

THE POLITICS OF BELONGING: UNITED KINGDOM
MIGRATION AND ASLYUM DEBATES IN A SHIFTING SOCIAL
CLIMATE

by

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This thesis investigates the political, economic, and socio-cultural interests that shape the United Kingdom's approach to migration and asylum delegation. It situates current policies within the broader historical context of the UK's colonial legacy, marked by ethnocentric reforms and systemic power imbalances. These colonial-era biases continue to shape contemporary post-colonial migration practices, contributing to exclusionary frameworks. I examine the effects of Brexit, particularly through the implementation of the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS), highlighting the challenges individuals face due to both structural and bureaucratic barriers to citizenship. The thesis highlights the lived experiences of migrants, examining conditions within detention centers, challenges associated with post-resettlement integration, and the enduring presence of systemic discrimination. I critique the construct of "illegality," analyzing how it perpetuates harmful stigmas and narrows perceptions of who is deemed a "deserving" migrant. Ultimately, this thesis illustrates that human rights are frequently compromised by entrenched political, economic, and cultural biases, which determine who is afforded safety, dignity, and access to citizenship in the United Kingdom.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to intern with the University of Oregon's GlobalWorks Program, working closely with a social welfare advisor in a non-profit focused on aiding migrants and refugees. Over the course of two months, I assisted in collecting client intakes and managing confidential information, but what stood out most were the personal interactions I witnessed. As a cultural shock in British society, I observed how my colleagues treated each individual with dignity and care, often going above and beyond to make people feel seen and supported. Despite the bureaucratic barriers and the complex, often demoralizing systems that many of the clients faced, there was a consistent demonstration of empathy. I had never encountered a community that celebrated personal milestones, like birthdays, or that would personally ensure elderly clients made it safely home. Yet, despite these acts of compassion, I saw how many clients came in with the hope that their basic needs for survival or their right to remain in the country might be met. The reality, however, was that their struggles were not just about legal or economic survival—they were human stories of people fleeing violence, trauma, and instability in search of a better life.

My internship experience emphasized the urgent need for a more humane migration system—one that recognizes the historical roots of exclusion, dismantles harmful narratives, and prioritizes the lived realities of those navigating the system. Indeed, migration frameworks in the UK, as I had observed during my time working with vulnerable migrants, often reflect colonial legacies and contemporary biases that shape who is deemed "deserving" of care and protection. While the UK's policies have evolved, the influence of its colonial past still reverberates, often manifesting in policies that treat migrants not as human beings, but as "cases" to be managed. This dehumanization is reflected in both government policies and media portrayals, which tend

to cast migrants as threats rather than individuals deserving of rights and compassion. Just as my internship experience showed the impact of individual compassion within a broken system, this thesis examines how broader political shifts reinforce systemic barriers that deny migrants their basic dignity and rights.

Throughout this thesis, I aim to explore these three research questions:

- How have colonial and post colonialities shaped contemporary migration policies?
 - How have political and economic interests shaped the countries' decision-making process over migration and asylum procedures, requisites, and laws?
- How do discourses about 'deservingness' shape and subject individuals to feel "belonged"?
- What are current social issues migrants and refugees face in detention centers and post-resettlement life?

In this thesis, I investigate how these legacies are not only sustained but actively reinforced through ongoing policies and political discourse. Significantly, I chose to examine the recent development is Brexit, which profoundly altered the UK's relationship with the European Union and reshaped the legal and social landscape for migration. I focus on the implementation of the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), which was designed to secure the rights of EU, EEA, and Swiss citizens residing in the UK. While it was presented as a protective measure, this scheme also introduced new bureaucratic barriers and challenges, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Throughout this thesis, I deliberately avoid using the term "immigrant," as I align with scholar Karma R. Chavez's perspective on why "immigrant" conveys a narrative that does not reflect the lived reality of migration. Chavez writes, "I use the word 'migrant' to refer to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who have crossed an international border, regardless of whether they have documents. Using 'migrant' instead of distinguishing between types of migrants is important because, as Luibhéid has shown, a 'shifting line' exists between these different statuses, as one can move from being documented to undocumented in a mere moment"¹. I believe making these efforts of adapting terminology to accurately express migrants allow us to view these groups as human beings.

¹ CHÁVEZ, KARMA R. *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*. University of Illinois Press, 2013. pp.153. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt3fh5cn>.

Methodology

This research draws primarily on current ethnographic studies conducted in the United Kingdom, with a focus on migrants and asylum seekers. The scholars referenced throughout this thesis have gathered case studies, narratives, and ethnographic data from individuals residing in Western Europe, particularly those who have studied the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities within the migration process. This approach is especially relevant as I aim to examine the experiences of specific racial groups, as opposed to the often-skewed portrayals presented by mainstream media.

Ethnography has increasingly shifted toward a critical examination of cultures and ethnic communities, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of migrant experiences. This perspective aligns with my own research, which intersects with grassroots efforts led by non-profit organizations and NGOs that advocate for marginalized ethnic groups in major metropolitan areas, such as London. My internship with the Latin American House, a non-profit organization in London, provided valuable insight into the significant impact that large, organized communities can have on social change. These communities are among the largest and most successful in advocating for political and social reforms in the UK.

Social media plays a crucial role in amplifying the efforts of these organizations, helping to raise awareness of the challenges faced by migrants who have fled their home countries to escape violence, poverty, or political unrest. In my analysis, I explore how these grassroots organizations use socio-cultural and political influence to advocate for their communities, not only within the UK but also in their countries of origin. Additionally, I incorporate quantitative data from credible sources like The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, which conducts independent research through the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS).

Established in 2011, COMPAS provides impartial, evidence-based analysis that informs media, public, and policy debates on migration in the UK.

I am fortunate to have access to such rich qualitative and quantitative research, and I am grateful for the scholars whose work has informed this thesis.

Chapter One: A Colonial Past to Present Day Challenges

To understand the United Kingdom's current approach to migration and asylum, it is essential to trace its historical and political trajectory. Following an economic devastation and labor shortages caused by World War II, the UK followed Western countries approaches towards its migration policies, opening its borders to migrants from former colonies to aid national recovery. However, the country's colonial past—and the enduring legacies of imperialism—continues to shape the political and economic interests that support contemporary migration frameworks. These frameworks often reflect systemic biases and power dynamics rooted in empire, selectively welcoming some while excluding others.

Post-World War II Migration and Early Immigration Policies

By 1946, an estimated labor shortage of 1.3 million workers required the country to consider bringing in foreign workers to address this issue. By this, the country enacted the Polish Resettlement Act of 1947, which permitted around 120,000-145,000 Polish servicemen to settle in Britain and work. Alongside this period, there was also the initiative of the European Volunteer Workers Scheme. The European Volunteer Workers Scheme was a significant post-World War II policy implemented by the government to revitalize essential industries such as coal mining, agriculture, steel, and construction. The scheme successfully brought in workers from continental Europe under a "dollar shortage". The Volunteer Worker Scheme facilitated this by granting around 180,000 European workers twelve-month labor permits. Alongside initiatives like the Polish Resettlement Act of 1947, the European Volunteer Workers Scheme stood out as one of the most crucial post-war migration policies in Britain.

Commonwealth Migration and Race Relations

Britain was slowly opening up towards allowing migrants from countries outside of Europe, specifically, current and former commonwealth countries into the UK. Migration from the Commonwealth grew in significance for Britain, shaped by long-standing patterns from its imperial past. More profoundly, however, imperial expansion played a key role in fostering a pervasive racist mindset within British society. This is important to recognize as migration continues to be a necessary instrument for the process of a country gaining traction. Migration brought on this idea of British superiority, a core element of British nationalism. In 1948, the country enacted the British Nationality Act (BNA), which would establish the status of "Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies" (CUKCs) and granted entry rights to Commonwealth citizens. As Britain was now handling labor shortages post-World War II, increasing numbers of people migrated from the Commonwealth, leading to significant political and societal discussions and policy adjustments. While this may have brought on equality among the Commonwealth having gained citizenship and created diverse racial and ethnic stock, many opposed this sudden change. British citizens were now challenged and undermined with the establishment of a new community—a new racial identity—settling in their ethnocentric society. The Conservative Party highly opposed this change because they were angered that this would allow colored people to "become British". This was a significant note that migration was not an option for everyone, and they rather preferred a system of British immigration than Commonwealth immigration. By opposing this, the government used more discretion in countries such as the Caribbean and Africa when issuing travel documents and manipulating rules regarding what proof of necessary documents looked like.

Government Response to Increasing Migration

By the early 1950s, the government was viewing the substantial increase of migration coming from the Commonwealth and was starting to consider ways to manage and restrict this influx of people coming into the country. By 1955, Britain fell under a sterling crisis, where there was an urgent need to strengthen the national economy. This came from vis-a-vis decolonization and participation in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This shifted foreign economic policy from imperial preferences to one based on internationally freer trade². The economy would play an important role as the government would now reconsider and question what should be done with the cohesion of the Commonwealth, more specifically, the process of decolonization. While both Commonwealth migration and schemes like the European Volunteer Workers were driven by post-war labor needs, the nature and duration of these migrations differed. The European Volunteer Workers Scheme was initially conceived as a temporary measure to address immediate shortages. In contrast, Commonwealth migration, facilitated by the BNA, evolved into a more permanent form of settlement. Something conservative British citizens were not so happy about.

Racialized Migration and Control Measures

The United Kingdom was seemingly getting overcrowded the number of diverse populations integrating into British society. This alarmed the Conservative party, and they sought out to find measures in order to keep out those unwelcome. De facto measures were incorporated into this strategy to disengage the motivation for migration. British government targeted certain countries such as India and Pakistan, formatting certain measures to prevent South Asians from

² Spencer, Ian R. G. *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*. New York: Routledge, 1997. pp.177 Print.

migrating to the country such as denying entry to individuals with a low-level education or limited financial resources. This meant that any migrant from the Commonwealth nations seeking entry was required to provide proof of admission if they were pursuing their education in the UK. This was not the same treatment to Eastern Europeans, this was the beginning of racially profiling who was allowed to cross the border. It was also mandated that they provide proof to bona fide educational institutions and show adequate financial proof that they were able to cover their expenses during their stay in the country. This led to migration, specifically from India, decreasing by 44% (62,000–2,930 migrants) and from Pakistan decreasing by 40% (4,690–1,860) in just one year. New Commonwealth migration fell from a high of 46,850 in 1956 to 21,600 in 1969, a 46% drop³. This raised questions and concerns about British identity, cultural homogeneity, and social cohesion—issues that were perhaps less present with the predominantly white European Volunteer Workers. These actions and ideals on how to treat Commonwealth citizens can demonstrate how racial biases influence policy and public opinion, which should note how society worked to manage racial diversity. The government was pressured to find a way to control migration.

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act and the Voucher System

By 1962, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was enacted, marking a significant change in the country's political system, instituting stricter control on Commonwealth migration for the first time. This would induce tight control over the entry of Commonwealth citizens who did not have a job or were not students. This caused the chain of free movement from the BNA movement to break. It was no longer simple to enter the country. The act established a voucher

³ See Figure 1.

system for entry based on employment opportunities, skills, or dependents. The vouchers were a central part of the immigration control mechanism established by the new Act. These vouchers essentially functioned as work permits that most Commonwealth citizens needed to obtain to immigrate to Britain for employment. The act mandated that having a pre-arranged job or specific skills was necessary for entry, and the voucher system was the practical method for implementing this requirement.

Political Influence in Asylum and Migration Policy

The government was also now shifting its priorities to managing the asylum system and addressing the challenges posed by asylum seekers. The acceptance of asylum seekers is dictated on certain characteristics of race, nationality, and/or religion, aimed at identifying those deemed "not disturbing"⁴. Scholars Baldwin-Edwards and Schain suggest that the popular perception of the origins of foreign residents has often been shaped by political discourse, with the French, for example, associating migrants predominantly with West Africa. Associating the term "immigrant" with certain countries validates these harmful racial stereotypes. Often, mainstream media generates bold headlines such as the "crisis of immigration" to generate views of the flow of people crossing borders. Rather this is not a humanitarian reaction, but a political reaction media achieves to get. This has been evident since the introduction of the "New Commonwealth" migration and has continued to shape the political discourse surrounding migration.

⁴ Baldwin-Edwards, Martin, and Martin Schain. *The Politics of Immigration in Western Europe*. Newbury Park, Ilford, Essex ; Frank Cass, 1994. Print. pp.6

The Push-Pull Theory and Migration Patterns

It is considerable that international politics plays a role towards certain migration patterns. The push-pull theory, introduced by scholars Baldwin-Edwards and Schain. "Push" factors are linked to global and European trends; policymakers exert significant control over the "pull" factors attracting migrants to Europe⁵. Interestingly, migrants were sometimes referred to as "a good stock" for the benefit of the economy, but in some cases, they were also compared to "animals"—valued for their economic utility but dehumanized in the process. An analysis of asylum applications in the UK between 1989 and 1991 revealed that African and Asian countries, particularly the Indian subcontinent, were significant sources of applicants. These asylum seekers were often lumped together under the generalized concept of "black immigrants", leading to their status being equated with the "colored" migrants whose entry had been restricted. These asylum seekers were not all "black," as many came from Europe and the Americas, including Kurds fleeing Turkey. This emphasizes the complex and often ironic nature of the xenophobia between different minority groups.

The Evolving Migration Debate

The "refugee problem" began to gain a global dimension in the 1980s with advancements in technology, connecting the world economy through mass media, electronic transmission, and air travel. By this period, discourse about the economic contribution of migrants had become a popular topic. Some argued that migrants were costly and hindered industrial modernization, but these concerns were largely dismissed due to democratic values opposing such crude

⁵ Baldwin-Edwards, Martin, and Martin Schain. *The Politics of Immigration in Western Europe*. Newbury Park, Ilford, Essex ; Frank Cass, 1994. Print. pp.7

assessments of an individual's worth⁶. The rise of minority politics emphasized that individuals could be both British citizens and members of a minority group, something the conservative party was not so fond of. Moreover, British conservatives, particularly those from colonial backgrounds, perceived migrants, particularly those from Asian and African countries, were seen as a threat to cultural uniformity and democracy, differing from other white migrants. While this thesis specifically highlights the United Kingdom, it is evident that Westernized countries were struggling to adapt asylum policies and migration laws, that had subtly reinforced discrimination and exclusion of certain minority groups. The Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999 further strengthened the government's resolve to control immigration. It sought to eliminate the attraction of public entitlements for potential economic migrants and introduced voucher systems instead of cash assistance for asylum seekers. The act also included provisions to fine truck drivers and employers who facilitated the transport or employment of illegal migrants. Despite these measures, the act did not close all loopholes, and the government faced ongoing criticism for its handling of asylum cases. By the late 1990's, new labor policies emphasized a more symbolic approach to enforcement, with statements indicating that some provisions of the act would not be rigorously enforced.

Britain's Evolving Migration Policies: Security, Sovereignty, and Economic Interests

Britain's approach to migration was also shaped by intra-EU migration and its distinct approach to EU membership. The country consistently prioritized social control and sovereignty,

⁶ Baldwin-Edwards, Martin, and Martin Schain. *The Politics of Immigration in Western Europe*. Newbury Park, Ilford, Essex ; Frank Cass, 1994. Print. pp.7

opting out of certain European integration efforts such as the Schengen Area⁷. This was due to a belief that Britain could manage migration flows more effectively on its own, leveraging its geographical position to better control its borders. Additionally, following the 9/11 attacks, British migration and asylum policies became more restrictive. The Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Bill of 2002 further increased penalties for those involved in smuggling illegal migrants and restricted asylum seekers' ability to appeal decisions. The government also implemented "safe havens"⁸ outside the UK, where asylum seekers were intercepted and sent for processing by the UNHCR before entering the country.

During this period, the government began to adopt policies that balanced security concerns with economic interests. Programs like the Highly Skilled Migrant Program (established in 2002) were introduced to attract foreign workers with advanced qualifications, ensuring they could enter the UK without a prior job offer. The introduction of measures to encourage social integration, including language classes and knowledge of British society for those seeking citizenship, was also a key development. These policies aimed to reduce social distance and foster integration, helping migrants' transition more smoothly into British society, while also addressing perceptions of marginalization and societal threat.

⁷ "Schengen Area" refers to group of European countries that have abolished passport and other types of border control at their mutual borders. This allows people to move freely across most of Europe as if it were a single country for travel purposes. As of 2025, the Schengen Area includes 27 European countries, most of which are EU members.

⁸ "Safe havens" outside the UK generally refer to countries or regions considered safe for refugees, asylum seekers, or vulnerable individuals fleeing persecution, violence, or disaster.

Chapter Two: European Union to Brexit- A Treacherous Journey Out the Door

Citizenship Before the Brexit Era

Prior to Brexit, EU citizens enjoyed the right to free movement within the UK under EU law. This freedom would dramatically change following the 2016 vote to leave the EU, raising significant questions about the future legal status of the estimated 3.6 million EU citizens living in the UK at the time. Concerns were raised by these EU citizens about their post-Brexit rights and the mechanisms needed to protect them once EU law ceased to apply to the UK. The UK government- at this time led by the Conservative party and prime minister, Theresa May- assured EU migrants that their existing rights would be largely unchanged and that applying for settled status would be a straightforward process.

Shifting Ideologies within Brexit

The implementation of Brexit and subsequent exit out of the EU reflect a significant shift for the UK's approach to migration, following a conservative route. Leading up to the 2016 Brexit referendum, the Conservative party introduced the 'Leave campaign', which focused heavily on the idea of "taking back control" of migration policies. This campaign successfully linked EU membership to a perceived lack of control over the UK's borders, advocating for the end of the EU's principle of free movement. This use of campaign propaganda restored trust within British conservatives that leaving the EU would restore national sovereignty, allowing the UK to regain control over its borders, laws, and trade policies. Migration became a focal point of this discourse, with appealing to nationalist sentiments. While not explicit, the 'Leave campaign'

had subliminal messaging that suggested that limiting migration was essential for reclaiming the UK's identity and autonomy⁹. The outcome of shifting to Brexit proved these views and would demonstrate a clear understanding on the government's push for stricter migration controls.

Issues and Challenges within the EUSS

In order to respond to concerns over citizenship for EU citizens, the government introduced the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS) in 2018 to translate the rights outlined in the EU–UK Withdrawal Agreement into a new domestic legal framework¹⁰. By March of 2019, the Home Office launched the scheme, requiring eligible individuals to apply for either settled status (for those with five years of continuous residence) or pre-settled status (for those with less than five years). These individuals had to demonstrate they have been residing in the country before December 31st, 2020. Successful applicants were granted the right to remain in the UK, with continued access to work, healthcare, education, and public funds, subject to eligibility. The deadline for submissions was set for June 30th, 2021, leaving millions of EU citizens uncertain about their future. This deadline would be severely impacted by a global health pandemic, COVID-19.

In spite of a pandemic, the implementation of the EUSS was fraught with challenges that delayed the process to apply before the deadline. EU citizens applying for settled status faced numerous difficulties, primarily due to the digital nature of the application process. Many

⁹ Botterill, K., et al. "Negotiating Brexit: Migrant spatialities and identities in a changing Europe." *Popul Space Place*, vol. 25, 2019, doi:10.1002/psp.2216.

¹⁰ Dennison, James, and Andrew Geddes. "Brexit and the perils of 'Europeanised' migration." *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 25, no. 8, 2018, pp. 1137–1153, doi:10.1080/13501763.2018.1467953.

encountered technical issues with the smartphone app (available only on Android devices), including glitches, compatibility problems, and difficulties with facial recognition or document scanning. These problems disproportionately affected individuals with older devices or without electronic passports. More significantly, usage of online applications was a major hurdle for the elderly, disabled individuals, and those with limited digital skills.

Proving five years of continuous residence was another major hurdle. The EUSS relied heavily on automated checks of government databases, which were often incomplete. Those in unstable jobs or with gaps in employment faced particular difficulties in providing sufficient evidence, resulting in some applicants receiving pre-settled status instead of settled status. Vulnerable groups, including the elderly, disabled individuals, and those with limited digital skills, struggled to navigate the system. Non-profits and NGOs stepped in to provide aid, but with only an estimated 60 organizations offering immigration support, the demand for help far exceeded capacity¹¹. On top of that, individuals applying through paper applications faced further obstacles. These applications were often lost in transit, with the Home Office refusing to take responsibility for damages to original documents. Applicants were left feeling frustrated, anxious, and unsupported. Ultimately, the EUSS served as a stark reminder of the government's dismissive reliance and uncertainty to care for marginalized groups. These restrictive policies confirm that citizenship is attainable to only a small group of individuals and would have no hesitancy to remove anyone that didn't meet their qualifications.

¹¹ Elfving, Sanna, and Aleksandra Marcinkowska. "Imagining the Impossible? Fears of Deportation and the Barriers to Obtaining EU Settled Status in the UK." *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2021, pp. 55–73, doi:10.17467/ceemr.2021.04.

In response to the uncertainty surrounding their status, many UK citizens living in the EU rushed to naturalize in their host countries. This surge in naturalizations served as an “insurance mechanism” to secure their residency rights and retain freedom of movement within the EU. Germany, for example, saw a sharp increase in British citizens acquiring German passports following the Brexit referendum¹². Naturalization provided a sense of stability and protected UK citizens from the consequences of Brexit, demonstrating how individuals adapted to the shifting political landscape. This allowed for naturalized EU citizens to have an easier pathway to UK citizenship compared to other EU citizens. While this may have effectively worked for certain individuals, there is still those to consider who are unable to have this privilege and are unable to leave the country, without fear of not being allowed back in.

Post-Brexit Political Agenda and the Illegal Migration Act of 2023

This post-Brexit era continued to demonstrate efforts to restrict migration. The Illegal Migration Act of 2023, introduced by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, exemplified the government’s hardline stance. The act is framed around the slogan “stopping the boats,” symbolizing the government’s goal of eliminating small boat crossings. Home Secretary, James Cleverly, aimed to reduce these crossings to zero by 2024¹³. This slogan was not so notable to ending migration, as there is no significant impact of boat crossings being the sole route when crossing a border. Although the government considers a 36% reduction in 2023 a sign of success, this approach continues to be deeply problematic in that humanitarian aid was now being questioned.

¹² Auer, Daniel, and D. Tetlow. “Brexit, uncertainty, and migration decisions.” *International Migration*, vol. 61, 2023, pp. 88–103, doi:10.1111/imig.13079.

¹³ Walsh, Peter William, and Nuni Jorgensen. *Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the UK*. Migration Observatory, COMPAS, University of Oxford, 2024.

Key provisions of the act include the mandatory removal of individuals entering the UK unlawfully, particularly via unsafe routes. The law introduced a “duty to disregard” feature, in cases of protection for a refugee or on human rights grounds, except in cases of modern slavery or human trafficking. Additionally, unaccompanied children would now be subject to removal upon turning 18. With an eight-day limit for individuals to appeal their removal, the act significantly restricts access to asylum and due process. These measures demonstrate the government’s preference towards deterrence over protection, which reinforces a harmful narrative that criminalizes migrants. With limiting pathways to asylum and placing an emphasis on border control instead, the UK has entrenched discriminatory practices that undermine its commitment to human rights and international obligations.

Chapter Three: The “Deserving” Migrant

Political and social discourses play a central role in shaping who is considered “deserving” of care, rights, and citizenship. Government and media often frame displacement in ways that either humanize or dehumanize migrants, influencing how humanitarian responses are justified—or denied. This framing does more than shape public opinion; it dictates policy outcomes. Migrants who are portrayed as “threats” to jobs, housing, and public services are more easily cast as undeserving, paving the way for harsh policies and xenophobic rhetoric.

“Voluntary” versus “Forced” Migration

A common dichotomy in migration discourse is the distinction between “voluntary” and “forced” migration. This central discursive distinction predicates that “voluntary” migrants migrate primarily for economic reasons, while “forced” migrants are categorized as refugees. Refugees are those who are involuntarily displaced due to war, violence, or environmental disasters, and thus are often perceived as deserving of physical security and protection from states.¹⁴ The United Kingdom is obligated to follow international law, having signed the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, which codifies the nations’ responsibilities toward refugees. The very category of “refugee” grants legitimacy to claims for social rights and services. In contrast, migrants, particularly economic migrants, are often viewed as having made a “choice” to leave their home countries in search of a better life and are frequently considered unworthy of social and political support. Both mainstream media and academic discourse often

¹⁴ Yarris, Kristin, and Heide Castañeda. "Special Issue Discourses of Displacement and Deservingness: Interrogating Distinctions Between 'Economic' and 'Forced' Migration. Introduction." *International Migration*, vol. 53, no. 5, Oct. 2015, pp. 65–69. doi:10.1111/imig.12170.

frame them as "economic opportunists." This problematic dichotomy sets migrants on opposing ends, between "force" and "will." It overlooks the complex reality of economic desperation, which is often rooted in structural violence and postcolonial economic inequalities that can also "force" people to migrate, rather than migration being a simple choice.

Geopolitical Interests and Deservingness

States' responses to asylum seekers' claims are frequently influenced by geopolitical interests, which shape ideas about which groups are considered deserving of support. Countries from Latin America, such as Cuba and Mexico, are given a different treatment compared to other countries in the United States based on geopolitical considerations. Certain Latin American countries as the two mentioned are racially profiled as an entire nation based off racial stereotypes and grouped altogether as threats to the white-folk nation. This pattern can also be seen in the differing treatment of refugees, as demonstrated by the admission of Ukrainian prisoners of war to Britain in 1947, based on foreign policy and security interests—treatment not extended to refugees fleeing the war in Yugoslavia. This emphasizes the idea that the social and legal status of a refugee is socially constructed and influenced by perceived political interests. In this context, deservingness is often determined by whether a migrant group aligns with the host government's broader geopolitical interests. The EUSS also contributed to an exclusionary narrative that questioned who "belonged" in the UK. Before Brexit, the UK was home to around 66 million people, an estimated 3.4 million EU citizens lived in the country, alongside 2.9 million non-EU citizens and approximately 271,000 documented migrants in 2019¹⁵. Large cities

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics. Migration Statistics Quarterly Report: August 2019. 22 Aug. 2019, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/migrationstatisticsquarterlyreport/august2019.

like London, Birmingham, Leicester, and Manchester became multicultural hubs, reflecting the UK's diversity. However, the government's stringent policies disproportionately targeted migrants from certain backgrounds, fostering a divisive and hostile environment.

Brexit, Austerity, and the Making of the 'Undeserving' Migrant

Austerity and scarcity narratives have framed public discourse and perceptions of migrants in the UK, particularly in the period leading up to the Brexit referendum. This frame was built upon the context of austerity policies implemented in the UK following the 2010 election, which involved "drastic cuts to public services and welfare"¹⁶. These austerity measures were politically framed as a virtuous necessity required due to an overdeveloped state; a narrative that also served to stigmatize welfare recipients. This created an environment where discourses of deservingness and entitlement became highly pervasive.

Within this climate, especially in the lead-up to the EU referendum, debates about migration and entitlement were prominent. The "Leave campaign" strategically exploited the consequences of years of austerity policies by explicitly correlating their negative effects with supposedly high migrant numbers. Migrants were scapegoated for Britain's material struggles. They were presented as placing undue pressure on struggling public services. Constantly, they are viewed as a "drain on scarce resources" and, at worst, as "benefit scroungers" taking advantage of an "overly generous British welfare state"¹⁷. This narrative positioned migrants,

¹⁶ Tuckett, Anna. "The island is full, Please don't come": Narratives of austerity and migration in a UK training centre. *Anthropology Today*, vol. 33, no. 5, pp. 24. Oct. 2017. Wiley Online Library, doi:10.1111/1467-8322.12381.

¹⁷ Tuckett, Anna. "The island is full, Please don't come": Narratives of austerity and migration in a UK training centre. *Anthropology Today*, vol. 33, no. 5, pp. 24. Oct. 2017. Wiley Online Library, doi:10.1111/1467-8322.12381.

particularly economic migrants from Eastern European countries, as "undeserving" of public resources and support.

The influence of these narratives extended into the handbook, "Life in the UK"¹⁸ and citizenship classes. These unofficial training centers, while primarily helping migrants pass the test based on the government handbook, also embellished ideological views about good citizenship and welfare dependency. Teachers, often from migrant backgrounds themselves, translated state-prescribed values. For example, in explaining the responsibility to "look after yourself and your family" that comes with permanent residency, one teacher explicitly interpreted this as "get a job, don't take benefits"¹⁹. This process demonizes and stigmatizes welfare benefit recipients and instills the Conservative government's message on fundamental values of British life.

These political discourses were reproduced not only by teachers but also by students themselves in these classes. Some migrant students echoed the claim that migration was a problem. For instance, a refugee student accused Eastern European migrants of taking "all the benefits" and making noise. Other students agreed that there were "too many" migrants. This allows for migrants to continue following rhetoric ideologies that demonizes other migrants, sometimes rooted in perceptions of geopolitical hierarchies and perceived injustices in migration

¹⁸ "Life in the UK" is a test that began being required for migrants applying for indefinite leave to remain (permanent residency) or citizenship in 2005, was later revised in 2013 to center British history and culture.

¹⁹ Tuckett, Anna. "The island is full, Please don't come": Narratives of austerity and migration in a UK training centre. *Anthropology Today*, vol. 33, no. 5, pp. 26. Oct. 2017. Wiley Online Library, doi:10.1111/1467-8322.12381.

regimes. This reproduction reinforces the narrative that migrants are responsible for straining resources, thereby solidifying the frame of austerity and scarcity as a justification for limiting migrant entitlements and support.

Struggles Within Post-Resettlement Life

While academia and media tend to focus on the bigger picture of the process of migration, there is limited spotlight on the realities of post-resettlement life, and the instability in social life many migrants face. Through one case study conducted in 2011 on qualitative interviews from young migrants (aged 18–30) from China, Brazil, Turkey (Kurdish), Ukraine, and Zimbabwe, this explores how ‘illegality’—understood not as a static condition but as a product of specific legal and political arrangements—affects migrants’ social lives. The aspect of having legal status can influence who has access to welfare, healthcare, and social inclusion, producing a precarious form of legal and political subjectivity. Social day-to-day interactions are constrained by the availability of resources offered to those with a vulnerable legal status.

A central factor influencing social interactions is the fear of disclosure of their undocumented status to those outside their immediate circle. This fear leads migrants to constantly weigh issues of trust versus necessary risk-taking when interacting with others. Specifically, those worry the risk of being stigmatized or reported to the police as a concrete threat and also worry that if people were to know their status, it might change others' attitudes towards them²⁰. This makes the process of building trust crucial and challenging. Consequently,

²⁰ Sigona, Nando. “‘I have too much baggage’: the impacts of legal status on the social worlds of irregular migrants”. *Social Anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2011, pp. 54. doi:10.1111/j.1469-8676.2011.00191.x.

many undocumented migrants report having much smaller friend circles compared to documented individuals. They tend to confine friendships and interactions primarily to those who are also undocumented, finding solidarity and understanding among people in similar situations. Even documented migrants from their own country can feel distant due to differences in legal status, as their aspirations, future plans, and daily realities diverge significantly. This often necessitates a habit of secrets and lies, which can cause feelings of discomfort, shame, or guilt, and lead to difficult ethical dilemmas or even the breakdown of relationships.

Practical constraints also significantly limit social interactions. Language barriers can impede communication with people outside of their immediate linguistic group, limiting opportunities for social interaction in broader spaces. Furthermore, undocumented migrants often work long hours in low-paid, unstable jobs, leaving them with little or no time or energy for social activities. Economic obligations and the need to save money can also mean there is little left for leisure activities. Significantly, there is some strong belief the color of their skins may increase their visibility to society, adding another layer of caution. Belief over being racially profiled was a significant constraint to their daily lives. Over time, some migrants report adapting to these constraints, getting used to the limitations imposed by their status.

"Illegality" as a Political Construct"

When undocumented migration is framed as "illegal," this notion of "illegality" profoundly shapes the lives and political subjectivities of migrants, further influencing perceptions of their deservingness. In contemporary American public discourse, it has been illustrated negative metaphors to depict migration, particularly to certain racial groups- in this case, Latinos. These metaphorical framings shape public perception and often carry

dehumanizing connotations, much like how the UK mainstream media covers migration and asylum. Migration is often framed as an "invasion," a metaphor rooted in war. This analogy disregards the experiences of migrants, who are typically unarmed and peaceful individuals seeking employment and freedom. It also challenges the basic human right to flee harmful conditions like violence or famine. Additionally, migration is frequently conceptualized as a "disease" or a "burden" on society²¹. Another prevalent metaphor equates migration to "dangerous waters," where the rising number of migrants is perceived as a dangerous tide, akin to floods threatening the nation. This metaphor serves as a "cultural alarm," evoking fears that a "brown tide" will erode Anglo-American cultural dominance. Harmful metaphors can dictate society's views and ideologies surrounding migrants of color. I also point a relative metaphor that continues to be metaphorically played, and it is the referring of migrants as "animals". An analogy rooted in a Western European cultural hierarchy, justifies social inequity by portraying migrants as lesser human beings. This metaphor has deep historical roots, harking back to the dehumanization of slaves, and serves to separate citizens from "non-citizens" by assigning a non-human status to the latter. These metaphorical framings dehumanize migrants, portraying them as threats to society, and obscure their underlying motivations for seeking a better life. The "invasion" metaphor ignores the peaceful nature of most migration, the "dangerous waters" metaphor evokes fear of cultural displacement, and the "animal" metaphor is deeply dehumanizing and tied to racist historical contexts. Hostile anti-migrant discourse can lead to "deportation regimes" that violate rights and create fear.

²¹ Santa Ana, Otto. *Brown Tide Rising : Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002. Print.

"Illegality" is not a natural or inherent state of being but a juridical status that entails a social relation to the state. It is a preeminently political identity. This legal terminology of "illegality" ties directly into the concept of migrants being determined deserving (or, more accurately, *undeserving*) of citizenship or other legal statuses. By legally defining certain individuals as "illegal" or "undocumented," the state actively creates a category of persons whose presence, while often utilized for labor, is officially negated. This process generates "spaces of nonexistence," characterized by a fundamental contradiction between their physical and social presence and their official negation²². This process of "illegalization" automatically positions migrants as undeserving of the rights, protections, and social entitlements associated with legal status or citizenship. The state's definition of "illegal" is not merely descriptive; it is a constitutive act that places migrants outside the realm of deservingness for legal recognition and rights. Even "legalization" programs are framed as disciplinary and episodic, refining the field of "illegality" rather than eliminating it, and requiring migrants to navigate a system that first defined them as outside the law. While these metaphors are rooted in American discourse, they echo strikingly within the UK's own narratives on migration—especially in the racialized framing of migrants as threats, burdens, or non-human. Both contexts reveal how state power, media, and public rhetoric collaborate in constructing the figure of the migrant of color as undeserving and out of place, thereby reinforcing exclusionary policies under the guise of legality.

²² De Genova, Nicholas P. "MIGRANT "ILLEGALITY" AND DEPORTABILITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 31, 2002, pp. 427. doi:10.1146/annrev.anthro.31.040402.085432.

Navigating Migration: Identity Formation and Social Contexts Among Spanish Migrants

Through this case study, Scholars Iria Vázquez Silva, Alberto Capote Lama, and Diego López de Lera explore how Spanish migrants conceptualize their migration projects and identities, particularly after the 2008 economic crisis. Their study, based on 44 semi-structured interviews with highly educated Spanish migrants (mostly young adults) in London, Berlin, and Düsseldorf, examines how individuals perceive the label “emigrant” and how these self-perceptions differ from earlier migration waves (1960–1975). This study results in the identification of three different types of migratory self-perception. First, some migrants reject the “emigrant” label²³, framing their mobility as a voluntary and professional choice within the EU. The second group accepts the label but positions themselves as “fortunate emigrants,” distinguishing themselves from more vulnerable migrant groups. For this group, Brexit shifted their identity from European citizens to “immigrants”. The third group embraces the emigrant label politically, viewing their migration as forced by Spain’s economic and political failures, and aligning themselves with movements advocating for labor rights and social justice, like Marea Granate²⁴. In comparing their experiences with earlier Spanish migrants, most participants highlighted key differences, such as higher levels of education, language skills, and employment opportunities. These distinctions shape their self-perception as more deserving migrants, in contrast to other groups who may be seen as more dependent on social welfare. Despite this, those identifying as politically engaged emigrants saw parallels in their experiences of insecure labor conditions and discrimination, which they linked to Spain’s broader history of emigration.

²³ Vázquez Silva, Iria, et al. "La nueva emigración española en Alemania y Reino Unido: identidades migratorias en cuestión." *Revista Española de Sociología*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2021, a24, Pg.12. doi:10.22325/fes/res.2021.24.

²⁴ Marea Granate is identified as a social movement or collective that emerged in 2013, specifically linked to the increased Spanish emigration starting from 2008.

I include this study to demonstrate this is not solely conservative British ideologies, but rather harmful associations through generational and cultural differences through their own cultural groups. It emphasizes that migrant identities are multifaceted and shaped by a combination of factors including past mobility, political engagement, and evolving socioeconomic contexts. Importantly, these factors also influence how migrants are viewed in terms of deservingness, with those in more privileged positions often seen as more deserving of rights and opportunities in their host countries.

Chapter Four: Examining the Role of Detention Centers

One of the most visible and contested tools of state control in this system is immigration detention. Detention centers are not merely administrative spaces for processing cases—they are mechanisms of physical and symbolic control. These centers confine individuals whose presence challenges the state’s legal or political boundaries, often under prison-like conditions and increasingly managed by private firms. Although immigration detention is legally distinct from criminal incarceration, the overlap in practice—especially through indefinite detention, the use of security infrastructure, and offshore processing—blurs these lines and reinforces the criminalization of migration itself.

Post-Brexit Changes to Deportability and Asylum Policy in the UK

The implementation and future evolution of the EUSS have significantly impacted the deportability of EU nationals in the United Kingdom by shifting them under national immigration laws and creating new categories of potential deportees. Post-Brexit regulations, such as the Immigration Act 1971, the UK Borders Act 2007, and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, now apply. These regulations allow for deportation not only on the grounds of public policy, public security, or public health, but also when it is deemed “conducive” to the public good or following a criminal conviction with a sentence of at least 12 months. This has led to a differentiated system of deportability, where certain characteristics increase an individual's risk of being targeted²⁵.

The loss of pre-settled status for individuals who do not apply for settled status or exceed permissible absences also raises concerns about future deportability. Additionally, the EUSS has generated a substantial database containing EU citizens' personal details, biometrics, and criminal records, which could be used for future immigration enforcement. Consequently, the EUSS has fundamentally altered the legal framework, resulting in a broader range of deportation reasons. Factors like criminal history and housing situations significantly increase the vulnerability of certain EU nationals to deportation.

In 2022, asylum seekers made up 0.6% of the UK's population, with most having been in the country for over a decade²⁶. In 2023, asylum seekers accounted for 7% of immigration, while bespoke humanitarian schemes made up 4%. The primary countries of origin for asylum seekers were Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh²⁷. Waiting times for asylum decisions have significantly increased, contributing to a growing backlog, though recent data shows some improvement. The cost of the asylum system reached £4 billion in 2022-2023, reflecting mounting strain on resources. Despite being the fifth largest claimant country within the EU, the UK ranks 20th when adjusted for population size. The success rate for initial asylum applications dropped from 76% in 2022 to 67% in 2023, with appeals increasing the success rate to about 66% for applications from 2018-2020. The share of asylum applications decided within six months fell dramatically from 87% in 2014 to just 6% in 2023²⁸. Disparities in asylum outcomes are evident, especially by nationality and gender. Between 2019 and 2021, 91% of Syrian and Eritrean nationals received asylum-related protection after appeal, while only 6% of Indian

²⁶ Walsh, Peter William, and Nuni Jorgensen. *Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the UK*. Migration Observatory, COMPAS, University of Oxford, 2024.

²⁷ See Figure 2.

²⁸ See Figure 3.

nationals did. Gendered trends also emerge, with women accounting for 81% of adults granted refugee family reunion visas between 2012 and 2023. While initial asylum success rates were similar for men and women, this disparity is more linked to family reunion policies than bias in decisions. These disparities raise concerns about the fairness and consistency of the asylum determination process.

A Rise in Detention

Several factors have driven the UK's increased use of migrant detention. With the expansion of migration system policies, the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act broadened the category of detainable non-citizens to include asylum seekers. Prior to this, detention was viewed more as an emergency measure, and the routine detention of migrants and asylum seekers was less prevalent. This narrative of deporting individuals from “emergency measures” to “uncontrolled measures” has now shifted, with the government justifying stricter migration restrictions²⁹. Events such as migrants attempting to enter via the Channel Tunnel during the 1990s were used to garner support for stricter policies, including detention. The government also portrayed areas like Calais as ‘chaotic’ to further justify the imposition of stricter controls. This aligns with a broader pattern, as scholars demonstrate that moments constructed as migration “crises” – often involving racialized populations – have been pivotal in expanding detention policies.

Following the “foreign-national prisoner (FNP) “crisis” in 2006, the government adopted an increasingly punitive stance toward “foreign criminals.” This resulted in new policies such as

²⁹ Mainwaring, C., and M. L. Cook. “Immigration Detention: An Anglo Model.” *Migration Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2019, pp. 460. Oxford University Press, doi:10.1093/migration/mny015.

the "hubs and spokes" model in 2009, which mandated the retention of non-citizen prisoners even after their sentences ended for consideration of deportation³⁰. This policy legally sanctioned the differential treatment of foreign nationals and further integrated migration enforcement into the penal system. Consequently, a significant proportion of those held in UK immigration detention are foreign-national offenders who have completed custodial sentences. Beyond the focus on criminality, there was a general trend toward stricter entry controls. While the primary motivation for many migrants entering the UK – even those later detained – was often to escape persecution and generalized violence, the government's response involved tightening controls. The indefinite nature of migration detention in the UK, with no legal time limit, has contributed to its increase, as individuals can be held for extended periods. The number of immigration detainees dramatically increased from low levels in the early 1990s to over 2,260 in 2003 following the 1999 Act³¹. This growth has been accompanied by increased spending on immigration detention. The increasing involvement of private security firms in running detention centers has also become a key feature of the UK's detention system. The rise in migrant detention in the UK has been driven by a combination of legislative changes expanding the grounds for detention, the political exploitation of perceived migration crises, a heightened focus on the detention and deportation of foreign national offenders, broader trends toward stricter immigration controls, and the indefinite nature and expanding infrastructure of the detention system itself.

³⁰ Turnbull, Sarah, and Ines Hasselberg. "From Prison to Detention: The Carceral Trajectories of Foreign-National Prisoners in the United Kingdom." *Punishment & Society*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2017, pp. 135–54. SAGE, doi:10.1177/1462474516660695.

³¹ Black, Richard, et al. "Routes to Illegal Residence: A Case Study of Immigration Detainees in the United Kingdom." *Geoforum*, vol. 37, 2006, pp. 552–64. Elsevier, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2005.09.009.

The Anglo Model

The Anglo model- introduced by scholars Cetta Mainwaring and Maria Lorena Cook, is characterized by the existence of detention policies in which individuals can be held for an unspecified duration (indefinite detention) and/or where detention is automatically applied to certain categories of migrants, such as those arriving without authorization (mandatory detention). Although the UK does not have a mandatory detention policy, its migration detention is indefinite, with no legal time limit³². These policies differentiate from those in many other advanced industrial democracies, where detention periods are often legally limited. Detention centers also raise controversy due to the involvement of private security firms and infrastructure. This involves engaging private security firms to manage and operate detention centers and provide various services within them. Inhumanely, these existing security infrastructures are designed and treated like prisons or military bases to house migrants who are detained. The UK set a precedent by contracting a private company to run detention centers since 1970. This reliance on private actors contributes to the criminalization of migrants and outsources liability for detention conditions. Although migration detention is legally an administrative measure, the use of prison-like facilities and the involvement of private security firms contributes to the criminalization of migrants. Detainees may be subjected to conditions resembling imprisonment, despite lacking the legal rights of criminals. Former prisoners in immigration detention are viewed as an "unpopular group" and may face additional stigmatization. Ultimately, the reliance on indefinite detention and private security firms in the UK reflects a broader trend of

³² Cetta Mainwaring, Maria Lorena Cook, Immigration detention: An Anglo model, *Migration Studies*, Volume 7, Issue 4, December 2019, Pages 455–476, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mny015>

criminalizing migrants, raising serious concerns about the treatment of individuals who are often caught in an inhumane and unjust system.

Migrant/ Refugee Well-being in Detention Centers

The experience of detention itself can be deeply traumatic. Children in detention are described as being in a position of "triple vulnerability" due to their identification as children, migrants, and as "undocumented" migrants. It has been indicated that children in detention can suffer from increased stress, food refusal, and self-harm. Even in facilities aiming for a "care model"³³, children still experience detention as detention. For adults, the indefinite nature of detention creates significant uncertainty, leading to stress. Detention can also lead to significant disruption and strain on family relationships, potentially forcing individuals to maintain ties through social media from afar. The potential for permanent separation from families due to deportation is a major concern and source of distress for detainees with ties in the UK.

The experience of detention can be particularly distressing for individuals who have already completed a prison sentence, as it is often perceived as a double punishment. Unlike imprisonment, where there may be sentence plans and rehabilitative programming, time in detention centers can feel nonsensical, boring, and unproductive due to the lack of meaningful activities. This can exacerbate feelings of stress and lack of control over one's situation. More specifically, individuals who identify as foreign nationals may experience isolation due to language difficulties and a lack of connections to outside communities, as their families and

³³ Tyler, I., Gill, N., Conlon, D., & Oeppen, C. (2014). The business of child detention: charitable co-option, migrant advocacy and activist outrage. *Race & Class*, 56(1), pp.11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396814531690>

social networks might be abroad³⁴. This can contribute to feelings of vulnerability and a lack of support. Migrants may become increasingly suspicious of organizations that offer support if these organizations are perceived to be too closely tied to government or private detention companies. This can hinder individuals from seeking help and further isolate them. The denial of "second chances" through rehabilitation and reintegration – seemingly available to British citizens – is a key social issue highlighted by detainees. The existence of prisons exclusively for foreign nationals can also foster feelings of being targeted and segregated.

³⁴ Turnbull, Sarah, and Ines Hasselberg. "From Prison to Detention: The Carceral Trajectories of Foreign-National Prisoners in the United Kingdom." *Punishment & Society*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2017, pp. 135–54. SAGE, doi:10.1177/1462474516660695.

Chapter Five: Systemic Barriers to Migrant Well-being: Political, Legal, and Mental Health Challenges

Limitations within mental health frameworks also act as systemic barriers that affect migrants' well-being. For example, in one journal, studies focus on the mental health of Afghans who suffer from the traumatic consequences of war-related violence. While acknowledging the importance of war-related trauma, the sources point out criticisms of approaches like the use of PTSD. PTSD can be seen as pathologizing normal distress, inadequately defining the original trauma, and having symptoms that overlap with other conditions³⁵. Critically, its application to Afghans is criticized for potentially constructing trauma as the norm, prioritizing war-related suffering over that caused by complex political-economic dynamics, focusing on the individual rather than the social context, and overemphasizing negative cultural factors. This narrow, flawed focus within mental health services might fail to address the more mundane losses and obligations of migration under global capitalism that contribute significantly to suffering.

Barriers to Housing for Migrants and Asylum Seekers: Systemic Failures and Bureaucratic Obstacles

Migrants and asylum seekers in the UK face significant barriers when it comes to securing housing, many of which are exacerbated by systemic failures within the country's immigration and asylum processes. A major issue currently seen is the malfunctioning of the Home Office's immigration database, the Person Centric Data Platform (PCDP), where in 2024, it was reported the database had merged the identities of over 76,000 individuals, resulting in

³⁵ Khan, Nichola. "A Moving Heart: Querying a Singular Problem of 'Immobility' in Afghan Migration to the UK." *Medical Anthropology*, vol. 32, no. 6, 2013, pp. 523. doi:10.1080/01459740.2012.757607.

incorrect personal information being linked to the wrong people. This has led to severe consequences for migrants and asylum seekers, including difficulties in proving their right to housing, work, and access to essential services like healthcare. Some instances for example, may include a refugee with a valid biometric residence permit, having encountered difficulties in securing employment and housing due to errors in the Home Office system. Despite holding legal documentation, they would find themselves unable to demonstrate their eligibility for housing, leading to an extended period of uncertainty and distress³⁶. This case is one out of many, as large groups of migrants report similar struggles, often spending months or even years trying to resolve discrepancies within the system. Such issues are compounded by the inability to access critical support services, and in some cases, the confusion around visa statuses and personal identification can even lead to homelessness³⁷. As these challenges reflect broader issues within the UK's asylum and migration systems, they mirror previous scandals, like the Windrush scandal³⁸, which underscored the deeply ingrained failures in data management and systemic discrimination.

A major theme seen in the ineffectiveness to secure housing as a refugee, is the policy of “housing-led” dispersal, where asylum seekers are often placed in deprived areas with limited services and substandard housing. This has been linked to severe outcomes in poor mental

³⁶ Starkey, Tom, et al. "'Their System Is Broken': The People Caught Up in Home Office IT Chaos." *The Guardian*, 14 Mar. 2024, www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/mar/14/their-system-is-broken-the-people-caught-up-in-home-office-it-chaos.

³⁷ Bancroft, Holly. "Housing Worker Blocked from Seeing Family Abroad Due to eVisa Issues." *The Independent*, 21 Jan. 2025, www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/evisa-uk-travel-problems-immigration-b2692700.html.

³⁸ Windrush scandal refers to the wrongful detention, denial of legal rights, and deportation of members of the Windrush generation, individuals who arrived in the UK from Commonwealth countries between 1948 and 1971, due to the government's immigration policies and the "hostile environment" approach, which targeted long-term residents without proper documentation. The scandal, revealed in 2018, led to public outcry and government apologies.

health, social isolation, insecurity, and discrimination.³⁹ Initial accommodation, often in centralized reception centers in repurposed buildings like former hotels or military institutions, are consistently held as poor-quality, neglected, and stigmatizing infrastructure. This type of accommodation deludes social integration with the wider community. Centers as basic and in poor condition negatively impacts the mental health of residents and contributes to their dehumanization and exclusion. Several other notable negative impacts from these accommodations can be a lack of privacy and autonomy, disturbed sleep due to noise, and fear of harassment and discrimination, particularly for women. These conditions also negatively impact families, making parents feel powerless in raising their children.

The transition from asylum seeker to refugee status, especially the UK's 28-day move-on period⁴⁰, emerged as a particularly vulnerable time. This shift often results to significant negative impacts on refugees' mental health. The disruption and disempowerment experienced during this time occur precisely when society has legitimized refugees' participation. It also leads in housing insecurity, risk of homelessness and destitution, due to a lack of affordable, stable housing. Access to housing is further complicated by differing pathways; former asylum seekers often face more difficult routes than government-sponsored refugees and frequently experience unstable or temporary accommodation. The lack of affordable housing is a major hurdle, sometimes leading refugees to accept substandard conditions or share homes to manage costs. Housing insecurity, including high rates of temporary accommodation and homelessness, is a common experience. Discrimination from landlords and letting agents is also noted as a

³⁹ Brown, Philip, et al. "The impact of housing on refugees: an evidence synthesis." *Housing Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2024, pp. 254. doi:10.1080/02673037.2022.2045007.

⁴⁰ UK's 28-day move-on period refers to the time given to individuals granted asylum after receiving a positive decision, allowing them 28 days to transition from Home Office accommodation to independent living.

barrier to accessing adequate housing, reflecting broader societal inequalities and hindering integration.

Latin American Migrants in the UK: Between Marginalization and Mobilization

Migrants and asylum seekers often face significant challenges related to their vulnerable legal status during or after the asylum process. Their status makes them highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, particularly in the workplace, where they may endure issues such as overwork, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and psychological mistreatment. To address these challenges, organizations such as the Latin American Workers Association (LAWA) and the Latin Front (LF) were established. LAWA, founded in 2004, defends Latin American workers against exploitation and advocates for their rights within the British trade union movement. The LF, also founded in 2004, focuses on advocating for the regularization of migrants, as well as securing rights such as voting rights for children born in the UK. However, despite some successes, both organizations face limitations due to internal divisions and limited resources.

Latin Americans in the UK, a significant yet often overlooked migrant group of more than 250,000 Latines and the eight-largest ethnic community⁴¹, face various legal statuses, including students, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants. They frequently endure exploitative working conditions, especially in sectors like cleaning and commercial work, and many arrive with limited English proficiency⁴². Additionally, their minimal representation in

⁴¹ Blair, Laurence. "Latin Americans Are One of the UK's Fastest-Growing Groups. So Why Aren't They Recognised?" *New Statesman*, 11 Dec. 2019, www.newstatesman.com/politics/2019/12/latin-americans-are-one-of-the-uks-fastest-growing-groups-so-why-arent-they-recognised.

⁴² Però, Davide. "Migrants' Mobilization and Anthropology: Reflections from the Experience of Latin Americans in the United Kingdom." *Citizenship, Political Engagement, and Belonging: Immigrants in Europe and the United States*, edited by Deborah Reed-Danahay and Caroline B. Brettell, Rutgers University Press, 2008, pp. 103–23. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hj33r.11>.

public discourse contributes to their marginalization. This lack of recognition further isolates Latin American migrants, affecting their sense of identity and belonging. Vulnerable legal status complicates access to essential services, such as healthcare, education, and housing, and political exclusion—particularly the inability to vote in UK elections—limiting their ability to influence policies that affect their well-being. In response, organizations like the Latin Front and LAWA have mobilized to advocate for the regularization of unauthorized migrants, better working conditions, and greater recognition and inclusion of the Latin American community in the UK.

Sanctuary and Struggle: Religious Engagement in the Lives of Asylum Seekers

Family and friends are often the main points of reference and crucial sources of informal advice and support, particularly upon arrival. However, the dependence created by their vulnerable status can sometimes become a burden, leading to distress or tension in relationships. Formal support networks include community organizations and faith groups. Access to community organizations varies, and fear of revealing their status or anxiety about surveillance can prevent some from using these resources. Faith groups, particularly churches, emerge as significant sources of support for many, offering a safe haven free from status-based discrimination. They provide practical assistance such as shelter, food, and contacts for jobs, and facilitate meeting new people and forming social connections. Churches organized by nationality or language can be especially accessible. Legal assistance is a key need, but many undocumented migrants are unfamiliar with mainstream non-governmental organizations, making faith groups or informal networks the primary sources of information and support.

Support systems and community engagement play a significant role in influencing migrant adaptation and well-being, particularly for asylum seekers in the UK. Faith-based

organizations (FBOs), such as churches, are highlighted as key providers of support for migrants and asylum seekers. This support is broadly categorized into "settling" and "unsettling" work.

The "settling" work is person-centered and aims to help newcomers meet their basic needs, offering essential resources for coping and adaptation. This includes practical aid like providing amenities, facilitating access to services, making referrals, and advocating for individuals.

Examples of this practical support are numerous, such as offering lunch, travel assistance, computer access, referrals to medical and legal services through drop-in centers.

“Elsewhere in London, the Memorial Baptist Church in Plaistow has accompanied people to doctors' surgeries and housing departments, helped to furnish houses and stood bail when needed (Baptist Union n.d.). The Notre Dame Refugee Centre, based at the French Church in Leicester Square, has catered for French-speaking Africans and hosted a twice-weekly drop-in offering general, health and legal advice, counselling, English lessons, food parcels, clothes and lunch (Notre Dame 2008)”⁴³.

FBOs also accompany people to appointments, help furnish homes, stand bail, provide advice, clothing, emergency hardship funds, and professional counselling. Accommodation projects for destitute asylum seekers are also run. Beyond basic needs, support includes social events, clubs, and even business advice. Psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, and practically, these activities offer valuable resources for coping. Asylum seekers themselves manage challenges through strategies including negotiating religious identity and practice, often actively seeking out familiar worshipping communities.

⁴³ Susanna Snyder, Un/settling Angels: Faith-Based Organizations and Asylum-Seeking in the UK, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 24, Issue 3, September 2011, pp. 570, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer029>

Community engagement, especially within religious communities, provide crucial social connections. Being part of these communities offers a sense of familiarity, comfort, and meaning during times of fear and uncertainty, acting as "ballast" while migrants struggle to adapt⁴⁴. These communities can function as informal cross-societal communities that facilitate friendships between asylum seekers and diverse members of the established society offering a safe space for open conversation. These friendship networks enhance emotional and practical adaptive capabilities, providing both short-term support and long-term networks. Participation in religious communities offers opportunities for social advancement, leadership, community service, and respect, as well as social, cultural, and socio-economic roles. Given that attaining jobs is not permitted for asylum seekers, participation in religious communities presents a viable alternative strategy for settling. Churches also make efforts to welcome newcomers into worship, sometimes incorporating multiple languages or inviting participation in services, which aids inclusion. Religious beliefs and practices themselves can serve as ballast for migrants as they struggle to adapt.

In addition to direct support, FBOs engage in "unsettling" work, which involves advocacy and systemic change. By aiming to transform views, systems, and legislation, this work indirectly influences the experiences of asylum seekers and eases their arrival process. Examples include raising awareness and challenging negative attitudes through public speaking and sharing stories. FBOs work to promote a positive response to migrants and build a "culture

⁴⁴ Susanna Snyder, Un/settling Angels: Faith-Based Organizations and Asylum-Seeking in the UK, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 24, Issue 3, September 2011, pp. 571, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer029>

of hospitality"⁴⁵, creating networks of towns and cities that include people seeking sanctuary in community life. More direct political initiatives include forming coalitions to campaign for adequate support, the right to work, free healthcare, and improved decision-making for asylum seekers. FBOs influence legislation and policy regarding asylum claims and work towards goals like ending the detention of children. This "unsettling" work, often informed by the grassroots knowledge gleaned by church-based groups and asylum seekers themselves, helps to create a more hospitable environment, which in turn facilitates adaptation and enhances well-being. While FBO's can generate short-term and sustainable resolutions to providing sense of community, FBOs can also be perceived as severely troublesome when they critically challenge governmental approaches.

The ability of FBOs to provide this wide range of support is linked to their continuous motivation rooted in divine meaning, such as biblical calls to care for the vulnerable and oppressed and the concept of hospitality to strangers. Their organizational nature provides strategic advantages for both settling and unsettling work. Furthermore, their ability to mobilize resources like leaders, volunteers, funds, and facilities is a significant strength. However, this continuation of support is crucial. There is a risk of exploitation if mutuality, dignity, and agency are not fostered. Encouraging asylum seeker participation in projects and worship is essential to avoid disempowerment. It should also be noted that care cannot be assumed, and some biblical texts could potentially be used to justify hostility towards certain foreigners, especially those of color. Overall, support systems and community engagement through FBOs provide indispensable practical aid, emotional strength, social connections, and spiritual resources crucial for asylum

⁴⁵ Susanna Snyder, Un/settling Angels: Faith-Based Organizations and Asylum-Seeking in the UK, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 24, Issue 3, September 2011, pp. 572, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer029>

seekers navigating the challenges of displacement and adaptation in the UK, alongside efforts to improve the broader societal context.

Systemic Barriers and the Role of Community Legal Support Programs

The UK asylum and immigration system is characterized as extremely complex and hostile, creating significant challenges for people seeking asylum. Successfully navigating this system requires expert legal advice and support. However, changes in the political and legal landscape, a strict regulatory regime, and substantial funding cuts have severely limited the ability of non-legal specialist organizations to provide the necessary legal services. This situation has led to a reduction in the number of legal providers and an increase in "advice deserts"⁴⁶ across the country. This limited access to justice profoundly impacts the lives and social wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees. People seeking asylum often struggle to provide the required evidence to support their claims. The lack of specialist advice makes it difficult for them to build their claims, understand the validity of their evidence, and ensure their case is represented fairly. This can lead to many claims being rejected, resulting in people living in destitution. For instance, 48% of initial decisions resulted in approval for asylum, being the lowest percentage of the past five years whereas, more than 20,000 asylum applications were waiting longer than six months for an initial decision in the year ending September 2019 and the percentage of asylum appeals turned to 43%⁴⁷. During this lengthy waiting period, applicants

⁴⁶ Charitonos, Koula, et al. "Advancing Social Justice for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK: An Open Education Approach to Strengthening Capacity through Refugee Action's Frontline Immigration Advice Project." *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, vol. 2020, no. 1, 11 May 2020, pp. 3. doi:10.5334/jime.563.

⁴⁷ Charitonos, Koula, et al. "Advancing Social Justice for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK: An Open Education Approach to Strengthening Capacity through Refugee Action's Frontline Immigration Advice Project." *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, vol. 2020, no. 1, 11 May 2020, pp. 3. doi:10.5334/jime.563.

are not permitted to work and must depend on state support, which can be as low as £5 per day to live on. Even upon receiving a successful decision, most recognized refugees are granted permission to stay for only five years, making it difficult for them to plan for their future life in the UK.

As a result, The Frontline Immigration Advice Programme (FIAP), developed by Refugee Action, was established to increase access to justice for individuals navigating the UK asylum system. It focuses on enhancing the capacity of voluntary and community sector organizations to provide high-quality immigration advice, which is crucial due to the complexity and hostility of the system. Phase 1 of FIAP (2016-2019) offered tailored support to organizations, including service development assistance, OISC registration guidance, online training, and peer-led learning opportunities. This program aimed to provide affordable, relevant education and foster a community for ongoing development. FIAP helps illustrate the intersection of social justice and open education, providing crucial legal support.

Individuals utilizing advice services come from diverse backgrounds and geographical locations, and their lives are frequently marked by extreme trauma. This trauma stems not only from fleeing their home countries but also from subsequent experiences like falling into destitution, surviving trafficking, or domestic violence. Many suffer from trauma and live in vulnerable circumstances. Their needs extend beyond legal advice to include English language training, cultural awareness, mental health support, and assistance with navigating local services, social workers, bills, and online forms. Registering with the Office of the UK's Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) and maintaining regulation is crucial for organizations providing advice because a person's immigration status is essential for accessing key services in the UK, such as housing, health, education, and work.

Brexit and the Politics of Fear: Xenophobia as a National Unconscious

It is inevitable to ignore this discourse of migration and asylum without addressing the key factors that embed ideologies and views, through unconscious psychological processes of racism and xenophobia. Racism and xenophobia profoundly affect migrants and asylum seekers by positioning them as targets for negative emotions, blame, and aggression rooted in the unconscious of individuals, groups, and nations. Xenophobia, defined as a deep antipathy to foreigners, reflects a narrow sense of national identity that generates intolerance and aggressive rejection of those perceived as not belonging to the national group. From a psychodynamic perspective, this hostility towards the "other"⁴⁸ is driven by deep-rooted emotions such as anxiety, fear, and anger, and fantasies stemming from unconscious conflicts and desires. Through a psychodynamic lens, they frame Brexit as a manifestation of national unconscious anxieties, including nostalgia for imperial identity and fears of economic decline—emotions that often translate into anti-migrant rhetoric and racist narratives.

Recent political leaders like Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage are shown to have mobilized xenophobic fantasies and nationalist myths to gain support, reinforcing exclusionary attitudes. Migrants and asylum seekers are often presented as a "foreign body" or "alien" group, associated with concepts of danger, pollution, impurity, sickness, or poisoning to the perceived purity of the nation. This fantasy of the 'other' as a threat leads to an urge to reject them to re-establish a sense of wholeness and continuity with a fantasied pristine past. In this dynamic, the pure object (the nation/self) is idealized, while the other is denigrated, demonized, rejected, and excluded. They appeal to the unconscious emotions and desires of their followers, shaping anxieties through

⁴⁸ Starkey K., Holstein J., and Tempest S. (2021) Xenophobia, the Unconscious, the Public Sphere and Brexit, *European Management Review*, 18, 25–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12446>.

discourse and presenting migrants as a "breaking point" for the nation. Claims are made about the detrimental effects of immigration on society, such as undermining services and stealing employment opportunities, even when evidence does not support these claims. The rhetoric often includes racial stereotyping and emotionally charged messages. Essentially, migrants and asylum seekers are caught in a dynamic where unconscious fears, anxieties, and projections are exploited by leaders, making them the recipients of blame and aggression, leading to their denigration, rejection, and exclusion.

Consequently, migrants and asylum seekers become convenient scapegoats onto whom negative emotions, experiences, and blame are projected. They become the focus and victims of destructive fantasies and aggression, stemming from unresolved inner conflicts and frustrations. In times of change or perceived national trauma, anxieties and feelings of helplessness or inadequacy can be reignited, leading to a hostile reaction towards the 'other'. Economic changes, such as de-industrialization, can lead to feelings of loss and impotence, which may be expressed as rage against those identified as perpetrators, including migrants.

Racialization and Deservingness

The concept of racialization significantly intersects with the construction of deservingness among migrants. Racialized migrants are often seen as less deserving than white migrants, even within the EU context. The "super-diversity" of contemporary migration does not necessarily negate the role of racialization in shaping perceptions of deservingness. Discourses around cultural difference can function as a "post-racial mask"⁴⁹, obscuring the racialization of migrants and shaping their perceived worthiness of inclusion and support. The construction of

⁴⁹ Erel, Umut, Karim Murji, and Zaki Nahaboo. "Understanding the contemporary race–migration nexus". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 39, no. 8, 2016, pp. 1339-1360. doi:10.1080/01419870.2016.1161808.

deservingness among vulnerable populations is a complex process shaped by the interplay of legal, social, and symbolic discourses. The dichotomy between "forced" refugees and "voluntary" migrants is a key framing device, yet it is often overly simplistic and influenced by geopolitical interests and assumptions about agency. These discursive constructions have profound consequences for how humanitarian responses are shaped, determining who receives aid and protection, as well as the social and political rights granted to displaced individuals. Furthermore, the increasing entanglement of humanitarianism and politics, along with the persistent influence of racialization, adds further layers of complexity to understanding how deservingness is constructed and its impact on displaced populations.

Beyond Whiteness: The Complex Racism Faced by Polish Migrants

Several intertwined factors influence the racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK. A significant factor is the impact of media and political discourses, which have rapidly turned hostile towards Polish migration, particularly in the context of the 2008 economic crisis and the 2016 EU referendum. Media coverage, especially in tabloid newspapers, had been overwhelmingly negative, blaming migrants, including Poles, for Britain's economic and social problems. This creates a "hostile environment" that becomes culturally embedded. The media and politicians have been accused of finding a "scapegoat" in Polish migrants and pitching the interests of the white working class against those of migrants.

Another crucial factor is the racialization of Polish migrants despite their predominantly white appearance "Xeno-racism," defined as racism directed at impoverished strangers, including

white migrants from Eastern Europe⁵⁰. The claim that anti-migrant sentiment is not rooted in racism because the migrants are "white" is flawed, as racist discourse often shifts from race to culture and ethnicity, framing these groups as having foreign or inferior origins despite their skin color. Even shared whiteness does not exempt them from the effects of racism. The experience of racism can lead Polish migrants to become conscious of being seen as "not-quite-white" through contact with white hosts. Racialization is viewed as a socially constructed outcome of exclusion, where difference can be "invented in situ" even without biological difference⁵¹.

When there is a difference in cultural markers, it can play a key role in making Polish migrants targets for hostility and challenging their potential invisibility despite being white. These markers include speaking the Polish language or having a foreign accent, even perceived physical appearance or clothing can be considered markers of difference. While whiteness might afford some level of invisibility, a foreign accent, in particular, makes their "Otherness" apparent and can lead to negative reactions.

Class and location also significantly influence experiences of racism and xenophobia. Racism and xenophobia are common attributes given by the White high-class to the poor white working class, particularly in deprived neighborhoods, which are sometimes perceived as dangerous by migrants. The physical presence of Polish migrants in these areas is sometimes perceived by established residents as competition for jobs, welfare, and housing, a tension often exploited by media and political discourse. Conversely, Polish migrants often report feeling safer

⁵⁰ Rzepnikowska, Alina. "Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2019, pp. 63. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2018.1451308.

⁵¹ Rzepnikowska, Alina. "Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2019, pp. 64. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2018.1451308.

from racism in more ethnically diverse or more affluent areas, reinforcing the idea that racism is linked to specific socio-spatial contexts. The physical presence and visibility of Polish migrants across various social spaces contribute to experiences of xenophobia, particularly when linked to narratives about them straining public services. This presence can lead to perceptions of "invasion" or "rivalry" within local communities.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how the United Kingdom's migration and asylum policies are shaped by a complex interplay of historical, political, and socio-economic forces—many of which trace back to its colonial legacy. These entrenched power structures continue to influence the ways in which migrants and asylum seekers are classified, treated, and ultimately either integrated into or excluded from British society. Labels such as “migrant” and “asylum seeker” are not fixed categories; they are fluid constructs imposed by bureaucratic systems that prioritize control over care. Trauma itself becomes politicized—not as a means for offering support, but as a justification for surveillance, exclusion, or conditional assistance.

The UK's 'hostile environment' policies, compounded by Brexit-era reforms and mounting bureaucratic hurdles, have created a landscape in which fundamental human rights—housing, legal representation, medical care, and social support—are increasingly conditional and, in many cases, inaccessible to the most vulnerable. These systemic failures, exemplified by the breakdowns in initiatives like the PCDP, underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and empathetic reform. Until these foundational issues are addressed, migrants will continue to face insurmountable barriers to stability, dignity, and long-term inclusion.

Xenophobic rhetoric, often disseminated by political leaders and sensationalized by media, reinforces a public narrative that positions migrants as threats—threats to jobs, public services, safety, and national identity. These narratives normalize fear and hostility, reinforcing racist ideologies that uphold exclusionary policies. Furthermore, the traditional frameworks through which migrants are expected to engage with political systems—such as the POS (politics of belonging) approach—fail to capture the ways in which migrants resist, mobilize, and create

community on their own terms. Migrants are not merely subjects of policy; they are often architects of resistance and organizers of alternative visions of justice.

This thesis has made clear that human rights are not universally guaranteed. They are filtered through layers of institutional bias, bureaucratic opacity, and political agendas. A migration system rooted in equity and humanity must first acknowledge the historical roots of exclusion, dismantle dehumanizing narratives, and center the lived experiences of displaced people. Only then can the UK—and other nations—move beyond a model based on suspicion and control, and toward one guided by justice, compassion, and global accountability.

This work does not end simply with a set of recommendations or policy critiques. To truly shift these dynamics, we must confront the broader worldview that informs them. We still operate within systems that privilege white-supremacist ideologies and uphold colonialist frameworks. Calls for reform will remain superficial until these ideologies are unseated and replaced with anti-racist, decolonial practices. Real change requires a willingness to interrogate the cultural, political, and educational structures that allow xenophobia to persist—and a collective commitment to fostering international solidarity grounded in empathy and mutual respect.

Looking ahead, I view this thesis as a foundation for further research and action. I intend to continue this work through advanced studies—specifically in a master’s program focusing on global affairs and human rights. Migration and asylum will remain central to my focus, as these issues touch on every facet of justice, from access to safety to the right to self-determination. Through future academic work and field engagement, I hope to deepen my understanding of how

migration intersects with other global issues, and how transnational cooperation might offer new frameworks of protection and dignity.

In envisioning solutions, it is clear that we must invest in grassroots efforts. Existing organizations need greater diversification—not only in leadership but in perspectives, practices, and languages. Nonprofits and NGOs around the world must be equipped with the training, staff, and resources required to serve displaced individuals effectively. This includes expanded interpretation and translation services, trauma-informed care, and accessible legal aid. Without these basic tools, the system will continue to replicate the very harms it claims to redress.

Migration is not a crisis—it is a global reality shaped by conflict, climate change, inequality, and hope. Yet, too many governments still treat it as a threat rather than a human rights issue. Why is it so difficult to collectively recognize that displacement is not a failure of individuals but a failure of systems? Why are we so hesitant to acknowledge the moral obligation to respond not with walls and quotas, but with care?

I dedicate this thesis to those who believe in the possibilities of change, especially those working toward peaceful resolutions and advocating for the dignity of all—regardless of status, race, or origin. We live in an era of uncertainty, where political climates shift rapidly, often sowing division and harm. And yet, our understanding of the world remains limited, especially when education fails to teach us about the complexities beyond our national borders. That must change. My hope is that readers walk away with not only a deeper understanding of migration and asylum, but also a renewed sense of urgency to act, to learn, and to listen.

As I write this during the Winter term of 2025, I do not know what political transformations lie ahead. But I remain hopeful. I believe in the momentum of collective action, in the power of informed voices, and in the capacity of future generations to build systems rooted in justice. This thesis is not an end—it is a beginning.

Figures

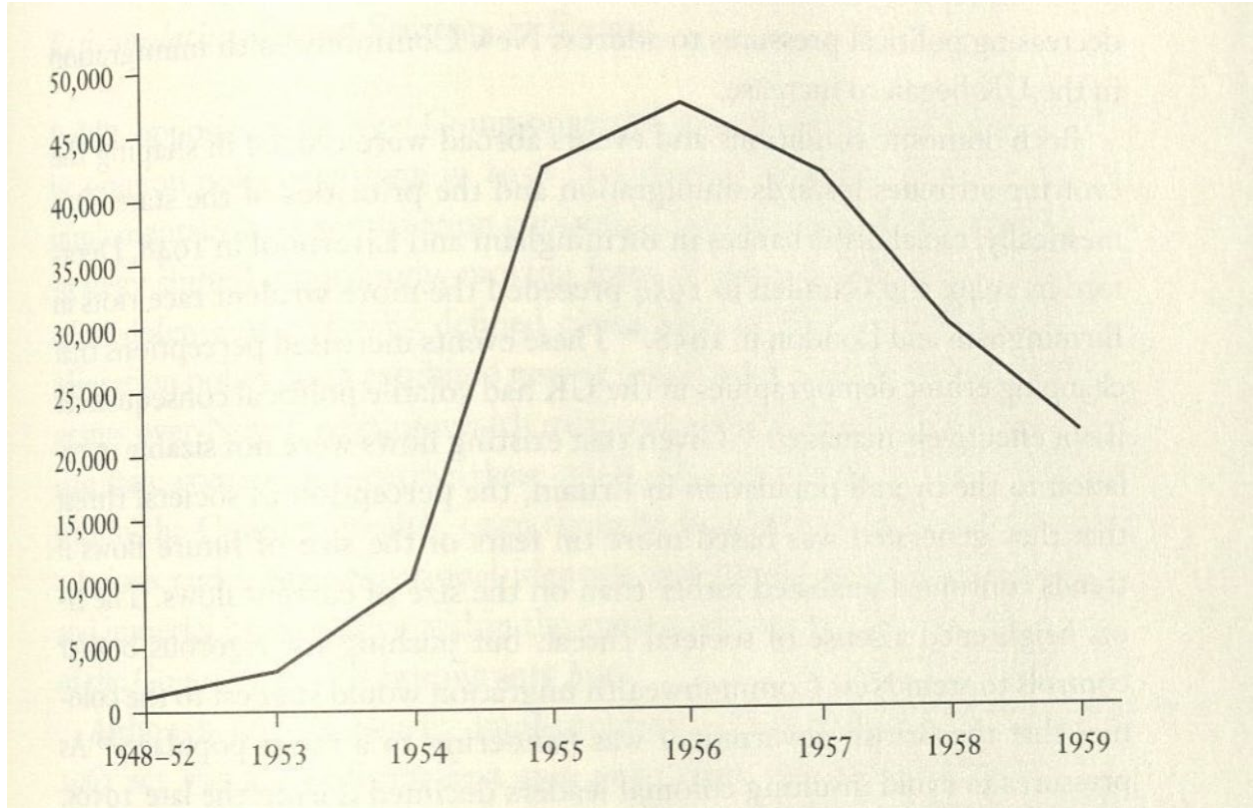


Figure 1: Colonial Migrants to Britain, 1948-1951. Source from Spencer, Ian R. G. *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

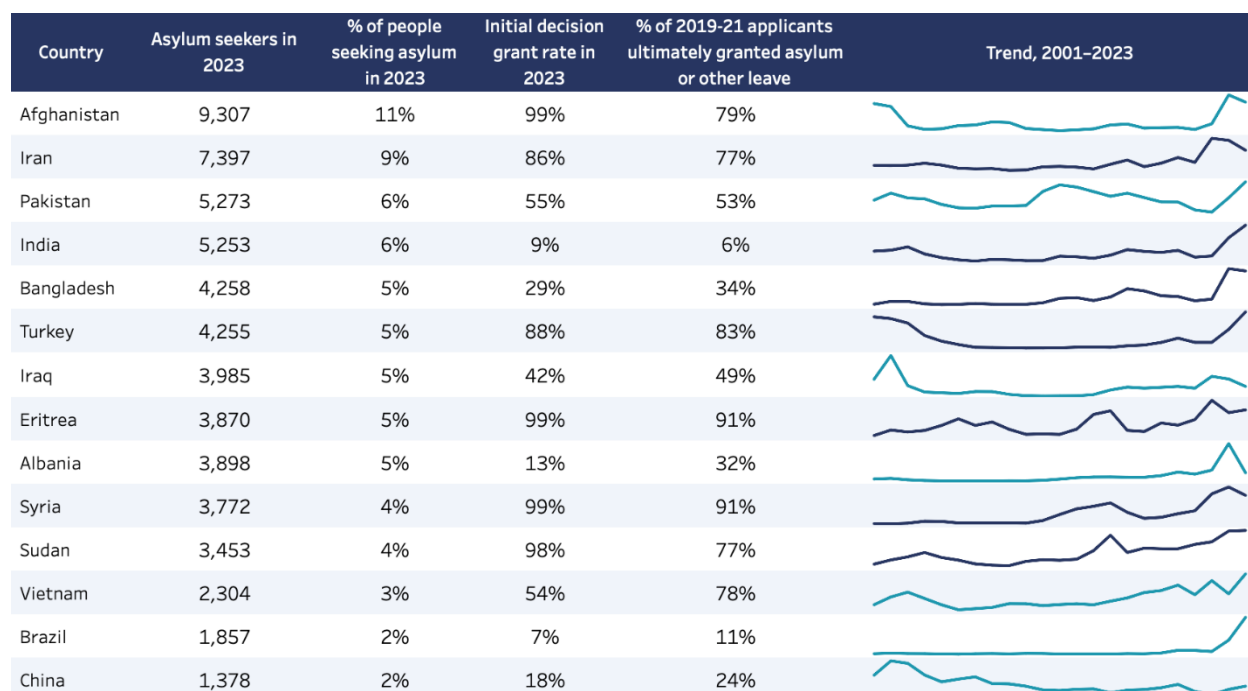


Figure 2: Nationality of people seeking asylum in the UK: the top 15 most common in 2023.

Source from Walsh, Peter William, and Nuni Jorgensen. Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the UK. Migration Observatory, COMPAS, University of Oxford, 2024.

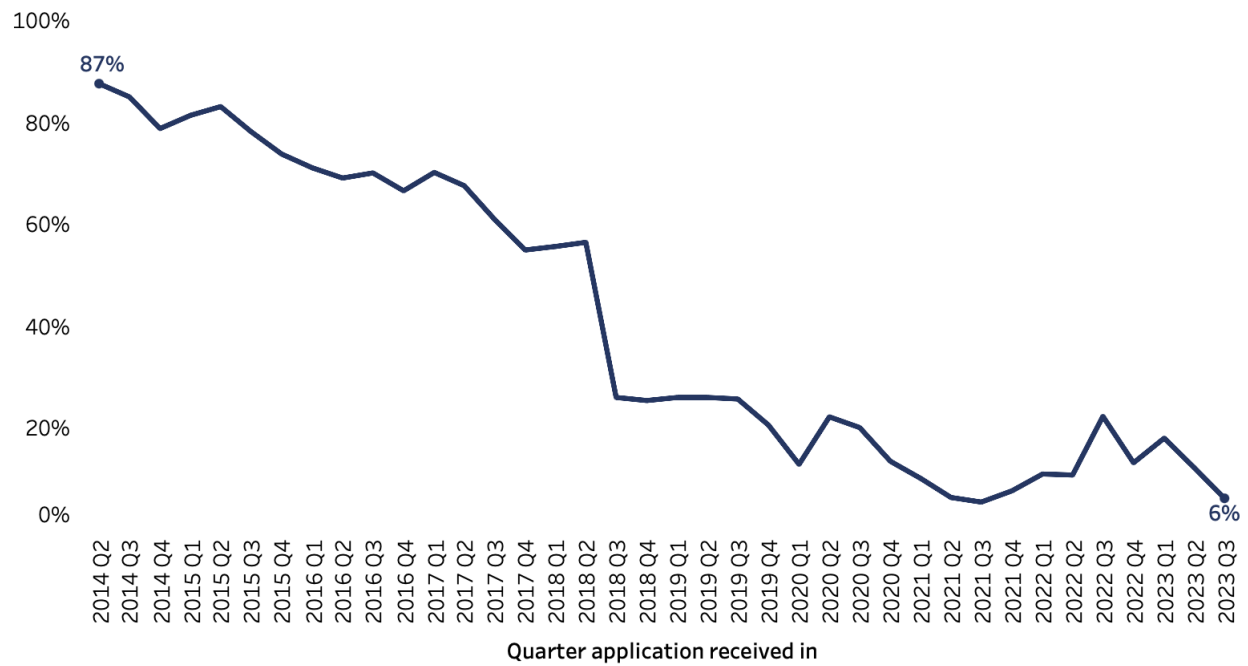


Figure 3: Share of asylum applications receiving an initial decision within six months, UK, Q2 2014 to Q3 2023, Adult main applicants. Source from Walsh, Peter William, and Nuni Jorgensen. Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the UK. Migration Observatory, COMPAS, University of Oxford, 2024.

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