical accessibility of services must be considered if Wales is to provide inclusive integration strategies for queer forced migrants.

Wales's integration strategy for queer forced migrants is further underpinned through legal and social advocacy efforts. Local organisations in Wales, as well as the Welsh Government, are key actors in executing these efforts to address legal and advocacy needs. These efforts are however limited through both resources, and the non-devolved nature of asylum and immigration policy in the UK. Support is often allocated through reactively rather than proactively. For example, legal support is primarily available at crisis points, rather than readily accessible. Wales promotes values of inclusion and has a predominantly sound integration strategy theoretically. However, practical limitations and focus on short term achievements and funder requirements prevent the strategy from being realised. Wales's lack of sustainable support frameworks and reliance on temporary solutions reveals a need for a more comprehensive and considered approach to the integration of queer forced migrants.

How is integration facilitated or hindered by initiatives and policies in Wales, and how do these impact upon the experiences of queer forced migrants?

Integration policies and initiatives in Wales, whilst well intended, often lacked the ability to successfully facilitate the integration of queer forced migrants in practice. Throughout my research, I witnessed evidence of a disconnect between policy objectives and queer forced migrants' lived experiences. This was particularly apparent in areas such as healthcare, education, and community engagement. For example, access to quality healthcare is not inclusive of all queer forced migrants in Wales. Although forced migrants, including asylum seekers, are entitled to free healthcare in Wales, access is not uniform. Specialised services appropriate for queer forced migrants were centralised in Cardiff, leaving individuals in other areas poorly served. For those outside of larger cities, travel and logistics make attending specialised support largely impossible. The interviews with queer forced migrants' showed experiences of discrimination and unsuitable care when accessing more generalised healthcare provision. Centralisation not only limits healthcare access but also creates a sense of exclusion. Queer forced migrants recounted feelings that being placed in rural areas was a punishment, because of the lack of support services available.

Disparities between policy and reality were further illustrated through the area of public safety and law enforcement. Professionals discussed efforts that have been taken to train law enforcement officers in awareness and competency around queer forced migrants. These are designed to ensure respectful interactions with queer forced migrants, but many of my interviewees described experiences of culturally insensitive or discriminatory police interactions. Negative experiences can often be compounded by intersectional identities such as racial and religious biases, which add layers of complexity to their interactions with law enforcement. Professionals described community policing initiatives to have had an initial success in fostering community trust. However, this was not reflected in participants interviews, leading to questions of whether this training was widespread enough for impact to equal need. Additionally, these programmes were discontinued after COVID-19, highlighting an inconsistency in public safety efforts, and the instability and short-term nature of many initiatives. Initiatives must be long term to be able to create the impact that can facilitate integration for queer forced migrants in Wales.

Through community engagement initiatives are designed to facilitate social integration, these were often perceived by queer forced migrants to be superficial or disconnected from their needs. Such initiatives included elements such as art exhibitions, storytelling events, and cultural exchange. These are intended to bridge social divides, establish trust, and create a sense of belonging. However, queer forced migrants viewed such events as performative. They criticised the prioritisation of public cultural celebration, over addressing essential needs and meaningful support structures. Such initiatives can position migrants as passive recipients rather than active participants in their integration journey. This is because they are

being allowed input and engagement only through symbolic gestures, rather than through structural change and policy. Consequently, this disconnection prevents the sense of belonging. A lack in appropriate long-term support hinders queer forced migrants from integrating in Wales.

What integration opportunities and limitations do the queer forced migrants face in Wales as a result?

My study highlighted numerous opportunities and limitations that queer forced migrants face throughout their integration journey in Wales. Though structured programmes and resources are available, barriers to these are presented through implementation gaps, systemic challenges, and resource constraints. For example, education and employment are key integration areas. Programmes such as language exchanges and vocational training can help forced migrants adapt to Welsh society. However, I discovered that these areas risked replacing integration with cultural assimilation. As such, identity and language differences presented barriers to participation in these programmes. Stigma and discrimination presented additional access barriers to queer forced migrants. I found that few programmes recognised and built upon individuals' prior education and professional experience, leading to an underutilisation of their skills that can limit their economic mobility.

Support offered through Wales's legal support and advocacy frameworks are limited. Services are stretched thin due to limitations on resources, and the constraints of non-devolved immigration policies. Legal support is of fundamental importance to queer forced migrants navigating the asylum process. However, individuals struggle to access their rights and protections due to the shortages in legal support, procedural delays and systemic barriers that characterise Wales's immigration system. Reliance on short-term initiatives to provide legal aid also impact these services' reliability, leaving many forced migrants feeling unsupported and insecure. As such, this area clearly limits queer forced migrants' ability to integrate in Wales.

In theory cultural and community initiatives are opportunities for inclusion for queer forced migrants in Wales. These include initiatives such as cultural orientation programmes and queer-friendly events and are designed to create safe spaces for queer forced migrants. However, such initiatives are often unstable and short term, as they rely upon temporary funding arrangements. This limits these programmes' effectiveness; inconsistent support means that queer forced migrants struggle to establish stable social connections. As such, individuals are left feeling disconnected from the very community that these programmes aim to include them in. As such, cultural and community initiatives do not present the level of

integration opportunity that they appear to offer. Through these initiatives do not limit queer forced migrants' integration, they do not currently adequately fulfil these needs.

What is the larger policy scale impact of queer forced migrants' integration attempts in Wales?

Queer forced migrants' integration attempts in Wales have ramifications on understandings of integration on a larger policy scale. Their experiences reveal systemic inadequacies in UK-wide integration policies and highlight a need for national reform. Through their experiences, we can see the opportunities and limitations of a range of integration efforts. These serve to suggest areas in which policy and practice reform could have a meaningful impact and could be used as a model for UK reform and integration frameworks overseas. My research highlighted that there is a greater need for active inclusion of queer forced migrants in integration frameworks. This should be considered in a wide range of areas, including healthcare, housing, safety and legal support. My research also strongly advocates for the creation of policies that can provide both immediate assistance and long-term structural support.

The experiences of queer forced migrants highlighted the importance of UK wide governance changes. Currently, decisions regarding asylum and immigration policy are made at a UK level, without apt consideration for the needs of individuals within the Welsh context. This non-devolved nature of immigration policy results in a lack of the autonomy needed to provide tailored support services for queer forced migrants in Wales. It was suggested that devolving more powers to Wales could allow for more effective localised solutions to address community-specific needs. Through increased powers, policy coordination between Welsh and UK agencies could be streamlined, enabling more responsive and efficient service provision. As such, Wales would have a greater ability to implement policies that reflect the lived realities of marginalised groups such as queer forced migrants.

The integration attempts of queer forced migrants in Wales highlight the importance of adopting intersectional approaches in policy development. This provides lessons that can be applied to integration policy creation both nationally and internationally. Current UK policies treat forced migrants as a homogenous group. They often overlook the intersecting factors such as race, religion, gender, and sexuality that shape the experiences of queer forced migrants. My study advocates for asylum professionals to consider an intersectional approach when developing integration strategies. This allows for a range of marginalised groups such as queer forced migrants to be included in policy considerations. Consequently,

more inclusive and equitable integration strategies can be created, ensuring that a far larger number of individuals are appropriately supported.

What are queer forced migrants' and migration professionals' experiences of integration policies and initiatives?

Queer forced migrants and asylum sector professionals' perspectives provided valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current integration policies in Wales. In general, the perspective of my queer forced migrant interviewees was that they appreciated the inclusive intentions behind integration policies but felt that intention did not meet reality. They shared experiences of an environment in which most services were unequipped to adequately support their distinct needs. Participants shared that they valued community initiatives that celebrated diversity and offer safe spaces, but they often felt that these were symbolic gestures, and not useful in supporting more urgent and essential needs. The gap between intention and lived experience creates a sense of disillusionment among queer forced migrants. They revealed that they do not feel truly supported to integrate in Wales.

The asylum sector professionals that work closely with queer forced migrants shared similar frustrations regarding current system limitations. They expressed concerns about organisational constraints, such as limited resources, bureaucratic delays and keeping up with funder requirements. These restrict their ability to provide effective support and often led to a short-term and unstable nature of initiatives. The professionals I spoke to were dedicated to meeting the needs of queer forced migrants, and had clear ideas of the strategies that could meet these needs. However, they felt that the current system prevents them from enacting meaningful change, leaving them unable to fully address the challenges that queer forced migrants face. This disillusionment leads to burnout and high staff turnover, leading to increased instability of queer specific initiatives which are often spearheaded by one motivated staff member. Consequently, my study has underlined the need for increased resources, streamlined processes, and to empower professionals to enact their specialised knowledge on how to best support queer forced migrants.

Queer forced migrants and asylum sector professionals both shared the perspective that it is key to involve those with lived experience in integration policy development. They noted the ability of co-production in empowering queer forced migrants to contribute their valuable insights and actively shape outcomes for their communities. Participants were critical of methods that place queer forced migrants as passive beneficiaries of top-down programmes. Instead, they advocated for participatory and empowerment-based approaches that position queer forced migrants as essential contributors. More informed and effective integration

strategies can be produced through greater collaboration and co-creation between queer forced migrants, migration professionals, and policymakers.

6.2 Divergent Perspectives

Throughout the interviews, I witnessed a disparity between the perspectives of asylum sector professionals and the lived experiences of queer forced migrants. In the majority, asylum sector professionals considered integration through the lens of policy frameworks, bureaucratic procedures, service provision and socio-economic indicators. Queer forced migrant participants offered an understanding shaped instead by personal narratives, identity struggles, and social dynamics. This division highlights the importance of preventing top-down policy initiatives through including queer forced migrants within strategic planning meetings. Through co-production, the disparity between these perspectives can be addressed.

We saw that asylum sector professionals are pressured by funder requirements to prioritise within integration approaches measurable outcomes such as employment rates and language proficiency. By these measures, integration is equated with achieving economic self-sufficiency and cultural assimilation within the host society. However, cultural assimilation is not the same as integration. As discussed, assimilation is particularly damaging to queer forced migrants as non-mainstream identities are supressed within the narrow expectations of outcomes. Consequently, intersecting layers of marginalisation and discrimination are produced, that hinder queer forced migrant's ability to integrate. For queer forced migrants, integration is not centered around assimilation into the dominant culture. True integration should recognise and validate of their unique identities through means such as creating safe spaces for community building and dismantling systemic barriers that perpetuate exclusion and invisibility. Consequently, whilst asylum sector professionals prioritise structural reform and institutional support mechanisms, queer forced migrants emphasise the importance of cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and empowerment in their journey towards meaningful integration.

Policymakers and practitioners are influenced by broader political agendas, public opinion, and resource constraints. They must also operate within the bounds of UK policy frameworks. This also leads to a perspective that is divergent from that of queer forced migrants. Top level professionals have the largest amount of power over policy but often have the least communication and engagement with the affected communities. This exacerbates misunderstandings and leads to ill-informed and ineffective policies. Such a disconnect can be seen in the Welsh Government's Nation of Sanctuary Report. No queer forced migrants were included within the creation of this policy, as there is no mention of

their challenges. The plan emphasises principles like equality, inclusion and human rights, but fails to include this group. Welsh Government's failure to understand queer forced migrant's integration perspectives is evident in its inability to address the multifaceted challenges faced by this marginalised group. Welsh Government's key asylum reports recognise that integration as a complex process extending beyond economic participation. However, in practice they primarily focus on measurable markers of integration such as employment and language proficiency. As such, they neglect the systemic barriers and social dynamics that disproportionately affect queer forced migrants, including discrimination, stigma, and lack of culturally competent support services. This neglect in policy consideration has meant that queer forced migrants continue to experience hostile environments, invalidation of their identities and substantial barriers to accessing essential resources. This ultimately hinders queer forced migrants' ability to establish a sense of belonging and security in their new communities.

Queer forced migrants are not given sufficient opportunities to meaningfully engage in the development and implementation of integration policies. This perpetuates a top-down approach which exacerbates their marginalisation and disregards their agency and expertise. Welsh Government emphasises the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, including public bodies and the Third Sector. However, there is a notable absence of queer forced migrants' presence in developing integration strategy. Government initiatives risk overlooking critical issues and perpetuating systemic inequalities without meaningful representation and participation from the queer community. As a result of their occlusion, queer forced migrants' need are not addressed, undermining the Welsh Government's commitment to fostering integration and inclusivity.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government's lack of commitment to understand and address the unique challenges faced by queer asylum seekers and refugees leads to assimilation rather than integration. Many integration initiatives and policies are tailored towards centralised expectations and stereotypes of what a forced migrant looks like and needs. Through such narrow definitions the Welsh Government efforts does not address the specific needs of queer forced migrants. This neglect fails to recognise the diverse identities and experiences within the queer community, pressuring individuals to conform to dominant cultural norms to meet integration criteria. In the absence of culturally competent resources, individuals feel compelled to assimilate into environments where their identities are invalidated, rather than experiencing authentic integration where their identities are respected and celebrated

6.3 Policy Recommendations and A Vision for Reform

The effective integration of queer forced migrants in Wales demands bold, systemic reforms that are informed by intersectional perspectives, grounded in sustainable practices, and implemented through participatory frameworks. These recommendations address critical gaps and propose strategies for building an inclusive and equitable integration model.

Holistic Understanding of Intersectionality

Integration policies must account for the compounded effects of multiple forms of marginalisation experienced by queer forced migrants. These intersecting identities—spanning gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and disability—place individuals at a unique disadvantage, amplifying their vulnerabilities. Thus, it is paramount to reconcile their identities with community expectations, as well as external discrimination from host communities. This calls for intersectional data collection and analysis to inform policies, which centralises the collection of the lived experiences of queer forced migrants, to ensure that policies reflect this diversity rather than adopting a homogenised view of forced migrants. To enshrine protections for queer forced migrants in Welsh integration policies, recognising the unique challenges posed by their intersectional identities. This ensures that integration efforts actively dismantle systemic inequalities.

Decentralisation and Devolution

Decentralisation and devolution are critical to creating responsive and effective integration policies for queer forced migrants in Wales. By advocating for the transfer of immigration and asylum decision-making powers to the Welsh Government, integration efforts can become more tailored to regional dynamics and specific community needs. Devolving these powers would enable the development of localised policies that are better aligned with the lived realities of queer forced migrants, ensuring faster and more adaptive service delivery without the constraints of the broader UK immigration bureaucracy.

Devolution will empower the Welsh Government to design and implement integration policies that reflect the unique challenges faced by communities within Wales. These policies can address local priorities and incorporate culturally nuanced approaches that are often overlooked in centralised frameworks. A decentralised approach fosters greater involvement of local councils and grassroots organisations in leading integration initiatives through participatory feedback mechanisms, community advisory panels composed of queer forced migrants to provide ongoing input, as well as developing regional hubs to provide accessible healthcare, legal support, and cultural programmes tailored to local communities. This participatory model ensures that queer forced migrants are directly involved in shaping the

policies that impact their everyday lives. This is particularly important for addressing the geographic disparities across Wales, as currently, services for queer forced migrants are disproportionately concentrated in urban centres like Cardiff, leaving rural areas underserved.

Sustainable Funding Allocation

Effective integration strategies for queer forced migrants require a fundamental shift from short-term, project-based funding to sustainable, long-term financial investments. Although pilot projects and temporary initiatives can be valuable platforms for experimentation, they often lack the continuity and scalability needed to address the systemic challenges faced by vulnerable populations. Long term approaches are fundamental to successful integration, as they can provide stable and reliable support to queer force migrant communities. Through transitioning to sustainable funding models, services can ensure continuity in service provision. This is especially key with regards to essential programmes regarding healthcare, housing, and legal advocacy, as service interruptions in these areas can be detrimental to wellbeing and integration. Interruptions in these services disproportionately impact marginalised communities who rely on them for stability. Through long-term funding it is possible to evaluate programme outcomes, enabling policymakers and practitioners to develop and refine initiatives based on evidence and best practice. Implementation of an iterative approach has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of integration initiatives.

The development of equitable funding models must include recognition of the needs and challenges of queer forced migrants, particularly those in underserved regions. In rural and remote areas, queer forced migrants often face significant barriers to accessing informed and appropriate services. As such when considering resource allocation, additional financial support must be provided to extend services into these areas. Additionally, my research advocates for increased funding to grassroots organisations and projects led by queer forced migrants. Such initiatives have the cultural and contextual expertise needed to address intersectional challenges effectively. This can ensure that integration efforts are informed and responsive to the lived realities of queer forced migrants. Collaboration across the sector is essential for creating innovative and comprehensive integration programmes, such as mobile outreach units or intersectional mental health services. Through partnership working resources can be pooled to maximise impact. Consequently, this model can address diverse areas of integration—such as housing, education, healthcare, and legal advocacy—in an integrated and cohesive manner.

Training and Capacity Building

A comprehensive approach to training and capacity building is necessary to the successful integration of queer forced migrants. This should include professionals across a range of sectors, including healthcare, education, law enforcement, social services, and policymaking. To be effective, training programmes must be rooted in principles of intersectionality, cultural competence, and responsiveness to the unique challenges faced by queer forced migrants. Professional development and continuous learning are essential to queer forced migrants' integration, as it facilitates more inclusive environments and informed service delivery.

Training on queer forced migrants should be mandatory for asylum sector professionals. Such training can ensure that professionals have the knowledge, skills, and cultural competency required to provide effective services to this group. Such training should include discussion of intersectionality, and aid understandings of how overlapping identities—such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and religion—can compound the challenges faced forced migrants. Through the training, participants learn how to identify and prevent the implicit biases that hinder inclusive service delivery. It is essential that the training incorporates the lived experiences of queer forced migrants and examples of real-life scenarios. Such case studies should illustrate the systemic barriers faced by queer forced migrants. This can allow professionals to fully understand their perspective, provide professionals with useful insights into how to apply inclusive practices. To build a culture of continuous learning, platforms should be developed in which best practice and lessons learned can be exchanged. Through events focusing on queer forced migrant integration professionals can share insights, innovations, and success stories. Such forums can also serve as networking opportunities for professionals across different regions, which is especially important for those in remote areas.

Training programmes must integrate the voices of queer forced migrants into their design and evaluation. This can help ensure that they are relevant and effective in addressing the evolving needs of this community. Additionally, professionals must be encouraged to develop mechanisms within their services for queer forced migrants to provide regular feedback and suggestions. Insights provided through feedback can serve to highlight gaps in areas such as cultural competence, accessibility, and effectiveness. Feedback from queer forced migrants can be used to refine both service delivery and the training programmes. Through utilising an iterative process, training programmes can evolve in response to emerging challenges and the changing needs of queer forced migrants.

Community Empowerment Through Participatory Frameworks

Participatory frameworks, where queer forced migrants play an active role in shaping policies and programmes, are an essential element of effective and inclusive integration models. Traditional top-down position queer forced migrants as passive recipients of services and policies. Converting migrants' positions to co-creators, reinforces their sense of agency and belonging while also ensuring that developed approaches are informed by lived experience. Participatory frameworks ensure that integration efforts are both meaningful and sustainable through emphasising reciprocal integration and local ownership. This approach recognises queer forced migrants' value through allowing them to be active contributors to the strategic development and implementation. An example of how this approach could be implemented is through the establishment of advisory bodies composed of queer forced migrants. These bodies could ensure that governmental and organisational decisions and policies are informed by the lived experiences of those directly affected. Another example of utilising participatory frameworks is through empowering queer forced migrants to lead community workshops, cultural events, or educational programmes. This provides queer forced migrants with a space to promote understanding within their local community, which can allow them to take ownership of their integration journey.

To ensure that integration programmes reflect the unique needs and dynamics of local communities, it is critical to empower community organisations and grassroots initiatives. This goes hand in hand with provide financial and logistical support to NGOs working in rural or underserved areas. These organisations often have the cultural and contextual expertise needed to address the specific challenges faced by queer forced migrants. Moreover, funding mentorship initiatives that pair queer forced migrants with local LGBTQ+ allies. These programmes could facilitate personal and professional development while building networks of support and solidarity.

Strengthening Proactive Asylum Support and Legal Protections for Queer Forced Migrants

Addressing inequities within the asylum process, developing robust safeguards and enhancing access to legal resources is essential to the successful integration of queer forced migrants. Through proactively addressing these matters, policymakers can aid the ability of this community to integrate within Wales.

Systemic delays and procedural inequities in asylum processing disproportionately impact queer forced migrants, particularly those fleeing persecution based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. Therefore, it is vital to prioritise and fast-track asylum claims involving gender or sexuality-based persecution. As these cases often involve heightened

vulnerability, necessitating timely resolution to prevent prolonged uncertainty and potential re-traumatisation. It should be a no-brainer that the Home Office should recognise and mitigate the barriers queer forced migrants face in providing evidence to substantiate their claims. This includes accommodating circumstances were conventional findings, such as medical or police reports, may be inaccessible due to the risk of exposure or discrimination in their countries of origin.

Legal frameworks must explicitly safeguard queer forced migrants against discrimination and bias, throughout the asylum process ensuring their rights are upheld across all facets of integration. Wales should campaign to strengthen policies that explicitly protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These policies should provide clear protections in areas such as housing, employment, healthcare, and public services. Furthermore, establish robust mechanisms for the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, including accessible reporting channels and accountability measures to address violations swiftly and effectively.

Access to specialised legal support is essential for queer forced migrants navigating complex asylum and integration processes. Centralised legal assistance hubs can serve as critical resources, providing translation and interpretation services to ensure non-English-speaking migrants can fully understand and engage with legal procedures, as well as employ legal professionals with expertise in LGBTQ+ issues and asylum law to offer tailored support. These specialists can address the unique legal and cultural challenges faced by queer forced migrants, enhancing their access to justice and equitable treatment.

Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms for Integration Policies

The development of robust evaluation mechanisms is essential to ensure the accountability, effectiveness, and continuous improvement of integration policies for queer forced migrants. By employing comprehensive evaluation strategies, setting clear success benchmarks, and maintaining transparency, policymakers can assess the real-world impact of integration efforts while fostering trust and inclusivity.

The use of a mixed-method approach to evaluation is essential to accurate measurement of integration policy success. If they are to provide a holistic understanding of policy outcomes, the methodologies employed must be person-centric and trauma informed. Examples of best practice include conducting interviews, focus groups, and case studies with queer forced migrants. Through these means it is possible to capture lived experiences, challenges, and perceptions of integration policies and initiatives. Statistical data alone is unable to capture the nuanced insights and teachings that these methods can provide. It is important that these evaluations are conducted by individual who are well-trained and informed on queer

forced migrants. Best practice will include peer researchers. Co-creating the evaluations with queer forced migrants is essential, to ensure it is informed by lived experiences and responsive to evolving needs.

Traditional integration metrics, such as economic participation and language proficiency, fail to capture the complexities inherent in queer forced migrants' experiences of integration. To achieve an accurate assessment, it is necessary to include additional measurements. For example, when considering healthcare, self-reported well-being, mental health outcomes and level of access to trauma-informed care, could all be used to inform assessments. Other potential metrics to explore could include understanding engagement in community programmes and cultural activities, as well as assessing the progress in reducing discriminatory practices and incidents targeting queer forced migrants. These can truly evaluate integration policies and initiatives' effectiveness for queer forced migrants.

The Welsh Government must publish annual or biennial progress reports that detail integration outcomes in Wales. These reports should highlight successes, address areas requiring improvement, and detail future plans. Additionally, through hosting public forums to discuss report findings, a wide variety of stakeholder could be able to contribute valuable input into ongoing policy refinements.

Conclusion

Integration for queer forced migrants in Wales is constrained by policies and initiatives that prioritise assimilation into western cultural norms, over celebrating and including a wide variety of cultures and identities. A primary issue is the common conflation of integration with homonormativity — a framework that centres western concepts of gender and sexuality. Through this approach, queer experiences that depart from expected norms are erased. As such, a sense of "otherness" is perpetuated for individuals from non-western contexts, such as queer forced migrants. This not only invalidates these individual's identities but creates barriers to authentic connections with host communities and the development of a sense of belonging. Failure to recognise and embrace the diversity of queer forced migrants further marginalises these individuals and limits the potential for meaningful, reciprocal integration. To be successful, integration efforts must actively prioritise inclusivity over assimilation. Consequently, exclusion perpetuating biases and structures can be dismantled, which empowers queer forced migrants to shape their own pathways to belonging.

Through this chapter, I have outlines comprehensive recommendations that are informed by the body of my research. These recommendations outline methods through which equitable and meaningful integration can be achieved for queer forced migrants in Wales. Wales has the potential to become a model for other regions, through transforming its integration

strategies in the ways that I have outlined. Emphasis on intersectionality, sustainability, participatory approaches, and a commitment to authentic inclusion are key pillars of the strategy I suggest. By embedding these elements, Wales could lead by example and become a true nation of sanctuary.

7. Conclusion

In summation of my findings, the current policy landscape in Wales, shaped by frameworks such as the Nation of Sanctuary Plan (NoS), fails to comprehensively address the distinct needs and experiences of queer forced migrants. Failures to consider this group in integration frameworks leads to a disconnect between policy intentions and the lived experiences of this group. I found that asylum sector professionals and policymakers predominantly utilise traditional, outcome-based metrics to evaluate integration success. These measurements include elements such as employment rates, language proficiency, and economic independence. My interviews with queer forced migrants highlighted that for them, integration is a deeply personal journey. They experience integration through more aspects than mere economic assimilation, such as through accessing safe spaces, cultural inclusivity, identity validation, and evading systemic barriers such as stigma and discrimination. Through reducing integration success to traditional outcome-based metrics, the nuanced experiences of queer forced migrants face are ignored. Through limiting the scope of integration, existing policies inadvertently push queer migrants toward assimilation through pressuring them to conform to dominant cultural norms. Wider integration aspects and experiences must be considered to create integrational policy that can truly include and accept queer forced migrants.

The "Nation of Sanctuary" vision commits to fostering a welcoming environment for forced migrants. However, its failure to explicitly include LGBTQ+ identities, especially those of forced migrants fleeing gender-based and sexuality-related persecution, exemplifies the shortcomings of top-down policymaking, overlooking the plurality of migrant experiences, prioritising heteronormative and cis-normative trajectories of integration that assume a stable, binary identity. This oversight is not benign. It leaves queer migrants without tailored services, such as trauma-informed mental health support, safe housing, or culturally competent legal aid, essential to their survival and flourishing. These gaps are exacerbated when policy development is reactive, crisis-driven, and lacking community-led consultation, rather than proactively inclusive.

The Welsh independence movement often appeals to cultural revivalism, with strong emphasis on markers such as the Welsh language, mythologies of ancestry, and national symbolism. While these elements are important for postcolonial identity-building and resistance to Anglocentric marginalisation, they risk creating exclusionary forms of belonging. As Yuval-Davis (2011) argues, nationhood is always a contested construction, often guarded by boundaries that determine who counts as a legitimate member. In the Welsh case, the reification of traditional cultural elements can inadvertently marginalise

those who do not, or cannot, easily access or perform these symbols. Queer forced migrants, often already alienated from their original cultural and familial structures, are further isolated by nationalist identity frameworks that reward conformity to narrow definitions of “Welshness.”

In such a constrained cultural and political context, queer migrants are subtly pushed toward assimilation, rather than genuine integration or belonging. Belonging requires that individuals are seen, valued, and allowed to express the full scope of their identities without fear of erasure or reprisal. But when policies omit sexual and gender minorities, and when nationalist discourse privileges “authentic” cultural expressions, migrants are left with the choice of conforming or being invisibilised. However, this dynamic is not unique to Wales but reflects broader Eurocentric trends, where inclusion is conditional upon adoptability to mainstream norms. In Wales, this is compounded by the use of national identity as both an emancipatory tool (against English domination) and a gatekeeping mechanism, consciously or unconsciously filtering who gets to belong.

My findings detail the complex interplay between queer forced migrants’ experiences of integration and the limitations of Welsh policies. Top-down policy initiatives often perpetuate narratives of “otherness” and dependency. These frame queer forced migrants as inactive recipients of integration efforts. Most of the asylum sector professionals I interviewed acknowledged that their current organisational approaches, through bureaucratic constraints, funder requirements and resource limitations, are not sufficiently responsive to the needs presented by queer forced migrants’ intersectional identities. Consequently, my research highlights the need for urgent reform in terms of integration strategies. Wales must move from reactive, homogenising integration frameworks, to approaches that promote inclusion and validate diverse identities. Without this shift, Wales risks perpetuating a cycle of exclusion for queer forced migrants. These communities deserve to experience meaningful integration and a sense of belonging. My interviews revealed that current systems reinforce feelings of invisibility, undermines self-determination, and reinforces power imbalance. For true integration, queer forced migrants must be given opportunities to become active agents in shaping their new lives, rather than remaining passive recipients of integration efforts.

Implications for Future Research

Reflecting on the potential for comprehensive data collection and research on queer forced migrants in Wales opens a range of insights into the ways in which such an initiative could fundamentally reshape support systems across the UK. As a researcher, I recognise that developing and implementing data collection initiatives in this area is a challenging yet

transformative undertaking. The current gap in data means that many of the unique experiences of queer forced migrants remain invisible within broader policy frameworks, and this invisibility often results in support services that are generic, rather than responsive to the lived realities of those they aim to serve. Addressing this absence requires a deliberate, respectful, and inclusive approach to data collection that goes beyond simply filling knowledge gaps; it actively challenges existing paradigms and compels a rethinking of what inclusive policy truly entails.

In reflecting on this project, I understand that bringing queer forced migrants into the research process is critical not only for data accuracy but also for ethical integrity. Inclusive, participatory research—where queer forced migrants are not merely subjects but active collaborators—demonstrates respect for their autonomy and validates their perspectives. This approach could include a commitment to ensuring confidentiality, safe engagement spaces, and adequately compensating participants for their time and insights, all of which are essential for building trust. In retrospect, a more collaborative approach with Welsh governmental agencies, local councils, and asylum organisations would have enhanced the impact and visibility of this research, but when I began this project, queer forced migrant issues were often viewed as niche concerns that did not warrant large-scale investment. This perception led to limited institutional support, which ultimately left a gap at the meso level of policy and service provision—missing the kind of middle-ground advocacy and resources necessary to make the research truly mainstream and scalable.

The approach I used involved in-depth interviews and provided rich qualitative data and highlighted real-time challenges, but it also underscored the issues in translating this nuanced understanding into broader institutional frameworks. If I were to undertake this project again, I would aim to establish stronger partnerships with mid-level institutions early in the process, seeking to build capacity and align interests in ways that could sustain advocacy beyond individual programmes. I believe this shift would help bridge the gap between community insights and the practical, policy-oriented changes required to create scalable, mainstream solutions that benefit queer forced migrants holistically.

The challenges encountered in developing this research during the COVID-19 pandemic also warrant reflection. The pandemic fundamentally limited my ability to conduct face-to-face, ethnographic research, which would have allowed for richer, contextually grounded insights. Creative methodologies, such as in-person storytelling sessions, workshops, or arts-based data collection, would have provided a more holistic view of queer forced migrants' experiences and allowed for deeper participant engagement. Instead, the pandemic necessitated a shift to digital and remote methods, which, while functional, may

have constrained the depth of relational trust and nuanced understanding that is often better developed in shared physical spaces. The adaptation to virtual methods also underscored the technological and accessibility barriers that can further marginalise queer forced migrants, many of whom may lack stable access to digital platforms-a factor that highlights the importance of ensuring that future research is accessible and inclusive in both methodology and scope.

The pandemic limited the extent to which I could employ CBPR, particularly in the face-to-face collaboration that this approach requires. However, I worked to maintain ethical rigor and participant-centred practices by incorporating as many CBPR principles as possible, such as engaging community organizations in preliminary stages. This adaptation helped build a foundational trust, ensuring that the research process respected the autonomy and dignity of participants despite the challenges posed by remote interactions.

Looking back, I don't believe the lack of full CBPR engagement invalidates the findings. Rather, it suggests that the data is part of a larger, iterative process of knowledge building—an essential step toward understanding queer forced migrants' experiences in Wales. While COVID-19 created barriers to the ideal participatory model, the research still captures important and valid insights. However, it also underscores the need for further, more immersive research that could amplify these findings with even greater community input. In this sense, the research is perhaps a preliminary contribution, one that invites a continued and expanded commitment to participant-centred research in the future.

Considering the long-term implications of this research, I realise that the data and insights gained here could serve as a valuable foundation not only for Wales but also for the other devolved nations. By establishing a new model for looking at "integration" and centring queer forced migrant voices in policy development, this research has the potential to inspire similar initiatives in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England. Each nation, while unique in its social and political landscape, shares common challenges in supporting marginalized asylum populations. A cross-national commitment to intersectional, evidence-based policymaking could transform support structures for queer forced migrants across the UK, ensuring a more comprehensive, culturally competent approach that resonates with the needs of each local context. Moreover, the academic and institutional partnerships fostered through this project could facilitate a more integrated, collaborative research environment across the devolved nations—enabling researchers, policymakers, and community leaders to collectively address systemic issues and amplify the impact of their work.

The necessity for disaggregated data cannot be overstated. By capturing the complexities of queer forced migrants' identities and experiences, we can identify specific challenges they

face, such as discrimination, stigma, and barriers to essential services. Such data goes beyond surface-level statistics; it unveils the intricate realities of intersectionality. Understanding intersectionality enables policymakers and service providers to craft nuanced, responsive programmes that genuinely meet the needs of queer forced migrants. Moreover, effective data collection is foundational for establishing a robust evidence base that informs policy decisions, ensuring that the voices of queer forced migrants are not only heard but actively shape the legislative and institutional frameworks that affect their lives.

Reflecting on the significance of my approach to interviewing, I realise how crucial it was in capturing the full complexity of queer forced migrants' experiences in Wales. Initially, I had considered using quantitative methods, envisioning surveys and structured questionnaires that would have yield statistical insights into the challenges and opportunities for queer forced migrants. However, as the research progressed, it became evident that a quantitative approach would have fallen short of uncovering the depth and nuance of participants' lived realities. My psychosocial methods allowed participants to share their experiences in a more organic and unrestricted way, which revealed layers of emotional and social complexity that would likely have remained hidden in a structured survey format. For example, participants were able to speak at length about deeply personal challenges, such as the psychological impact of their transition, and the nuanced ways in which their sexual orientation intersected with their racial or religious identities. These insights were unplanned and often arose as participants responded to open questions, allowing them to steer the conversation to issues most important to them. Reflecting on this, I am confident that the qualitative approach was essential to achieving a deeper, more authentic understanding of the issues queer forced migrants face. The rich narratives that emerged underscore the importance of flexibility in research methods, especially when working with marginalised communities. This approach also underscored the value of empathy in research, as it created space for participants to feel heard and respected, reinforcing the ethical responsibility to treat their stories with sensitivity and depth.

Positioning my findings within the broader field, this research represents a significant advancement in our understanding of LGBTQ+ forced migration, particularly within the unique context of Wales and the UK. Building on my earlier work as an MSc student in 2018/19, which along with subsequent policy collaboration with organizations such as Stonewall, the Welsh Government, and the United Nations, initially flagged the critical need for research focused on LGBTQ+ forced migrants in Wales, this study extends that foundational knowledge by providing an in-depth, qualitative examination of the integration experiences of queer forced migrants. Importantly, it does so within a non-devolved policy

context, where the intersection of UK-wide immigration policies and Wales-specific integration efforts reveals crucial gaps in support and understanding for this population.

To date, this study is the first of its kind in the UK to focus on integration processes for LGBTQ+ forced migrants, specifically examining how queer asylum and migration intersect with integration policies. Existing literature largely addresses the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ asylum seekers within the broader asylum process but seldom explores how integration is experienced post-asylum or how integration policies intersect with queer identities. This research fills that gap by not only highlighting the lived experiences of queer forced migrants but also examining how policy, structural barriers, and community-level interactions influence their sense of belonging, well-being, and social inclusion.

What makes this study particularly unique within the field is its methodological commitment to centring LGBTQ+ forced migrants' voices. Rather than approaching integration as a one-size-fits-all framework, my research foregrounds the individual and collective experiences of queer forced migrants, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the specific barriers they encounter, such as lack of culturally competent healthcare, discriminatory policing practices, and limited economic and social opportunities. By centring their narratives, this work challenges the traditional integration model and argues for an alternative approach that considers the unique, intersectional identities of queer forced migrants—an approach that does not assume they will assimilate into existing cultural norms but instead seeks to create spaces that honour and celebrate their distinct backgrounds and identities.

This research also contributes to the field by proposing an alternative framework to integration, advocating for policy reforms that move away from assimilationist models toward approaches that recognize and respond to the specific needs of queer forced migrants. Current integration frameworks generally overlook intersectionality, yet my research highlights the ways in which race, sexual orientation, gender identity and migration status intersect to produce unique challenges for queer forced migrants. By demonstrating the inadequacies of the current integration framework, this study not only provides evidence for the need to reform integration policy but also serves as a call for further research into inclusive and culturally responsive models of integration that prioritize the voices of marginalized groups within the forced migrant population.

My findings highlight the significance of understanding LGBTQ+ forced migration through context-specific research. In this study, I focus upon the Welsh context, where policy is constrained by the limitations of a non-devolved system. Through using the example of this specific context, I explore how dynamics between local and national policies can compound the challenges faced by queer forced migrants. Most UK-based LGBTQ+ migration studies

focus on the experiences of forced migrants within devolved or centralised systems. My study's regional focus therefore offers an important perspective that has been largely missing previously. Through examination of the ways in which non-devolved policy structures impact queer forced migrants' experiences, my research provides valuable insights that can inform policy development across the UK.

The contribution of this study to the field of queer migration

This study brings forward a unique intersectional perspective, drawing attention to a community with layered marginalisation. I have advanced research and push the boundaries of this field through asking what integration could look like if queer forced migrants were truly considered. My study could be foundational for future research. A broader, UK-wide study would be useful in revealing commonalities and regional distinctions in the integration experiences of queer forced migrants. Subsequent research could also build on my findings to explore how devolved powers might better support this population, as well as considering whether similar barriers exist in other regions, or how a shift in policy focus might positively impact queer forced migrants across the UK.

Firstly, this research de-centres global urban imaginaries by shifting the geographical focus of queer migration studies from dominant metropolitan contexts to the distinct and underexplored national setting of Wales. The majority of academic literature in this field has historically privileged cities like London, Toronto, or New York-spaces assumed to be emblematic of queer refuge and progressive politics. In contrast, Wales offers a unique socio-political and cultural landscape, shaped by devolution, a bilingual national identity, and emergent equality strategies. By placing Wales at the centre of analysis, this research complicates conventional narratives of queer sanctuary, illustrating that devolved regions have their own political logics and structural challenges. This relocation of focus thus broadens the spatial terrain of queer migration scholarship and challenges the metropolitan bias that often obscures the granular, place-based dynamics of integration.

Secondly, the thesis makes a significant theoretical intervention by theorising integration through a queer, decolonial, and intersectional lens. It interrogates how dominant integration policies in the UK-despite being rhetorically framed around inclusion, continue to reproduce assimilationist expectations and homonormative standards of acceptability. These standards often reflect a narrow vision of queerness rooted in whiteness, respectability, and economic utility. By foregrounding the experiences of queer forced migrants who are racialised, trans, Muslim, or non-Western in origin, the research challenges the erasure of non-normative queer subjectivities. In doing so, it calls for a redefinition of integration as a practice of

mutual recognition and structural transformation, rather than a unidirectional process of adaptation to dominant norms.

Thirdly, this study makes a contribution by embedding co-production and participatory ethics within the research design. Through longstanding collaboration with grassroots community organisations, the study is guided by principles of accountability, relationality, and knowledge justice. It treats queer forced migrants not as passive subjects of inquiry but as epistemic agents and co-theorists, whose insights shape both the substance and process of research. This approach disrupts traditional academic hierarchies and contributes to a growing body of queer and decolonial methodological scholarship that advocates for reflexivity, emotional labour, and ethical responsiveness. The result is ethically attuned study that centres community expertise as foundational to knowledge production.

Finally, the research serves as a critical bridge between academic scholarship, public policy, and grassroots organising by synthesising theoretical critique with practical engagement. It not only critiques Welsh policy frameworks such as the Nation of Sanctuary, the LGBTQ+ Action Plan, and the Race Equality Action Plan for their limitations in implementation but also engages directly with these initiatives through policy consultation, advisory roles, and activist collaboration. In doing so, the research lays the groundwork for transformative, community-led policy innovation that moves beyond symbolic inclusion.

Taken together, these contributions significantly expand the boundaries of queer migration scholarship, thus, repositioning Wales as a critical site of inquiry, provide new theoretical tools for understanding integration, introduce a participatory model of queer research, and demonstrate how scholarship can operate in dialogue with policymaking and activism. As such, this research not only enriches academic debates but also offers actionable frameworks for more just, inclusive, and contextually grounded integration practices-locally, nationally, and transnationally.

Through reflecting on my research journey, I have recognised that this work has laid a valuable foundation to future endeavours. My study has affirmed the urgent need to further expand understandings of queer forced migrants' experiences through inclusive and participant-centred methodologies. I have highlighted significant gaps in the support and recognition provided to queer forced migrants in Wales. Addressing these gaps requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes elements such as ensuring long-term sustainable institutional support, cross-sectoral partnerships, and community centred research methodologies. As I look ahead, my hope is that this research will serve as a catalyst for the development of policies and practices that can effectively meet the needs of this marginalised population.

Future studies on this topic must strive to engage queer forced migrants as co-researchers, to ensure the continued relevance and impact of the research. As such, those with lived experiences should be actively involved in the research design, data collection, and analysis. A participatory approach, as found in community-based participatory research (CBPR), would offer deeper insights into the complexities of queer forced migrants' integration experiences. Through inviting members of this community to shape the research narrative, we can ensure that their voices are authentically represented, and that findings accurately reflect lived experience.

Institutional support and investment are key elements to expanding research on this subject. Queer forced migration is underfunded and sidelined within policy and research agendas. This topic must be prioritised and recognised through provision of financial resources and structural support from governmental and non-governmental bodies. Funding to this area would make longitudinal studies possible. Such research would be able to trace the evolution of queer forced migrants' integration experiences over time and compare how these are impacted by different socio-political contexts. Institutional support also has the capacity to build stronger networks of researchers, policymakers, and advocates. Such networks could facilitate a more collaborative approach to addressing the integration needs of queer forced migrants. Collaboration has the potential to lead to the development of shared resources, best practice, and policy recommendations that would benefit queer forced migrants across the UK.

Creative partnerships with organisations at both local and national levels are an important element of expanding institutional support. Crucially, these should include cross-sectoral collaborations between academic institutions, community-based groups, third sector organisations and government bodies. Through such collaborations, it is possible to pool resources and bridge the existing gaps in service provision. This would ultimately contribute to the development of a more holistic support system for queer forced migrants. Through incorporating co-production, inclusive policies and programmes could be designed that reflect the diverse identities and experiences of queer forced migrants. These methods would assist the development of more accessible, responsive, and culturally competent services and initiatives. Through creative partnerships, researchers and policymakers can leverage a broader base of expertise, resources, and advocacy. This would consequently improve the quality of integration policies and initiatives tailored to queer forced migrants.

In moving forward, it is essential to advocate for the inclusion of queer forced migrants in policy-making processes. Queer forced migrants can contribute valuable perspectives, that are informed by lived experience, to discussions on immigration, integration, and LGBTQ+

rights. Involving this community in policy discussions ensures that their voices are heard and ensures that policies are informed and shaped to their evolving needs. Policies in areas such as housing, healthcare, legal support, and employment opportunities directly impact queer forced migrants' lives. As such, it is fundamental that policymakers prioritise the inclusion of lived experience voices in developing these policies. Through such as commitment, policymakers could take a significant movement toward empowering queer forced migrants to participate fully in their communities. This group has unique insights and talents which have great promise in contributing to the social and cultural fabric of Wales and the UK.

I would suggest that an important area for future research is to consider the long-term impacts of integration policies on queer forced migrants. Through longitudinal studies, researchers could advance understandings of how queer forced migrants experience of integration develops over time. Additionally, these studies could consider how interactions with integration policy frameworks influence their wellbeing and sense of belonging. Such research would help identify which policies and programmes are most effective, as a means of informing evaluations and improvements to service provision. Another potential area of future research is comparative research across different regions of the UK. This would have the ability to develop understandings of how geographical area creates disparities in support. Such research would give increased understandings of how to develop inclusion and integration strategies that are comprehensive of all areas.

The goal of this research has been to fill crucial gaps in understandings of the challenges and barrier to integration that queer forced migrants face in Wales. Through developing this research, I advocate for prioritisation of inclusivity, equity, and empowerment within integration policy and practice in Wales. Queer forced migrants deserve to feel supported, integrated, and a sense of belonging. My research shows the importance of strong institutional partnerships, sensitive and informed support, and sustainable long-term initiatives in achieving this goal. The insights gained emphasise the need for queer forced migrants to be a central part of developing integration policy and practice. Ultimately, I hope that my research has effectively informed measures that are able to create a Wales where queer forced migrants can thrive, feel included, and are celebrated as integral to the diverse tapestry of Wales and the wider UK.

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9. List of Appendices

Appendix A

Queer Forced Migrants Script

Suggested structure

Intro:

- Thanks for participation.
- Ask how person would like to be addressed.
- Explain purpose of study - informed consent to be obtained and recorded, check participant happy with process and fully understands implications.
- Explain what the study is about their individual experiences, personal journey within the asylum system and their thoughts on LGBTQ+ forced migrant and integration in Wales.
- Make clear how I will be recording answers (notes, sound recording) and get consent for this. Explain what will happen to the recording and how it will be kept safe.
- Undertake to keep informed of whether evidence provided goes into study, and to check with them before any final evidence goes in study - ie informed consent to be obtained again at end of process - give estimated timescale for this and be clear there may be slippage.

Examples of questions:

- In your experience as a queer forced migrant residing in Wales, how would you describe 'integration' and how important it is in your asylum journey?
- What do you think when you hear the term 'forced migrant' in the context of your life so far and the challenges that have come with it?
- If you are open to it, can you share your journey through the UK asylum system with me and how it has moulded your experiences of identifying as LGBTQ+ as well as a forced migrant in Wales?
- Can you share what have been the most significant challenges and barriers that you have faced as an LGBTQ+ person going through the asylum process?
- Walk me through how you realised what are your needs as a queer forced migrant, to whom did you express them and how?
- Have you come across Welsh-based organisations and/ or initiatives that address the needs of queer forced migrants? If yes, which organisations and what kind of support did they offer you?
- Can you tell me how did these organisations communicate their actions and support? Did you feel seen and included? Please provide specific examples.
- How do you feel about the support you have received? Did you at any point feel that the support was not sufficient?
- Did you face any challenges and/or barriers trying to access support? If yes, what were these challengers and/or barriers and how did they impact you?
- With the gift of hindsight, what kind of support do think should be offered to queer forced migrants but did not?
- In your point of view, what actions and initiatives can have the most positive impact on the lives of queer forced migrants in Wales?

- Thinking back, what could the organisations and community have done differently to better support your integration needs?
- In your point of view, what are the biggest barriers to queer forced migrants when trying to integrate into the Welsh society?
- In an ideal world, how would integration in Wales would look like for queer forced migrants?
- How do you think intergration for queer forced migrants would look like in Wales in the next 5 years? What immediate changes you'd like to see?

Appendix B

Professional's Script

Suggested structure

Intro:

- Thanks for participation
- Ask how person would like to be addressed
- Explain purpose of study - informed consent to be obtained and recorded, check participant happy with process and fully understands implications
- Explain what the study is about how the individual in their current position can explain what their organisation has done, is currently doing and is planning to do soon regarding LGBTQ+ forced migrant and integration.
- Make clear how I will be recording answers (notes, sound recording) and get consent for this. Explain what will happen to the recording and how it will be kept safe.
- Undertake to keep informed of whether evidence provided goes into study, and to check with them before any final evidence goes in study - ie informed consent to be obtained again at end of process - give estimated timescale for this and be clear there may be slippage.

Examples of questions:

- What is your organisation's working definition for integration?
- What is your organisation's working definition of LGBTQ+ and forced migrants?
- Can you tell me about your time working in a large-scale asylum organisation/ LGBTQ+ organisation/ Welsh Government, and specifically regarding your experiences and interactions with LGBTQ+ forced migrants?
- How did you find out what are the specific needs of LGBTQ+ forced migrants?
- What actions did you or your organisation has taken in the past to accommodate the integration needs of LGBTQ+ forced migrants?
- How did you communicate these actions with the target group?
- What was the reaction of the group?
- Did you face any issues? If yes, what were those issues and how did they affect the outcome?
- What kind of support, if any, do you think the group should have had by your organisation and other relevant bodies that they haven't received by now?
- What are the main things that could positively impact the group, that you personally could take forward in your role?
- Thinking back, what is the one thing that your organisation could have done to support the integration needs of the group?
- From your professional perspective, where do you think the LGBTQ+ forced migrant integration challenges lie in Wales specifically?
- Where do you think integration for this group will look like in 5 years?

Appendix C

It is worth noting that even though the title of this study was revised soon after April 2021, the core aims and objectives of the research remained unchanged. The graduate office determined that it was not necessary to seek new ethical approval. This decision aligns with the ethical guidelines, which suggest that modifications to a study's title alone—when they do not alter the scope, risks, or methodologies—do not require a new review by the ethics board.

20 April 2021

Our ref: SREC/3796

Ourania Vamvaka-
Tatsi PhD
Programme SOCSI

Dear Ourania,

Many that for advising us of the changes to your project entitled *'Examining the strategic approach and response to social cohesion of queer forced migrants in Wales'.* This has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University, and you can now commence the project should all necessary forms of approval been received.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses, you need to inform 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 SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.

All ongoing projects will be monitored, and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return a SREC 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

Dr Kirsty Hudson
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Appendix D

1. **<u>Experiences of integration amongst queer asylum seekers and refugees in Wales (Queer Forced Migrants)</u>**

You are invited to participate in a research study.

Before you agree, it is important that you carefully read the information provided below, which will help answer any questions you may have. If you require further clarifications, please get in touch with the researcher.

What is the aim of the study?

With this study I wish to focus on how queer refugees and asylum seekers experience integration in Wales and examine how such experiences may contribute to improving integration policies for queer refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. As you are someone who has successfully navigated the asylum journey or you are currently undertaking your journey, your experiences are invaluable.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Ourania Vamvaka-Tatsi, and I am a Ph.D. researcher at Cardiff University, in the School of Social Sciences. This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

What is required of the participants?

If you choose to take part, you will be asked to contribute to an interview and possibly a follow up interview (if required). Each session should last approximately 1 hour. You are not obliged to answer any questions you may feel uncomfortable with.

In which language and medium will the sessions be conducted in?

All interviews will be in English and will be conducted over Zoom.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. The transcripts will only be accessible to the researcher and the advisory team. All information will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). All data will be retained for up to five years following the sessions. Your answers will not be shared with any organisation and will not affect your legal status in the UK. The sessions will be analysed, and parts of the findings may be used in published journal articles/policies.

Is all information confidential?

Yes, all information is confidential. I will not use your name. I will amend timings, locations and other people's names, to protect your anonymity and ensure confidentiality.

Can I withdraw from the study?

You may withdraw from the study at any time.

<u>Who should I contact if I require further information?</u>

If you require further information prior to or during the study, I will be contactable via email:

Ourania Vamvaka-Tatsi – Vamvaka-TatsiO1@cardiff.ac.uk

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information on the study at any time.

2. **Experiences of integration amongst queer asylum seekers and refugees in Wales (Professionals)**

You are invited to participate in a research study.

Before you agree, it is important that you carefully read the information provided below, which will help answer any questions you may have. If you require further clarifications, please get in touch with the researcher.

What is the aim of the study?

With this study I wish to focus on how queer refugees and asylum seekers experience integration in Wales and examine how such experiences may contribute to improving integration policies for queer refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. As you are a professional with years of experience within the asylum sector in Wales, your perspective is invaluable.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Ourania Vamvaka-Tatsi, and I am a Ph.D. researcher at Cardiff University, in the School of Social Sciences. This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

What is required of the participants?

If you choose to take part, you will be asked to contribute to an interview and possibly a follow up interview (if required). Each session should last approximately 1 hour. You are not obliged to answer any questions you may feel uncomfortable with.

In which language and medium will the sessions be conducted in?

All interviews will be in English and will be conducted over Zoom.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. The transcripts will only be accessible to the researcher and the advisory team. All information will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). All data will be retained for up to five years following the sessions. Your answers will not be shared with any organisation and will not affect your legal status in the UK. The sessions will be analysed, and parts of the findings may be used in published journal articles/policies.

Is all information confidential?

Yes, all information is confidential. I will not use your name. I will amend timings, locations and other people's names, to protect your anonymity and ensure confidentiality.

Can I withdraw from the study?

You may withdraw from the study at any time.

Who should I contact if I require further information?

If you require further information prior to or during the study, I will be contactable via email:

Ourania Vamvaka-Tatsi – Vamvaka-TatsiO1@cardiff.ac.uk

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information on the study at any time.

Experiences of integration amongst queer asylum seekers/refugees in Wales (Meeting chair/attendees)

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree, it is important that you carefully read the information provided below, which will help answer any questions you may have. If you require further clarifications, please get in touch with the researcher.

What is the aim of the study?

With this study I wish to focus on how queer refugees and asylum seekers experience social cohesion in Wales and examine how such experiences may contribute to improving cohesion policies for queer refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Ourania Vamvaka-Tatsi, and I am a Ph.D. student at Cardiff University, in the School of Social Sciences. This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). This study has been approved by the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

What is required of the participants?

If you choose to take part, you will be asked for permission for the researcher to collected online ethnographic data, such as meeting notes. I will join the sector meeting/ forum and observe, as well as take notes.

In which language will the meetings be conducted in and in which medium?

All meetings will be in English and will be conducted over Zoom or Teams (depending on the organisations chosen medium).

What will happen to the information I provide?

The meeting will not be audio recorded or transcribed. The researcher will be taking notes and may or may not include such notes in the thesis. All information will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). All data will be retained for up to five years following the sessions.

Is all information confidential?

Yes, all information is confidential. I will not any real names. If I chose to use any of the meeting notes, I would amend timings, and people's names, to protect your anonymity and ensure confidentiality.

Can I withdraw from the study?

You may withdraw from the study at any time.

Who should I contact if I require further information?

If you require further information prior to or during the study, I will be contactable via email:

Ourania Vamvaka-Tatsi – Vamvaka-TatsiO1@cardiff.ac.uk

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information on the study at any time.

Appendix E

1.Consent Form (All Interviews)

Experiences of integration amongst queer asylum seekers/refuges in Wales

1.	I understand that I will be participating in a study on the experiences of integration of LGBTQ asylum seekers/ refugees in Wales. This will involve taking part in an interview and possibly follow up interview.	
2.	I understand that these discussions will be always kept anonymous and confidential. I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I understand that the data collected from these interviews will be kept private and that all names will remain anonymous. I also understand that I can choose to withdraw from the interview at any time or discuss any concerns with the researcher.	
3	I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I understand that the information provided by me will be held anonymously. I understand that in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018), this information will be retained for a minimum of five years following the completion the research project.	
4.	I have read the Participant Information Sheet in full, and I understood the aim of the study and what is required of the participants.	
5.	I discussed the study with the researcher, and she answered all my questions in a satisfactory manner.	
6.	I agree to take part in this study.	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

2.Consent Form (Meeting chair/attendees)

Experiences of integration amongst queer asylum seekers/refuges in Wales

1.	I understand that I will be participating in a study on the experiences of integration of LGBTQ asylum seekers/ refugees in Wales. This will only involve the researcher collecting online ethnographic data, such as meeting minutes and notes, during pre-arranged sector-wide or organisational meetings.	
2.	I understand that these discussions will always be kept anonymous and confidential. I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I understand that the data collected from these meetings will be kept private and that all names will remain anonymous. I also understand that I can choose to withdraw from the meetings at any time or discuss any concerns with the researcher.	
3	I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I understand that the information provided by me will be held anonymously. I understand that in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018), this information will be retained for a minimum of five years following the completion the research project.	
4.	I have read the Information Sheet in full, and I understood the aim of the study and what is required.	
5.	I discussed the study with the researcher, and she answered all my questions in a satisfactory manner.	
6.	I agree to take part in this study.	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date