



Design Thinking in Policy Making: How Can User Experience Inform
Refugee Integration?

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the multifaceted nature of refugee integration and the potential of applying design thinking in shaping integration policies and services. The study highlights the role design thinking can play in addressing the gaps in the current refugee integration policy cycle, offering a fresh approach to bridging local and national perspectives and ensuring cohesive problem definition across governance levels. By facilitating co-production of policies involving policymakers, authorities, and refugees, design thinking can foster an inclusive, adaptive, and human-centred policy development framework.

Design thinking is a human-centred approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people. It involves five stages: Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. In the context of policymaking, design thinking can help create more effective and user-centric policies by involving end-users in the co-production process. It emphasises understanding the experiences and needs of the people affected by policies, defining the problems clearly, brainstorming and developing innovative solutions, creating prototypes, and testing these solutions iteratively. Design thinking when utilised in policymaking can bridge the gap between policymakers and the communities they serve. By involving stakeholders, including refugees, in the design process, policymakers can develop more informed, adaptive, and responsive policies. This approach ensures that the policies are not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable and beneficial to the target population. The iterative nature of design thinking also allows for continuous improvement and adaptation, making policies more resilient and effective in addressing complex social issues.

The research presents a detailed framework for understanding the elements influencing integration policymaking, emphasising the multidimensionality of integration, local governance dynamics, and agenda setting. Design thinking's integration into the policy cycle brings assessment into the early stages of agenda setting and policy formulation, potentially reducing time inefficiencies and enhancing policy effectiveness. This approach ensures that policies are aligned with the needs and experiences of refugees and host communities.

The main aim of this research was to develop practical ideas for refugee integration with refugees, and feed them into policymaking processes to support the development of coordinated and holistic policies for sustainable integration. The study was guided by the main research question: “How can a design thinking approach help generate new knowledge about refugee integration in the UK?”. This question arises from the intersection of design thinking and refugee integration in the UK, a field that has undergone significant transformations since the early 2000s. Refugee integration is not only a matter of urgent social importance but also one fraught with political sensitivity. Refugees, representing a particularly vulnerable group, face an extra layer of challenges to their integration journey due to their traumatic migration experiences. The UK, with its diverse and complex landscape, presents a unique setting for this research, particularly in Birmingham, which has a large and diverse population of refugees and asylum seekers.

This question was operationalised through six objectives, each associated with sub-research questions and methods. One objective was to implement a design thinking approach with refugees to ensure their co-production in integration policy. This involved Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with refugees and interviews with policymakers. Another objective aimed to identify what refugees understand integration to be, using brainstorming activities within the FGDs. Additionally, the research explored the types of integration policy refugees identify as needed to meet their needs, using various design thinking activities. It also aimed to determine if design thinking tools could facilitate collective knowledge generation among refugees, assessed through pre-post FGD questionnaires. Finally, the research looked into how the knowledge collated using the design thinking approach can help policymakers design and implement new refugee integration interventions, achieved through two rounds of interviews with policymakers.

Given the research objectives, a mixed-method research strategy was employed, emphasising both context and individual experiences. A combination of methods including document review, FGDs with design thinking activities, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires was utilised. This triangulation provided a comprehensive view of the design thinking process in refugee integration.

Empirical findings from a case study in Birmingham revealed the lived experiences of refugees and their perspectives on integration, highlighting gaps in housing, employment, education, and health services. The co-designed solutions proposed by refugees, although viewed as not entirely feasible by policymakers, provided valuable insights for future policy development. Policymakers' engagement with the co-designed solutions underscored the potential of design thinking to create more inclusive, adaptive, and human-centred policy frameworks, but also highlighted some limitations that could be explored further in future research. Future research should explore the scalability and adaptability of design thinking methodologies across different contexts and refugee populations. Studies should also examine the long-term effects of policies and services developed through design thinking on refugee integration outcomes, tracking their effectiveness, sustainability, and adaptability. Additionally, the integration of digital technologies within design thinking processes could enhance refugee participation in policy co-production. Comparative studies evaluating the effectiveness of design thinking against other methodologies would also provide valuable insights, and developing robust frameworks for measuring the impact of design thinking on policy and service outcomes is crucial. By addressing these key areas, future research can build on this PhD's foundational work, advancing our understanding of how design thinking can be leveraged to create more humane, effective, and sustainable solutions for refugees and their host communities.

Ultimately, this thesis advocates for a shift towards more inclusive and adaptive policy frameworks, leveraging design thinking to involve end-users (i.e., refugees) in policymaking and design of services for integration, to ensure that policies are responsive to the needs and aspirations of refugees.

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CHAPTER 1: THESIS INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the complex and ever-evolving landscape of refugee integration, understanding and addressing the unique needs of refugees remain a significant challenge. This chapter sets out the structure of my doctoral research, which examines the innovative application of the design thinking approach in refugee integration policymaking within the United Kingdom (UK) context. Design thinking (see also Chapter 4) is a solution-focused, human-centred approach that focuses on empathetic engagement, creativity, and iterative testing. Originally developed in the field of business, design thinking has since evolved beyond its commercial applications to address complex societal and policy challenges (Brown, 2009). It is characterised by a set of principles, including empathy for users, a bias towards action, and a focus on prototyping and feedback. These principles guide the five steps in the process of design thinking: Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test, and eventually help to develop solutions that are both innovative and practical (ibid). In the context of policymaking, design thinking offers a framework for addressing policy problems that are often complex and lack clear definition (Kimbell, 2011a). The approach enables policymakers to navigate the uncertainty inherent in public policy processes, particularly in areas like refugee and migrant integration, where traditional policy approaches may fall short. The empathetic and user-centred nature of design thinking ensures that policies are not only effective but also resonate with the needs and experiences of those they are intended to serve (Di Russo, 2016). I argue that applying a design thinking approach in refugee integration policymaking, which is unexplored in existing literature, could offer a fresh perspective on policy development by utilising the experiences and insights of refugees and host communities. This PhD uses a mixed method approach that employs design thinking tools and stages in an attempt to understand and refine the ways in which refugees can actively contribute to the policymaking processes that directly impact their lives. In this introduction chapter, I lay out the objectives of the thesis, provide background on the overall context and the UK government response to the so-called refugee crisis, define refugee integration and unpack the lack of

national refugee integration policy in the UK to set the scene for the research. I also outline the structure of my thesis by providing a brief summary of each chapter.

1.2 Context: the UK response to the so-called refugee crisis

The so-called refugee crisis has gained significant scholarly attention, given its political, social, and humanitarian implications. The term 'refugee crisis' often refers to the increase in refugees and asylum seekers entering Europe, particularly following conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa in 2015. The refugee crisis is marked by mass displacements from war-torn countries like Syria, Afghanistan, and regions in Africa. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that the number of forcibly displaced individuals globally has reached record levels, with 108.4 million people displaced by the end of 2022, including 32.5 million refugees and 4.9 million asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2022). Crises of this size present unique challenges and opportunities for host countries. In the UK, the government's response has been multi-layered, involving aspects of changes in the border security, asylum processing, and integration strategies.

The UK has been a destination for a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers, especially following global crises. Between 2015 and 2021, the UK received over 200,000 asylum applications, with a notable increase in applications in 2021, reaching 48,540, the highest number in nearly two decades (Home Office, 2023a). The response of the UK government has been shaped by various factors including political climate, public opinion, and international obligations (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). Policies have often been criticised for being reactive rather than proactive, focusing on border control and deterrence rather than on long-term integration (Boswell, 2003). The Immigration Act 2016 and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, and more recently the Illegal Immigration Act were pivotal in shaping the UK's approach to refugees and asylum seekers. These policies have been subject to debate, with critiques focusing on their restrictive nature and potential breaches of international law (Home Office, 2023b).

The UK's policy response to the refugee crisis has evolved over time. A pivotal policy in this context is the UK's 2017 Syria Resettlement Programme (Home Office, 2017). This policy aimed to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020, signifying a commitment

to humanitarian protection. In 2020 the government promised to accept more refugees than the number it committed to in 2015. In 2021 both the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) were discontinued, and currently the UK offers five main schemes for relocating refugees: the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Mandate Resettlement Scheme, Community Sponsorship Scheme, Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP), and Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) (GLA, 2023). In total, between 2015 and March 2023, the UK resettled 49,492 individuals through its multiple resettlement schemes (Home Office, 2023a). Scholars like Crawley and Skleparis (2018) critique the government's approach, arguing that it was more about managing public perception than addressing the crisis effectively. While the UK has made commitments to refugee resettlement, its policies often prioritise national security and border control over refugee integration. There is a need for more focus on the long-term outcomes of the UK's policies and their impact on refugees' integration and wellbeing.

Refugee integration is increasingly viewed as a "public good" within the UK, addressed at various policy and governance levels (Mulvey, 2015). Nevertheless, the lack of a distinct UK refugee integration policy and the presumption that such integration does not require central government oversight have led to inconsistencies (Mulvey, 2018). Prior to devolution, refugee integration policies and services were primarily managed at the national level by the Home Office and related central government departments. These responsibilities included the provision of housing, education, healthcare, and employment support for refugees (Zetter et al., 2006). However, the devolution process transferred many of these responsibilities to regional and local authorities. The devolution of responsibility for refugee integration has several implications. Local authorities and devolved administrations can develop policies and programmes that are more closely aligned with the specific needs and contexts of their communities. This allows for more nuanced and effective integration strategies, considering the diverse demographics and socio-economic conditions across different regions (Phillimore, 2012). Local authorities often collaborate with non-governmental organisations, community groups, and private sector partners to deliver integration services. This multi-stakeholder approach can foster innovation and more holistic support systems for refugees. While localisation allows for tailored approaches, it also

leads to variability in the quality and availability of integration services. The capacity and resources of local authorities vary significantly, potentially leading to disparities in the support refugees receive depending on their location within the UK (Cooper, 2018). In response to the challenges created as result of devolution, it is essential to critically evaluate the current UK refugee integration policies. In Chapter 6, I will undertake this task by examining policy documents, with a particular focus on England since my case study is focused on Birmingham. This analysis is preceded by exploration of integration and associated terms and a detailed review of the evolution of refugee integration policies in the UK, beginning with the first refugee integration policy implemented in 2000. This historical context is vital for understanding the development and implementation of these policies over time.

1.3 Defining Refugee Integration

The notion of refugee integration, particularly in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis in the EU in 2015, has sparked increased debate within academic and policy discourse, with no consensus on its definition (Wright, 2009). Described by Robinson (1998, p.118) as "chaotic," the term has been employed variably across contexts. Integration involves both personal experiences and public interactions. It is a public issue as it necessitates social engagement and legal protocols for successful integration, while also being a personal issue centred around the individual experiences of refugees and their interactions with the host society (Lomba, 2010). Phillimore et al. (2024) argue that integration is often framed as a linear, normative process based on assumptions of migrant deficiency and the superiority of host society norms. This framing complicates the structural inequalities and power asymmetries that shape the lived experiences of refugees and reinforces a one-sided expectation that refugees must adapt, rather than recognising integration as a reciprocal or systemic process. Critics also highlight that the concept of integration tends to prioritise migration status over other axes of difference, such as gender, class, or age, and risks marginalising those who do not fit neatly into policy-defined categories (Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2018; Phillimore, 2012). Ager and Strang (2004) identify three primary aspects of integration: (1) the public dimension, involving outcomes in education, employment, housing, and health; (2) the social dimension, which includes interactions between refugees and the host community and amongst refugees

themselves; (3) the personal dimension, focusing on refugees' personal growth in cultural knowledge, language acquisition, and stability. Phillimore (2012) adds that integration involves refugees gaining the confidence to claim their rights, developing social relations, and fostering a sense of belonging within the new community. Cheung and Phillimore (2014) further distinguish between social integration (social capital and networks) and structural integration (tangible outcomes including access to services).

While some scholars opt for alternative terminologies such as social inclusion, settlement, or holistic and resettlement integration (Strang et al., 2018; Díaz Andrade and Doolin, 2016; Netto, 2011; Robinson, 1998), historically refugee integration has been associated with other uni-dimensional approaches (see also Chapter 3). Yet, uni-dimensional approaches like assimilation are often viewed as exclusionary (Ager and Strang, 2008), demanding that migrants forsake their values and culture to become indistinguishable within the host community (Crisp, 2004). Contemporary scholarship advocates for a two-way process model of refugee integration, wherein refugees and the host community mutually adapt to one another's values and cultures within a shared society (Ndofo-Tah et al., 2019; Ager and Strang, 2008; Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016; Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015; Robinson, 1998; Castles et al., 2002; Korac, 2003; Phillimore, 2012). Under this model, integration emerges as refugees' engagement with the host community, maintaining their identity, while the host community reciprocates to facilitate coexistence (Kuhlman, 1991; Berry, 1994, 1997). The UK's definition of refugee integration encapsulates this process as “a multi-directional process involving multiple changes from both incoming and diverse host communities.” (Ndofo-Tah, et al., 2019). The approach adopted by the UK government is based on four principles: integration is multi-dimensional, integration is multidirectional, integration is context specific, and everyone takes responsibility for their contribution (see also section 2.4). Although certain elements of integration, such as rights access, community interaction, belonging, and societal participation, are broadly acknowledged, the absence of a definitive description hinders policymaking, leading to variations in integration approaches across different nations. Current scholarship suggests four critical areas for integration (see also Chapters 2 and 3):

1. **Integration is inherently a two-way process:** demanding adjustments from both refugees and host communities. This dual adaptation challenges the traditional

view of integration as solely the responsibility of refugees (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019; Ager and Strang, 2008; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016; Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015; Robinson, 1998; Castles et al., 2002; Phillimore, 2012).

2. **Integration is multidimensional and multidirectional:** encompassing personal and social dimensions on top of the functional aspects that facilitate its success, including access to the labour market, housing, health, and education (Fajth and Lessard-Phillips, 2023; Fyvie et al., 2003). These functional aspects are not only practical measures but also serve as indicators of successful integration, as outlined by Ager and Strang (2008).
3. **Building social networks is pivotal for integration:** which could help in providing emotional support, capacity-building resources, and access to services (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019, Atfield et al., 2007; Griffiths et al., 2005; Spicer, 2008). These networks are vital for both gaining functional benefits and developing personal connections within the community.
4. **Developing a sense of belonging is essential for integration:** satisfaction of needs, cultural participation, and recognition within a community contribute to this feeling (Hedetoft, 2002). Integration policies should aim to foster an environment that respects diversity and encourages a shared sense of community, thereby preventing integration from devolving into assimilation (Threadgold and Court, 2005).

Refugee integration in the UK focuses on those who have obtained legal refugee status, as the UK government has been explicit that integration should only begin after an individual is recognised as a refugee (Mulvey, 2015). In this thesis I will focus on integration of refugees who have obtained the legal status, as asylum seekers are not subject to integration policies in the UK.

1.4 Integration of Refugees vs Integration of Migrants

The main discourse on integration policy predominantly concentrates on the integration of migrants, with refugees often subsumed within the broader category of migrants (Scholten, 2013; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016; Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016; van Breugel et al., 2014; Scholten et al., 2017; Maan et al., 2015; Ali and Gidley, 2014; Jensen, 2018; Galandini et al., 2019). However, equating refugees with migrants overlooks critical differences, as the latter do not

usually come from the same context or have the same experiences as the former. Refugees, unlike other migrants, are forced to relocate, often under life-threatening circumstances, and therefore do not share the same experiential context (Bates, 2002). Refugees may also experience trauma and loss which can also add to uniqueness. Acknowledging the distinctiveness of refugees, who flee due to push factors such as persecution and conflict (Lee, 1966; Zimmermann, 1996), is crucial for crafting appropriate integration policies. Such differences are central, as integration policies may yield unequal outcomes for different migrant groups, dependent upon their unique backgrounds and legal statuses (Bilgili et al., 2015); moreover, refugees do not have the option to leave if they dislike the policies in their new location.

Migration, as defined by Lee (1966), involves changing one's residence temporarily or permanently, which is a characteristic shared by refugees. However, the motivation (push factors) behind migration differs significantly for refugees. They are forced to migrate, because of life-threatening situations that may involve concerns about risks of physical harms and exposure to human rights violations (Bates, 2002; Wood, 1994). On this basis, there is a need to distinguish between two types of migration: forced migration and unforced migration (Bates, 2002). In the case of refugees, migration is forced and involuntary. The 1951 UN Convention underlines this distinction, defining a refugee as a person who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 2019, p.18).

Given these distinct experiences, it is evident that refugees should not be subjected to integration policies developed for other migrants. Refugees' unique challenges necessitate dedicated research to inform specific policies that address refugee integration and governance. The following sections will critically explore the extant literature on migrant integration to better understand refugee integration policymaking and governance in the UK context.

1.5 The UK's De Facto Refugee Integration Policy in the Absence of a Defined Framework

Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016) argue that the primary function of integration policy is to facilitate the integration of migrants into a new society. They describe integration policies as part of a normative political process that involves identifying integration as an issue, framing it normatively, and then crafting and executing specific policy measures to achieve a desired result. Furthermore, they note that other general policies—such as those concerning education, healthcare, housing, the labour market, and public regulation of religion—can significantly impact (either positively or negatively) the integration processes (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016). Although the UK lacks a formally documented policy for refugee integration, it would be inaccurate to claim that there is a complete absence of policies or efforts regarding the integration of refugees in the country. In my research, when I use the term "Refugee Integration Policy in the UK" I mean to refer to some of the various existing components at both local and national levels. As I examined the UK's approach to refugee integration and its developmental trajectory (referenced in Chapter 2), I was able to develop a full understanding of the current practices. This understanding has led me to the identification of three primary elements. These elements collectively embody what I term the UK Refugee Integration Policy.

Firstly, I argue that the concept of policy in this context extends beyond conventional definitions. I argue that sometimes having no policy is a policy in its own right (Penninx, 2015). Dye (1975, p.1) suggests that policy encompasses both governmental actions and inactions; he defined a policy as "whatever governments choose to do or not do", implying that the absence of a formal policy can itself constitute a policy stance. This perspective aligns with Colebatch and Hoppe's (2018) understanding, where policy is also seen as the interplay between different levels of government and their approaches to public issues. Therefore, one can claim that the UK government's decision not to formally document a national refugee integration policy, effectively delegating this responsibility to the local level, is in itself a policy choice and should be recognised as such.

Secondly, I argue that by transferring the responsibility for refugee integration to the local level, the UK government has unintentionally fostered the development of ad hoc

local policies for refugee integration. As a result, some local authorities end up taking the responsibility of planning, designing, and implementing their own refugee integration systems and interventions. This decision is in line with the “local turn” position discussed in Chapter 3. Although devolving the responsibility for integrating refugees to the local level has its limitations, as argued in Chapter 3, it acknowledges the role of local communities in integration processes. Activities such as providing language classes, job market preparation, housing assistance, education access, NHS registration, and organising intercultural events, all form part of what can be perceived as elements of a *de facto* UK integration policy. However, a significant gap exists between the devolved nations, which have their own policies and frameworks, which lack a formal refugee integration policy. This discrepancy highlights a conflict within the UK’s approach to integration. The Indicators of Integration (IOI) framework developed by the Home Office stands as the only whole-nation document currently in operation, offering a set of common criteria and metrics for assessing integration outcomes across the UK. Yet, its implementation varies widely, with devolved nations incorporating it into their specific policies while England lacks a coherent strategy, leading to inconsistent practices and support systems.

Thirdly, the mainstreaming of refugee integration into broader public services and policies, as detailed in Chapter 3, represents another aspect of this policy framework. Accordingly, I argue that by mainstreaming refugee integration in the UK, the government has chosen to integrate refugees into existing public service frameworks instead of targeting them as a separate group within the community. This approach requires refugees to access health care, employment services, housing, and education in the same manner as their peer-groups within the British community. This approach works hand in hand with devolving the responsibility of integration to the local level. Thus, I argue that this strategy also forms part of the UK’s overarching Refugee Integration Policy.

Collectively, these three elements reinforce the existence of a Refugee Integration Policy in the UK, albeit not collated in a single policy document. However, the disparities between the devolved nations and the lack of a formal policy for England highlight the need for a more unified and comprehensive approach. The absence of a formal integration policy specifically for England creates a significant gap. Unlike

Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, which have their own tailored integration policies, England lacks a cohesive framework (see also Chapter 2). This disparity leads to inconsistencies and inequalities in how refugee integration is approached across the UK. The Integrated Communities Strategy (ICS) of 2019 is the only document that serves as a national guideline, but it falls short of being a comprehensive integration policy and it takes no account of the specific needs of refugees as it's more aimed at minoritised communities.

Moreover, the lack of a formal English policy contrasts sharply with the more structured approaches in the devolved nations, creating a conflict in the overall UK policy landscape. This fragmentation complicates integration processes, leaving local authorities in England to navigate without a unified strategy. The role of the Indicators of Integration framework (IOI) is crucial here, as it remains the only whole-nation integration document currently in operation, offering a set of benchmarks and guidelines (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the reliance on IOI underscores the need for a more formal and coherent policy for England to address the specific challenges faced by refugees.

In my doctoral research, conducted in Birmingham, I have focused on local-level interventions, engaging directly with refugees and key stakeholders. This allowed me to better understand the challenges and limitations faced in accessing mainstream services, as well as to identify the current gaps in local interventions. My findings highlight the pressing need for a formalised policy framework to support refugee integration effectively across England.

1.6 Research Questions and Objectives

This doctoral research examined the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking to generate new knowledge from refugees and bring it to policymakers. Previous studies have examined integration policies, but they have not done so from the perspectives of refugees. And little has been done to involve these end-users directly in co-producing knowledge that feeds into policies. My research fills this gap in knowledge, introducing an innovative approach to examining integration policies for refugees in the UK through a design thinking approach. The main aim was to develop practical refugee integration ideas with refugees and feed them into

polymaking processes, in the hope that this will support the development of a coordinated and holistic policy for sustainable integration for refugees in the UK. Accordingly, I focused my PhD on the following objectives which were guided by my main research question: How can a design thinking approach help generate new knowledge about refugee integration in the UK? Table 1.1 below sets out the six objectives, associated sub-research questions and methods:

Table 1.1: Objectives, sub-research questions and methods

Objectives	Sub-Research Questions (SRQs)	Methods (see also Ch. 6)
Implementing a design thinking approach with refugees	1-How can design thinking methods be implemented to ensure refugee co-production in integration policy?	FGDs with Refugees (Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype); Interviews with Policymakers (Test)
Using the design thinking approach to identify refugees' understandings of integration	2- What do refugees understand integration to be?	FGDs with Refugees (Empathise); Brainstorming activity
Using the design thinking approach to explore refugees' perspectives on the types of policy needed to support refugee integration	3- What kinds of integration policy do refugees identify as needed to meet their needs?	FGDs with Refugees (Define, Ideate, Prototype); Experience Diagramming Activity; Statement Starter Activity; Visualise the Vote Activity; Group Proposal Activity
Exploring if design thinking tools would generate collective knowledge	4- Can design thinking tools facilitate collective knowledge generation amongst refugees?	Pre-post FGDs questionnaires
Identifying ways of sharing refugees' knowledge with policymakers	5- How can knowledge collated using a design thinking approach help policymakers to design and implement new refugee integration interventions?	First round of interviews with policymakers
Exploring how policymakers engage with refugee knowledge to shape integration policy	Related to the previous Sub-Research question	Second round of interviews with policymakers
Evaluating a design thinking approach within refugee integration policy processes	6- What are the strengths and weaknesses of a design thinking approach?	Reflection on FGDs and policymaker interviews (Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test); Thematic analysis (see Ch. 9)

This series of questions arises from the intersection of design thinking and refugee integration in the UK. As highlighted in Chapter 2, refugee integration is not only a

matter of urgent social importance but also one of great political sensitivity. Crotty (2020) argues that research often emerges from the need to address real-life issues, solve pressing problems, or answer critical questions. Refugee integration, especially in the UK, is a field that has undergone significant transformations since the early 2000s. These developments, key to understanding the present research context, are summarised below and explored in depth in Chapter 2.

Refugees, the primary focus of this study, represent a particularly vulnerable group seeking protection and a new life. Therefore, their experiences and the effectiveness of integration policies are particularly important (see Chapter 5 for more on the effectiveness of policies). As a consequence of refugees fleeing their country alongside the often-traumatic situations of their migration, they face an extra layer of challenges to their integration journey. Despite their resilience and resourcefulness in escaping life-threatening situations, their potential and skills are often underutilised in their host countries, including the UK.

The UK, with its diverse and complex landscape as mentioned earlier, presents a unique setting for this research. Additionally, the UK was one of the leading countries in refugee integration and has developed an integration framework as part of the “Indicators of Integration (IoI) report” which was first published by the Home Office in 2004 (Ager and Strang, 2004). Since then, these indicators have been used comprehensively by many researchers and policymakers in both the EU and UK (Phillimore, 2019) and revised in 2019 (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). This PhD is focused on the specific local context of Birmingham, where the interaction between refugees, communities, and policymakers can be observed in detail. This focus was a result of many limitations faced during the fieldwork, including conducting research during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Chapter 6). However, Birmingham provided a good case study as it has a large and diverse population of refugees and asylum seekers, making it an ideal location to study the integration of this population. According to the Office of National Statistics, in 2017, Birmingham had the highest number of asylum seekers in the UK, with over 12,000 claimants. Secondly, Birmingham has a long history of welcoming and integrating refugees, with a number of organisations and initiatives dedicated to this purpose. In December 2015, Birmingham became recognised as a City of Sanctuary providing a culture of hospitality and welcome, especially for

refugees seeking sanctuary from war and persecution (Birmingham City of Sanctuary, 2015). At the same time, Birmingham City Council (BCC) committed to welcoming 550 Syrian refugees to the city by 2020, resulting in 516 individuals arriving on this scheme (BCC, n.d.).

Given the research objectives outlined earlier, specific methodological choices were made to best address these concerns. Recognising the critical role of context in understanding policy impacts, as indicated in both literature and policy documents, a mixed method research strategy was employed. This approach emphasised both context and individual experiences. A combination of methods including document review, focus group discussions (with design thinking activities), in-depth interviews, and questionnaires were utilised. This triangulation provided a comprehensive view of the design thinking process in refugee integration, capturing various perspectives and experiences.

Focus group discussions, particularly with refugee communities, offered invaluable insights into the practicalities and challenges of integration policy implementation and offered a space to co-produce solutions. Interviews complemented these discussions, adding depth through validating the feasibility of solutions and understanding perspectives of policymakers and other stakeholders. This multifaceted approach facilitated the identification of key themes related to the design thinking process in refugee integration, which are further analysed and discussed throughout this thesis.

In the next section of this chapter, I outline the structure and contents of the thesis, indicating how these themes are intertwined into the narrative of the research. This research is not only an academic endeavour but also a personal journey, informed by my experiences and academic and work background, aiming to contribute meaningfully to the field of refugee integration and policy development.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of nine chapters including this introduction chapter. The first few chapters lay down the foundation to the conceptual framework that guides the design of the methodology and implementation of design thinking in refugee integration, followed by discussion of the findings in the final chapters.

Chapter 2: Exploring the Landscape of Integration in the UK: Concepts and Policies

The chapter focuses on key areas within integration research, including concepts and policies. It discusses the importance of differentiating between different terminologies in order to build better understanding of the complexity of refugee integration policy. The reviewed terminologies are assimilation, multiculturalism, cohesion, acculturation, and integration. The chapter also touches on other concepts, including a differentiation between refugees and migrants and the importance of having separate policies that target each of these groups. An analysis of the history of social inclusion policy development in the UK since the 1960s, with a particular focus on refugee integration policy framework from the 2000s, is then presented. The policy development and impact set the scene for further exploration of integration policymaking literature in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Refugee Integration Policy and Governance

This chapter offers an overview of integration policymaking and governance with a focus on refugee integration by looking at some of the key factors that influence the decision making stage in what I term the refugee integration policy cycle. The chapter introduces the key stages in the policymaking process in general, to frame this cycle. The chapter then moves to discuss the multidimensionality of refugee integration and the importance of considering the role of both refugees and host communities in achieving the refugee integration policy. Finally, multi-level governance of migrant integration and other aspects that influence migrant integration policymaking and governance are discussed, in order to see how understanding agenda dynamics, the “local turn”, and mainstreaming migrant integration can help in building a new model of refugee integration.

Chapter 4: Design Thinking

In this chapter I explore design thinking literature and history. The chapter provides a condensed review of the history and practices of design thinking with special focus on its applicability within the context of policymaking, particularly for refugee and migrant integration, aiming to build a foundational understanding of this methodological approach and its applicability in social policy. Design thinking, recognised for its

human-centred, solution-focused approach, involves empathetic engagement, creativity, and iterative testing, and has evolved from its business origins to address complex societal and policy challenges. Its process, characterised by the steps of Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test, offers a framework for developing innovative and practical solutions to policy problems, especially those that are complex and ill-defined. This approach is particularly valuable in the uncertain realm of public policy, ensuring policies are effective and resonate with the needs of those they aim to serve. The chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature at the nexus of design thinking and policymaking, examining its history, theoretical underpinnings, methodologies, applications, and potential in refugee integration policymaking. It also identifies gaps in the literature, focusing on leveraging design thinking for more inclusive and effective policymaking in the context of refugee and migrant integration. This review sets the basis for discussing the PhD's conceptual framework in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Conceptual Framework

This chapter constructs a conceptual framework by linking the various themes and ideas discussed in previous chapters. This framework is crucial as it forms the foundation of my research, specifically focusing on the use of the design thinking approach in developing refugee integration policies. The goal is to present a theoretical structure, and also to offer a practical guide for applying these concepts in real-world policy development. The chapter begins by revisiting the policy cycle concept introduced in Chapter 3. This revisit serves to refresh and expand upon the understanding of the policy cycle, particularly emphasising its relevance to the context of refugee integration. Following this, I bring back the concept of design thinking in policymaking, as explored in Chapter 4. I will include theoretical justifications for using design thinking, illustrating how its principles can lead to more effective and human-centred refugee integration policy. Finally, I synthesise these concepts into a comprehensive conceptual framework. This framework aims to integrate the traditional policy cycle with the design thinking approach. The intention is to create a model that identifies and addresses the existing gaps in refugee integration policies, and also encourages greater co-production and stakeholder involvement. By involving refugees directly in the policymaking process, the framework seeks to ensure that policies are

not only well-informed and context-specific but also more likely to be accepted and effective. This conceptual framework will serve as a guide for my research design, providing a structured approach to examining how design thinking can inform and improve the process of refugee integration policymaking. The ultimate goal is to propose a model that can lead to policies which are not only theoretically sound but also practically viable and responsive to the real needs of refugees and host communities.

Chapter 6: Methodology

This chapter explores the research methodology employed in this PhD and discusses its evolution. Following a pragmatic critical realism philosophical stance and mixed method approach, I integrate design thinking tools and approach to examine the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration. The chapter explains the methods and tools in detail, including employing focus group discussions with refugees, pre-post FGD questionnaires, and selective interviews with policymakers. I also discuss the sampling and recruitment and reflect on challenges and power dynamics, as well as my research positionality. The chapter concludes with an overview of my thematic approach to analyse the findings.

Chapter 7: Refugee Insights and Co-designed Solutions for Holistic Integration

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the outcomes from focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugees in Birmingham, framed within the design thinking methodology and enriched with creative interactive tools. The primary objective was to understand the complex dynamics of refugee integration, identifying both barriers and pathways to more effective integration into host communities. The utilisation of design thinking served as a lens to examine solutions to these complex challenges, with the dual aim of generating actionable data and addressing specific research inquiries. The chapter provides answers to research questions 2 and 3 with a focus on the Empathise, Define, Ideate, and Prototype stages of design thinking. Despite satisfaction with social networking services, refugees expressed a desire for improvements in housing, employment, education, and health services to better meet their needs. The chapter identifies gaps in current integration services, particularly in housing quality and stability, employment access barriers due to language and

credential recognition, and the need for more targeted health services. Finally, throughout the chapter I engage with findings from pre-post FGD questionnaires which were crucial in evaluating the impact of design thinking on shifting perceptions and priorities regarding integration.

Chapter 8: Evaluating Design Thinking's Impact on Refugee Integration Service design

In this chapter, the examination of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking is furthered by assessing the practicality of refugee generated solutions; this examination responds to Research Question 4. The focus of the chapter is the 'Test' stage of design thinking, discussed through two rounds of semi-structured interviews with policymakers in Birmingham, and analysed thematically, concentrating on the transition from conceptual ideas to actionable policies. The first round of interviews sought to bring together refugees' and policymakers' perspectives, evaluating the impact of refugee-suggested solutions on integration policies. Therefore, I start the chapter with discussion of findings from round one, mainly focusing on exploring policymakers' attitudes towards integration, the necessity for stakeholder engagement, and the effectiveness of refugee input. Following on from this, the second round of interviews assessed shifts in policy approaches, investigating the implementation of solutions proposed by refugees and the role of design thinking in shaping policy. In essence, this chapter bridges the gap between theoretical insights and practical policy applications, underlining the significance of stakeholder collaboration in the policymaking process and the transformative potential of design thinking in refugee integration.

Chapter 9: Conclusion: Insights from Utilising Design Thinking in Refugee Integration

In this final chapter, I highlight the novel contributions of this thesis to the scholarly discourse on refugee integration and public policy design through the investigation of design thinking application. In addition, I touch on the difficulties encountered and the lessons learned, while reflecting on the constraints encountered during the research process. Specifically, I will focus on answering Research Questions 1 and 5. First, I discuss Research Question 1, looking at the application of design thinking in refugee

integration policymaking and service design, then move on to Research Question 5, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. By doing this, I pave the way for future academic research and promoting a paradigm change. This chapter is not merely a conclusion, but rather it is an appeal for public policy and governance to embrace complexity, diversity, and human centredness. It is evidence of the power of design thinking to bring change, and it calls on academics, practitioners, and policymakers to rethink the dynamics of refugee integration from the perspectives of creativity, empathy, and collaborative design.

CHAPTER 2: EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF INTEGRATION IN THE UK: CONCEPTS AND POLICIES

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I conduct an in-depth exploration of the complex concept of integration and associated terms. The aim is to examine and clarify the development of policies that target marginalised groups, particularly migrants, ethnic minorities, and other specific demographics. This analysis is set against the backdrop of demographic shifts, largely driven by increase in migration, which have emphasised the necessity for fostering equality and inclusion for all members of society. I also examine the various social policies that have emerged in response to these demographic changes, particularly in the UK. Among these, integration stands out as a key strategy from the year 2000, succeeding previous strategies like assimilation, cohesion, multiculturalism, and acculturation, which have shaped European and UK policies over the past six decades. This chapter provides a foundation for further exploration of refugee integration policymaking and governance in the following Chapter 3.

In the first section of the chapter, I examine these terminologies, setting the stage for an analysis of how each concept has emerged and the development of its related policies. I start with a detailed examination of assimilation, followed by an exploration of multiculturalism, its evolution, and its impact on social policies across various countries, including the UK. I then move to discuss the multifaceted term “cohesion” in the UK context, particularly its manifestation as community cohesion. This is complemented by an analysis of acculturation, addressing the dynamic interactions and cultural changes that occur when individuals from diverse backgrounds come into continuous contact. Finally, I conclude the section with integration, presenting it as a multidimensional process, distinct from the others, and emphasise the reciprocal adaptation between migrants and the host society (also refer to Chapter 3). This section lays the foundation for understanding integration, characterised by its nuanced and multifaceted nature. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the evolving landscape of integration policies in the UK, starting by policies targeting all migrants, then moving on to refugee integration policies between 2000 and present.

2.2 From Assimilation to Integration: Historical Review

The process of integrating marginalised groups within society, including migrants, ethnic minorities, and other specific demographics, has evolved over time. Most associated policies in the UK were a response to demographic shifts resulting from increased migration, which have highlighted the importance of ensuring equality and inclusion for all societal members. Consequently, diverse social policies have emerged, aimed at acknowledging and catering to the needs of various societal groups. Most policies were formed in response to specific local incidents or demands (Rose and Deakin, 1969). In recent years, social inclusion policies in the UK and other European nations have been implemented under a variety of terms, such as diversity, minority, cultural, and multicultural policies, as well as New Labour social inclusion policies. Integration, along with assimilation, cohesion, multiculturalism, and acculturation, has been predominant as a term used in Europe and the UK for the past six decades. In this section I aim to clarify these terminologies, prior to delving into an analysis of how each model has influenced the integration of refugees and the corresponding policies.

2.2.1 Assimilation

Historically, the term “assimilation” was first used in the migration context by the Chicago School in the United States, through the work of Park and Burgess (1921). They believed that for a “subordinate” group living within a “superordinate” group, complete adoption of the latter's values and culture was vital. This level of contact was deemed superior to other potential relationships that could exist: the accommodation level (i.e. subordinates changing their behaviour to meet the superordinate's values and culture); the competition level (i.e. subordinates maintaining their culture and values which compete with superordinate's values and culture); and the conflict level (i.e. excluding the subordinate group because of its values and culture) (Park and Burgess, 1921). Milton Gordon's work further elaborates on this concept by introducing the idea of 'Anglo-conformity' in the United States, suggesting that assimilation was not merely a matter of cultural absorption but also entailed intermarriage, identification, and civic participation within the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture (Gordon, 1985). Gordon outlined seven stages of assimilation, ranging from cultural and structural assimilation to marital assimilation, identification assimilation, attitude reception assimilation, behaviour reception assimilation, and civic assimilation. His model

suggests a gradual process of assimilation, wherein earlier stages involve superficial cultural exchanges and later stages lead to a deeper, more integral fusion within the dominant cultural and social structures.

Brubaker (2001, p.534) defines assimilation as a concept with dual interpretations: one abstract and general, the other organic and specific. In its general sense, assimilation implies becoming similar; in its specific sense, it implies a transformation, entailing complete absorption. Despite both interpretations necessitating a transition, the latter is more attuned to the consequential state of total absorption.

In the UK context, similar understandings of assimilation have been employed in policies concerning ethnic minorities. The 1960s and 1970s in the UK were characterised by an assimilationist approach, which came as a response to the flow of people from Commonwealth countries in the 1950s (Grosvenor, 1997). At that time assimilation was adopted as many British citizens were concerned about losing British values, and the assumption was that social harmony could be achieved if immigrants adopted British values and lifestyles (Grosvenor, 1997). Ethnic minorities were traditionally expected by government to relinquish their cultural heritage in favour of full integration into the host community's culture, a stance that has been subject to critique for overlooking the value of cultural diversity (Vasta, 2007). Assimilation, in this context, refers to the process where minority groups are expected to abandon their cultural distinctiveness and conform to the prevailing cultural norms of the majority population. Policies during this era, such as the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, were designed to restrict immigration and encourage the assimilation of those who had already migrated (Carson, 1976). Migrants were likely to adapt to the society in social-cultural and social-economic ways in order to fully integrate and participate in society (Brubaker, 2001; Alba and Nee, 2005). The assimilation model was criticised for being based on “a clear national identity” (Scholten et al., 2017) in which migrants are “expected to give up their distinctive linguistic, cultural or social characteristics and become indistinguishable from the majority population” (Zappalà and Castles, 2013, p.76).

2.2.2 Multiculturalism

By the 1970s, the limitations of assimilation became apparent, leading to a shift towards multiculturalism. This approach recognised and celebrated cultural diversity, rather than seeking to suppress it. Multiculturalism as a concept refers to cultural diversity and balancing relations between different groups of society through giving migrants and ethnic minorities equal rights without asking them to abandon their culture (Vertovec, 2007; Castles, 1998). Even though this concept constantly evolved over time and there are different definitions for it (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2005), Vasta (2007) argues that there are two key principles that categorise multiculturalism: social equality and cultural recognition. The first principle means that migrants participate in all societal institutions, including education and employment. The second principle means that migrants have the right to maintain their identity, language, and culture.

Bloemraad (2011) framed multiculturalism as a political philosophy that acknowledges and endorses cultural pluralism. Multiculturalism defies the notion of cultural neutrality within public institutions, suggesting that the accommodation of the varied cultural needs of diverse groups boosts social equality. This philosophical stance has been key in shaping public debates and the work of governmental commissions on multiculturalism. As a practical policy, multiculturalism encourages the acknowledgement and support of cultural diversity through state-sponsored initiatives, such as the inclusion of diverse literature in educational curricula, financial backing for minority-specific educational institutions, and public funding for an array of cultural activities. This policy has found a base in various nations, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Sweden, and the Netherlands, often with a particular emphasis on bilingualism and intercultural exchange.

In the UK, multiculturalism was adopted in the 1970s. Policies during this era were framed under two primary objectives: race relations and race equality, focusing on inter-ethnic connections and legal aspects of social inclusion, respectively (Bleich, 2002; Spencer, 2011a; Scholten, 2016). Race relations focused on inter-ethnic contacts and connections between different races, while race equality focused on accessing rights and the legal dimension of social inclusion (Cantle, 2018; Scholten, 2016). Multiculturalism as a policy aimed to accommodate the cultural differences of various ethnic groups while promoting equality of opportunity through multicultural

education. However, it was criticised for unintentionally fostering segregation and diminishing collective action against societal inequalities (Barry, 2002; Younge, 2010), and pushing towards competition between cultures (Lentin, 2008). Subsequently, the onset of the 1980s marked a pivotal change in UK policies and the death of multiculturalism in the UK, largely influenced by the British Nationality Act 1981 and the eruption of race riots across London, Brixton, Liverpool, Manchester, and other parts of Britain (Childs, 2013). These riots highlighted the growing racial tensions within the country, which provided a complex context for the emergence of acculturation in the UK.

2.2.3 Acculturation

Acculturation refers to a process in which individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds engage in continuous and direct contact, resulting in changes to the original cultural practices of one or both groups involved (Redfield et al., 1936). This process is not unidirectional; rather, it includes a multi-layered exchange where both the minority and the majority cultures influence each other, although not always proportionally. It often results in individuals adopting aspects of the dominant culture, such as language and social norms, while retaining significant features of their original culture, which can include religious practices, values, or dietary preferences. Furthermore, acculturation is not a one-time event, it is a continuous process that can manifest differently across individuals and groups, influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, education, and the openness of the host society (Portes and Rumbaut, 2014). It is important to distinguish acculturation from assimilation, that implies a complete absorption into the dominant culture, or multiculturalism, that endorses the presence and contribution of diverse cultural groups within a society. Acculturation allows for a more pluralistic integration, where cultural integrity is maintained and respected alongside new cultural adoption. Acculturation as a discourse extends to various disciplines, recognising it as a complex and bidirectional process that involves psychological and social dimensions.

Gordon (1985) has argued that acculturation is the first stage of assimilation. In his model, acculturation is focused on minority groups learning the culture of the dominant group including values and language. After acculturation happens, minority groups start integrating into the social structure of the larger society, which Gordon refers to

as integration (structural assimilation), and eventually intermarriage (marital assimilation) is established. Gordon argued that the movement from acculturation to integration is crucial to achieve full assimilation. On the contrary, Berry (1997) argued that unlike assimilation, acculturation did not imply a one-way adaptation but rather a mutual adaptation, where both majority and minority cultures influence each other. Berry (1997) introduced a theoretical framework for understanding acculturation, which organises the adaptive strategies of individuals into two principal dimensions. The first dimension evaluates whether individuals value retaining their indigenous cultural identity. The second dimension assesses their interest in forming relationships within the broader societal context. According to these two dimensions, Berry (1997) identified four distinct acculturation strategies:

1. Assimilation: characterised by individuals embracing the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture at the expense of their original cultural identity.
2. Separation: individuals maintain their original cultural identity and reject the dominant host culture. This is often seen among immigrants who move to ethnic communities.
3. Integration: individuals incorporate the norms of the dominant culture while still preserving their original cultural identity, often leading to a bicultural identity.
4. Marginalisation: occurs when individuals neither maintain their original cultural identity nor adopt the new host culture.

Berry's framework was adopted by many researchers that studied integration, and the societal reception of acculturation strategies has evolved. Mainly the studies that followed Berry's model indicate that the acculturation strategy employed can vary between private and public spheres of life (Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver, 2004). For example, an individual might reject the host culture's values privately (separation) yet conform to them in public settings (integration or assimilation).

2.2.4 Cohesion

Cohesion is a term which most commonly refers to either social cohesion or community cohesion, and at times is used interchangeably (Cantle, n.d.). However, the two are different in the sense that social cohesion is the glue that bonds society together, while community cohesion is a framework that measures social relationships

within the community. Kearns and Forrest (2000) suggest that social cohesion encompasses five dimensions: shared values and civic culture, social order and control, social networks and capital, social solidarity and wealth disparity reduction, and place attachment and identity. In the UK context, community cohesion has been particularly influential, defined by Perry and Blackaby (2007) as entailing shared aspirations for the nation's future, a robust sense of individual rights, equal access to opportunities, institutional trust, acknowledgment of contributions from all community members, and positive intergroup relations. In 2004 in particular, the UK government promoted community cohesion as a strategy that involves creating a common vision and sense of belonging among diverse communities, promoting equal life opportunities, and building positive relationships (LGA, 2004).

In September 2001, some areas in the UK witnessed civil unrest as a result of tension between communities, which Cantle (2001) explained resulted from ethnic segregation and lack of interaction between communities. This segregation was perceived by the UK government as a result of multiculturalism failing to build shared values between different groups and races in the British community. After the Cantle report “the paradigm of ‘parallel lives’ was forged whereby particular ethnic and religious groups are presumed to be self-segregating into ethnic enclaves” (Flint and Robinson, 2008, p.1), which puts the responsibility for unrest on deprived neighbourhoods which are heavily populated by minorities (especially Muslims). The UK Government pushed to frame social inclusion under the new community cohesion model. This approach emphasised bridging social capital gaps and fostering a unified British identity, but was criticised for perpetuating negative stereotypes, particularly towards Muslims, who were accused of being “guilty” for “self-segregating” themselves (Finney and Simpson, 2009; Phillips et al., 2007; Ratcliffe, 2012). Finney and Simpson contested Cantle's proposition, suggesting that minority groups exhibit a readiness to assimilate and actively participate in societal integration and that the idea of parallel lives was a myth. In contrast, they argue that it is predominantly “the majority White populations” that demonstrate significant isolation and a lesser degree of interaction with communities dissimilar to their own (Simpson and Finney, 2009, p.43).

Community cohesion in the UK emerged as part of government efforts to devolve responsibility for integration to the local level, allowing local authorities to address

specific community needs. Practical guidance from the government regarding implementing community cohesion through different areas at the local level was supported with a variety of programmes including regeneration (House of Commons, 2004), education (LGA, 2004), and housing (Perry and Blackaby, 2007). Moreover, special funds were provided by the UK central government to support efforts at mainstreaming community cohesion to everyday practice through other social programmes and services (Cantle, n.d.). Despite criticisms, community cohesion marked the start of contemporary social policies related to race relations and integration in the UK.

2.2.5 Integration

As mentioned in Chapter 1 and discussed further in Chapter 3, integration is a multidimensional process that involves settling in, interacting with the host community, and experiencing social change as result of immigration. Phillimore (2020, p.1946) argues that integration should be viewed through a multi-dimensional model that considers “five sets of host society opportunity structures: locality, discourse, relations, structure, and initiatives and support”. This model emphasizes the importance of understanding integration as a process that happens at different levels and focusing on the individual and collective outcomes, as well as highlighting the influence of the social, political, and economic context in which integration takes place. Integration as a concept is nuanced and multifaceted (see also section 2.3 and Chapter 3). It can be viewed as a process distinct from assimilation, cohesion, multiculturalism, and acculturation, each representing different paradigms of how individuals and groups interact within a society.

While assimilation is often characterised by a one-directional expectation for migrants to adapt to the dominant culture, leading to a potential loss of their original cultural identity, integration suggests a more equitable exchange. Integration promotes the idea that both migrants and the host society undergo mutual adaptation, resulting in the creation of shared social norms that allow for a diverse yet cohesive society (Castles et al., 2002). Moreover, in contrast to cohesion, which generally refers to the establishment of a common ground of shared values and experiences among members of a society, integration acknowledges and allows for a plurality of values and experiences, encouraging the participation of all groups within the existing societal

framework. Integration is thus more concerned with the role of diverse groups within the public sphere and ensuring their equal participation in social, economic, and political life. Integration also goes beyond multiculturalism's focus on institutional support, involving not just the recognition but the active inclusion of different cultures within the fabric of everyday societal operations. While multiculturalism can sometimes imply the coexistence of parallel societies, integration suggests intertwining these diverse threads into a single societal tapestry, where cultural exchange is a two-way street. And although acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change that can lead to various outcomes, including integration, as a societal goal, integration encompasses broader social domains, including legal, economic, and political dimensions, beyond the individual or group psychological changes outlined by acculturation.

In this thesis, I define integration as a dynamic, two-way process that entails both refugees and the host society adapting their norms and values to construct new social norms that will enable inclusion for all members of society. It represents a model that allows for diversity and the equitable sharing of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It stands apart from other models in that it seeks a middle ground between the preservation of individual cultural identities and the creation of a unified, yet diverse, social entity. Integration here is not merely about cultural exchange or policy enactment; it is about the nuanced interplay of the social, political, and economic contexts that shape the experiences of both migrants and the host community.

2.3 Overview of Integration Policies in the UK (2000 to present)

Understanding the refugee integration policy context and its history is an important aspect of my PhD in order to identify current gaps and potential learnings. This historical understanding is pivotal as it allows me to pinpoint specific areas where design thinking could make significant contributions, particularly in addressing the shortcomings of past policies. Thus, in this section I review the development of refugee integration in the UK, where the first refugee integration policy document was developed in 2000 (Broadhead and Spencer, 2020). I then shift the focus to England since the responsibility for refugee integration was devolved to the local level by the passing of the Localism Act in 2011 (DCLG, 2011). I decided to put special focus on England, as a result of choosing Birmingham as a case study. In England, the Home

Office oversees refugee integration, focusing on legal rights, settlement, and eventual citizenship (Broadhead and Spencer, 2020), while the local councils and Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) are responsible for local integration. Figure 2.1 presents a timeline for of refugee integration in England, which will be explored further in the following text. The figure identifies whether a policy document refers to the UK as a whole or England, noting that England's distinct refugee integration policies began in 2012, and it doesn't cover initiatives at the EU level (Home Office, 2000).

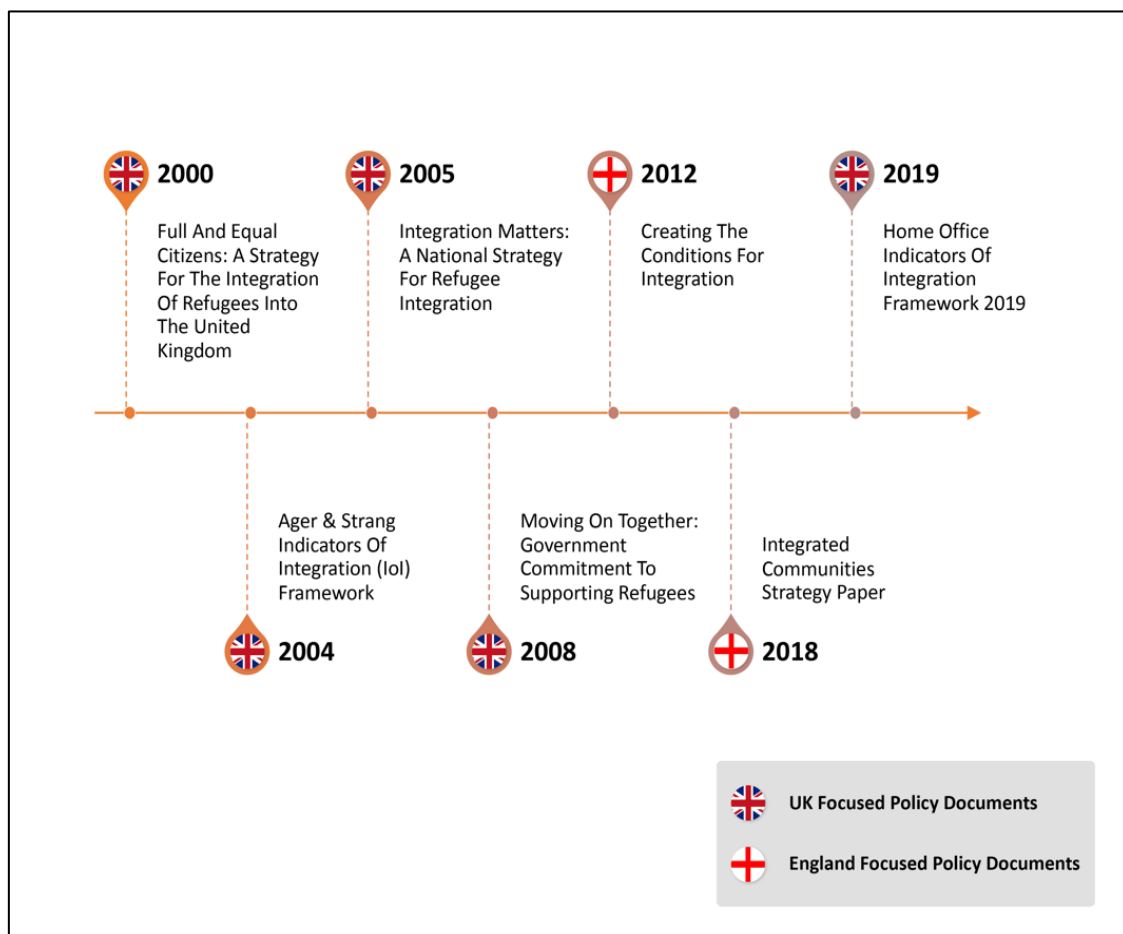


Figure 2.1: Timeline of Refugee Integration Policy Documents in the UK and England between 2000 and 2023 (Author)

The first ever strategy related to refugee integration in the UK was launched in 2000 under the New Labour government, titled: *Full and Equal Citizens: A Strategy for the Integration of Refugees into the United Kingdom* (Home Office, 2000). This strategy primarily focused on assisting refugees in obtaining employment, accessing benefits,

housing, healthcare, educational opportunities, and language courses, alongside fostering their participation in community activities (Home Office, 2000; Mulvey, 2015; Broadhead and Spencer, 2020). The document did not provide a clear definition for refugee integration and only hinted at a vision of integration achieved through attaining social citizenship rights. It emphasised enabling refugees to "develop their potential" in various areas of UK life, including social, cultural, and economic domains (Home Office, 2000, p.2). Although the title implies that it is a national strategy, however, the strategy was formed to support small local projects as well as providing funding to NGOs working with refugees (Mulvey, 2015). A National Refugee Integration Forum (NRIF) was then created as response to the strategy and to oversee its implementation. The NRIF was chaired by the Home Office and included members from the voluntary sector; however, it did not include representatives from the sub-national bodies (Mulvey, 2018). At that time, the community cohesion model was adopted to enable migrants to maintain their identity and culture (LGA, 2002), which was supported by a separate fund from the Home Office for groups of refugees to start their own refugee community organisations (RCOs) in order to maintain their cultural activities (Zetter and Pearl, 2000). These RCOs were later involved in the NRIF with other stakeholders who advised the government on refugee integration in the UK (Phillimore, 2012). The policy was criticised for focusing on the functionality of integration (i.e., accessing services) and ignoring the personal and social dimension (Ager and Strang, 2004; Phillimore, 2012), as well as overlooking the role of social networks in facilitating integration (Cheung and Phillimore, 2014). The Full and Equal Citizens strategy laid out plans for different programmes and policy outcomes that facilitated implementing refugee integration, such as *Working to Rebuild Lives* (Department of Work and Pensions, 2003) that focused on facilitating refugee access to the labour market (Mulvey, 2015), and setting the first indicators to measure integration outcomes in the UK (Ager and Strang, 2004).

The Home Office followed the *Full and Equal Citizens* strategy with the *Indicators of Integration* (IoI) developed by Ager and Strang in 2004 to help improve understanding of the meaning of refugee integration in the UK and to be used to evaluate refugee integration outcomes and guide future work in this area (Ager and Strang, 2004). The framework was structured around ten key domains that are important to refugee integration. These domains are grouped under four headings: markers and means,

social connections, language and cultural knowledge, and rights and citizenship. The markers and means category include domains such as employment, housing, education, and health, which are important areas of accomplishment and serve as both markers and means of integration. The social connections category includes domains like social bridges, social bonds, and social links, emphasising the significance of relationships in integration processes. The language and cultural knowledge category focuses on the importance of language proficiency and cultural understanding. Lastly, the rights and citizenship category highlights the rights, entitlements, and obligations that form the foundation of integration (Figure 2.2). The framework was developed to serve as a guidance for long-term planning of refugee integration projects and then to be used as measures to evaluate its influence. It addressed some of the shortcomings in the Full and Equal Citizens strategy by reflecting the importance of social capital and social connection that have been discussed in Berry's work (1994, 1997), and was the first attempt to measure refugee integration and make it tangible. However, the framework failed to develop knowledge about the interlinkages between domains and the role these linkages play in facilitating integration (Phillimore, 2012). See also Chapter 3, where I explore multidimensionality and the significance of understanding integration as a multi-layered, complex process.

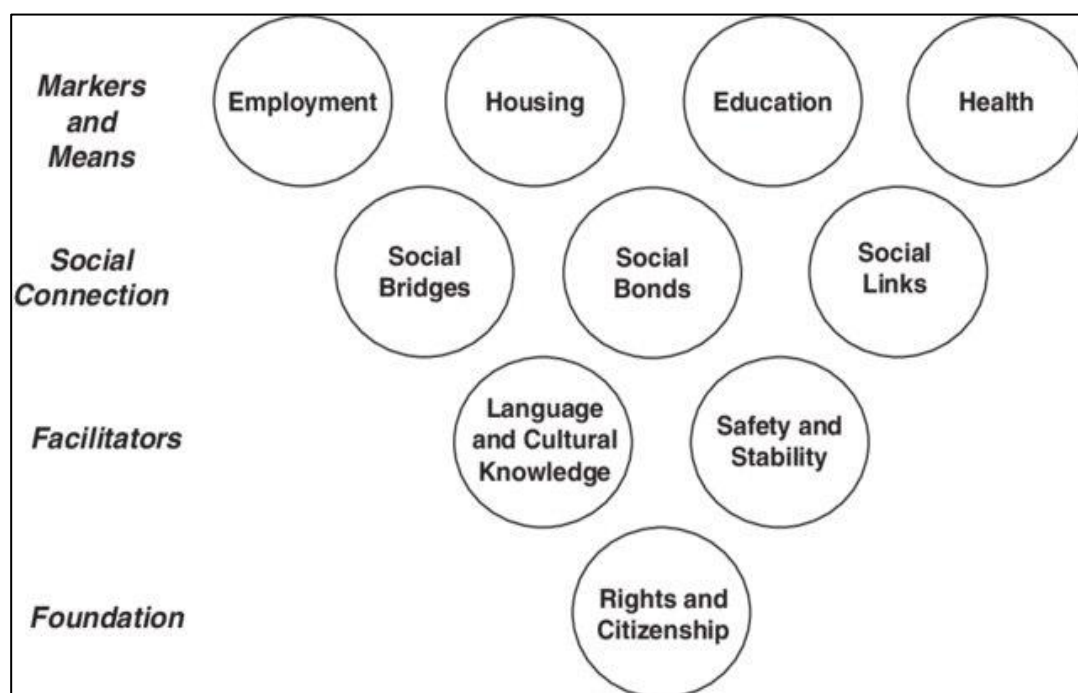


Figure 2.2: Ager and Strang's Indicators of Integration (Ioi) (Ager and Strang, 2004, p.3)

The *Integration Matters Strategy* replaced *Full and Equal Citizens* in 2005 (Home Office, 2005). The strategy outlined previous outcomes of refugee integration and included national funded refugee integration programmes (Mulvey, 2015). Integration Matters highlighted the significance of individual integration experiences and the need to design refugee integration programmes that take into consideration the personal needs of each refugee. The strategy introduced the National Refugee Integration Services (Sunrise), a pilot programme with a plan to allocate to a caseworker for each new refugee, in an expectation that the caseworker would “manage the transition from asylum seeker to refugee and produce a Personal Integration Plan covering longer-term integration objectives” (Home Office, 2005, p.8). The Sunrise programme was replaced in 2008 with a new programme, the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES), which mainly focused on employment as it was perceived to be the key to facilitating integration by giving refugees financial independence (EUROPA, n.d.). RIES was implemented as part of the Labour Government’s last refugee integration strategy, *Moving on Together: Government Commitment to Supporting Refugees* (Home Office, 2008). This strategy focused on reforms within the Home Office and reinforced government support, emphasising enabling refugees to access the labour market. However, it did not address the barriers they faced during this process and was scrapped in austerity cuts (Mulvey, 2018).

Later on, the UK government devolved the responsibility for refugee integration to local authorities, encouraging devolved authorities to have their own strategies. Accordingly, Wales published its first *Refugee Inclusion Strategy* in 2008 (Tydfil, 2008), and Scotland set up a four-year strategy, *The New Scots: Integrating Refugees into Scotland’s Communities*, in 2014 and then updated it in 2018 (gov.scot, n.d.). In England, the new Coalition Government published *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, a new strategy for migrant integration (DCLG, 2012). This first English strategy transferred the responsibility for integration of all migrants, not only refugees, from central government to local authorities and shifted the provision of integration services from the public sector to private and voluntary sectors (Broadhead and Spencer, 2020). While this strategy promoted migrant integration through a “clear sense of shared aspirations and values”, focusing on what the British community have in common rather than on the differences (DCLG, 2012, p.5), the Casey Review of 2016 highlighted issues of segregation in the UK. The report stated that the “high levels

of social and economic isolation in some places and cultural and religious practices in communities [...] are not only holding some of our citizens back but run contrary to British values and sometimes our laws” (Casey, 2016, p.5).

In 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the *Integrated Communities Strategy* Green Paper, followed by an Action Plan in 2019. This new strategy echoed the government's effort to mainstream integration into other social policy services that target the entire society, focusing on migrant integration without specific mention of refugee integration (HM Government, 2018b). The primary goal of this strategy is “to build strong integrated communities where people - whatever their background - live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities” (HM Government, 2018b, p.9). Acknowledging that integration policy could benefit from improvements, the strategy recommended promoting meaningful social contact, increasing economic opportunities, and providing access to English learning courses (Broadhead and Spencer, 2020). This was followed by commitments to invest in integration, funding multiple programmes including: the Integration Area programme aimed at co-designing integration strategies locally in five areas, the Integrated Communities English Language Programme providing community-based support for English learning, the Integrated Communities Innovation Fund to promote integration through innovative approaches, and the Controlling Migration Fund to assist local areas in managing the impacts of recent migration (Morris and Hochlaf, 2019). Such policy initiatives have increasingly acknowledged the importance of co-production and local stakeholder engagement, which provide a strong foundation for the potential of applying design thinking, which inherently prioritises iterative feedback and user involvement, and can further enhance policy effectiveness and responsiveness.

In 2019, a new set of Indicators of Integration (Iol) was also developed by consultation for the Home Office to focus on refugee integration (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). The framework consists of 14 domains structured around key aspects of integration and updated the previous version of Ager and Strang's indicators to include Social Care, Leisure, Communication, Digital Skills, and Responsibilities (Figure 2.3:). Similar to previous indicators, the domains are divided into four headings: Markers and Means, Social Connections, Language and Communication, and Foundation and

Responsibilities. The framework is designed to be used by local and national practitioners and policymakers to plan integration interventions and strategies and promote understanding of integration experiences.

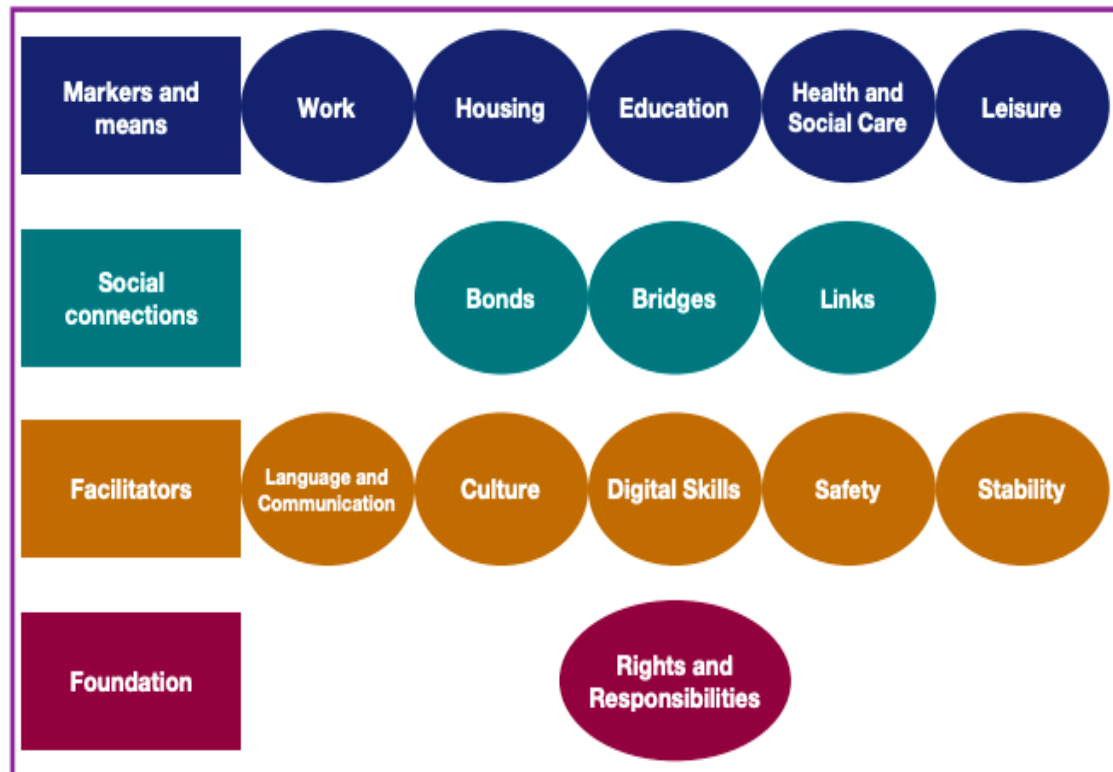


Figure 2.3: New Indicators of Integration (IoI) (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019, p.15)

The framework was founded on four key principles. Firstly, it recognises integration as a multi-dimensional process encompassing various life domains such as work, education, health, and social connections. Secondly, it views integration as a multi-directional effort, requiring active participation from both newcomers and the receiving communities, along with government support. Thirdly, the framework emphasises the importance of everyone taking responsibility for integration, including newcomers, the local community, and government entities. Lastly, it highlights that integration strategies should be context-specific, tailored to the unique needs and challenges of different communities, acknowledging that each place and time presents its own set of circumstances. The 2019 indicators marked a new era of refugee integration in the UK and provided guidance for future interventions, with emphasis on the importance of the role of local communities in facilitating integration as well as refugees themselves. It highlighted the need for practices and structures at both levels to

underpin effective integration, including, at the local level, initiatives that support access to housing, community organisations, cultural activities, and local services; and at the national level strategies to support access to stable accommodation, policies supporting access to local services, and engagement of communities in policy development and implementation (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019).

In 2021, the Home Office published the New Plan for Immigration (NPI) policy statement in which it reinforced its commitment to supporting refugee integration through the Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund (RTOF) and an enhanced integration package (HM Government, 2021). The Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund (RTOF) is a pilot funding scheme designed to support local refugee integration initiatives in England between 2021 and March 2024 (Coventry City Council, 2021). This fund allocated £14 million to four distinct projects, with the objective of enhancing the self-sufficiency and societal integration of newly recognised refugees. These projects focused on assisting refugees in obtaining employment, learning English, securing housing, and forging community connections, and often involved refugees in co-production of these services. The selected projects represent collaborative efforts involving social investors, regional entities such as migration partnerships, local governments, and predominantly organisations from the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector (Copeland, 2022). This initiative was followed up by the Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO), a data linkage pilot project set up by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Home Office. The project aims to test the feasibility of linking refugee data to two administrative data sources: Home Office Exit Checks and NHS Personal Demographic Service (PDS) data (Rogers and Hanson, 2022). RIO holds promise for creating an evidence base regarding the integration outcomes for refugees in the UK, particularly by providing quantitative data on refugee outcomes over the long term (Rogers and Hanson, 2022).

In 2023, the Home Office launched the Refugee Employability Programme (REP) to support refugees in England, helping them overcome language and cultural barriers to enter the job market and integrate into society (Home Office, 2023c). The programme, developed in consultation with refugees and stakeholders, aiming at providing individually tailored assistance for those eligible, will run for two years focusing on long-term integration and economic contribution (Home Office, 2023c).

The REP aims to remove the barriers refugees face when adjusting to life in the UK, which cannot be fully addressed or resolved by mainstream services (Home Office, 2023c). The REP is designed to align with and complement existing integration support delivered across mainstream services and the voluntary sector. The intention is to enhance the current provisions by offering additional support to refugees who would benefit from extra assistance in their journey towards self-sufficiency. The REP is designed not to replace or change existing services, but rather to complement and support them (Home Office, 2023c).

After the above review of the history of refugee integration policies in the UK, it became evident to me that while strategies have evolved to address the multi-faceted nature of integration, there are still some significant gaps and shortcomings that exist in the refugee integration policymaking practice in the UK. Early policies such as the "Full and Equal Citizens" initiated a framework that primarily focused on functional aspects of integration like employment and access to services. Subsequent frameworks, including the "Indicators of Integration", introduced a more nuanced understanding of integration, incorporating social connections and rights, yet often failed to effectively bridge the gap between policy intentions and their practical, impactful implementation on the ground. The shift from centralised strategies to local initiatives, as seen in the devolved nations, highlights a recognition of the need for localised policy responses. However, these efforts frequently lacked coordination and consistency, leading to a divergence. The introduction of design thinking elements in recent policies, such as the "Integrated Communities Strategy" and subsequent programmes, underlines a growing awareness of the need for more inclusive and co-produced policy frameworks that engage refugees directly in the policymaking process. Yet, there remains a critical gap in consistently applying these principles across all levels of policy development. The later strategies reveal an ongoing struggle to balance between national policy objectives and the unique needs of local communities, often compounded by insufficient integration of refugees' own perspectives and experiences in policy formulation. The failure to thoroughly understand and integrate these personal experiences and the local socio-cultural dynamics into national frameworks has resulted in policies that are sometimes out of sync with the realities faced by refugees. Thus, there is need for a more integrated approach that not only addresses the structural and functional dimensions of integration but also deeply engages the

personal and social aspects that are critical to the successful integration of refugees. There is a clear need for a consistent application of co-production in policy development, facilitated by design thinking, to ensure that policies are not only comprehensive but also adaptable to the changing needs and conditions of refugee populations (see also Chapters 3 and 5). This approach promises to bridge the gaps identified in past strategies, fostering policies that are more cohesive, responsive, and ultimately more effective in achieving genuine integration.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I provided a comprehensive and critical exploration of the multifaceted and evolving nature of integration policies in the UK. Starting by exploring the dissimilarities between terms associated with integration was instrumental in positioning my understanding of these concepts, thereby setting the foundation for my interpretation of integration. The examination of concepts such as assimilation, multiculturalism, cohesion, and acculturation, and their impact on the integration of refugees and migrants within UK society highlighted the necessity for tailored approaches in policy formulation.

Understanding these terms allowed me to navigate through historical perspectives, outlining the shift from assimilationist policies to more inclusive strategies like community cohesion and multiculturalism. This historical overview is particularly vital in understanding the elements that influenced integration policy evolution in the UK post 2000. The in-depth review of refugee integration policies, particularly post-2000, contributed to building a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between national strategies and local implementations. The evolution from the *Full and Equal Citizens* strategy to the more recent refugee integration initiatives, such as the *Refugee Employability Programme*, demonstrates a progressive shift towards recognising the unique needs and contributions of refugees. However, it also highlights the lack of a cohesive UK wide integration policy (see also Chapter 1). This evolution is marked by an increasing emphasis on multi-dimensional, multi-directional, and context-specific approaches, underlining the importance of local communities and refugees themselves in integration processes.

The critical examination presented in this chapter not only enhanced my understanding of the UK's integration policies but also set the stage for further exploration in subsequent chapters. It highlighted the significance of an integration approach that balances individual cultural identities with the creation of a unified, yet diverse, society. By clarifying the complexities of integration within the UK context, this chapter provides a solid foundation for my research design. In the following chapter, I will review the literature in relation to refugee integration policymaking and governance, examining elements that influence the integration policy cycle including the local turn, the multidimensionality of integration, mainstreaming integration, the multilevel governance, and agenda dynamics.

CHAPTER 3: REFUGEE INTEGRATION POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

3.1 Introduction

Having discussed the terminologies surrounding the phenomenon of integration as well as reviewing the history of refugee integration policies in the UK, I now move in this chapter to analyse some of the key elements that influence what I term the “refugee integration policy cycle”. I chose to use the policy cycle model to help frame a better understanding of refugee integration policymaking and governance. The chapter reviews literature around migrant integration policymaking and governance in general, since refugees and migrants tend to be conflated when integration is discussed (see Chapter 1). The literature review covers integration policymaking and governance globally, before giving special attention to the UK, which is the focus at the end of this chapter. This chapter will help understand where design thinking could be utilised within this cycle, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

Refugee integration policy and governance are becoming central concerns for many governments in Europe, including the UK (Garcés-Mascreñas and Penninx, 2016). Significant efforts have been made towards measuring and achieving integration in the UK in recent years, as seen in the first edition of the “Indicators of Integration” developed in 2004 (Ager and Strang, 2004) and the more recently developed second edition by the Home Office in 2019 (Ndofo-Tah, et al., 2019). However, it is crucial to explore integration policy processes to understand the gaps in the current approach to refugee integration policymaking and to provide suitable solutions. Using the policy cycle lens, refugee integration policy starts with defining the problem (Agenda Setting) and designing related policy (Policy Formulation), then moving to adopting it (Implementation), and finally evaluating its output to identify shortcomings and redevelop the policy (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). But what are the other factors that play a role in shaping and processing these policies? And how can understanding governance models help us analyse the policymaking process and the factors that impact it? This chapter offers an overview of migrant integration policymaking and governance, with a mention of refugee integration policy where available, by looking at some of the key factors that influence decision making stages in the policy cycle. The chapter starts by introducing the key stages in the policymaking process in general, in order to frame the refugee integration policy cycle. The chapter then moves

to discuss the multidimensionality of refugee integration and the importance of taking the role of both refugees and host communities in achieving the refugee integration policy. Finally, multi-level governance of migrant integration and other aspects that influence migrant integration policymaking and governance are discussed, in order to see how understanding agenda dynamics, the “local turn”, and mainstreaming migrant integration can help in building a new model of refugee integration.

3.2 Policy Cycle as a Framework

In order to analyse refugee integration policy effectively, there is a need to examine the integration policy stages from planning to implementation and evaluation. Early literature on the policy process emerged with Lasswell's (1956) work, wherein he proposed a framework for understanding the decision-making process. Through his multidisciplinary policy process model, a linear process of policymaking includes seven stages: Intelligence, Promotion, Prescription, Invocation, Application, Termination, and Appraisal. However, Lasswell's model has faced criticism, particularly regarding the placement of the termination stage before appraisal, and the portrayal of the policy process as a linear sequence of stages with a definitive beginning and end. This linear view is contested by the reality that policy processes often involve meshed activities from different stages, interacting and influencing each other (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). Contemporary models of the policy cycle typically utilise a loop format, as illustrated in Figure 3.1:, which incorporates a combination of different typologies developed by researchers such as Knill and Tosun (2017), Anderson (2014), Brewer and DeLeon (1983), Jenkins (1978), and May and Wildavsky (1978). In this model, the policy cycle progresses through chronological stages of Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation, Policy Adoption, Implementation, and Evaluation, leading to either termination or reformulation of this policy. The significance of this model lies in its portrayal of a continuous process of feedback, where outputs of the policy are evaluated in order to reframe policy inputs or change the way the problem is defined. Additionally, the model allows us *“to assess the cumulative effects of the various actors, forces, and institutions that interact in the policy process and therefore shape its outcomes”* (Jann and Wegrich, 2007, p.44).

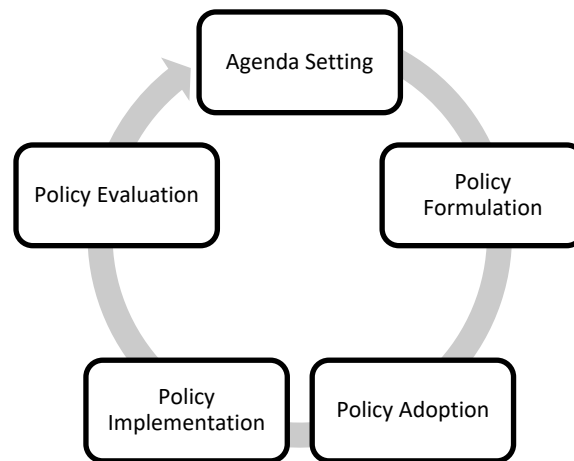


Figure 3.1: Policy Cycle (Knill and Tosun, 2017)

The first stage in the policy cycle is recognising and defining the problem; agenda setting refers to identifying which problems will make it to public policy and get the attention of decision makers (Knill and Tosun, 2017). Once the problem in hand is identified as a public problem that requires a specific solution, policy formulation starts by discussing objectives, actions and alternatives to be attained by this policy (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). Immediately after government institutions decide on objectives and actions, the cycle moves into adoption and then implementation of policy (Knill and Tosun, 2017). Once execution of the policy, by responsible institutions, has begun and its implementation has led to a set of outcomes, the evaluation stage comes to play an important role in reducing problem load and help in solving it (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). Finally, when the policy cycle reaches the evaluation stage, feedback is taken into consideration and decisions are made either to redesign the policy or terminate it.

To foster a deeper understanding of current refugee integration policy models and their governance, it is essential to examine each stage of the policy cycle. As discussed in Chapter 2, reviewing literature on refugee integration policy independently from migrant policy literature is challenging, as refugees are rarely targeted by specific policies and are usually treated as part of larger migrant groups. Hence, in this chapter, my focus is on reviewing literature on migrant integration policy, and on refugee integration policy where available. Previous literature on integration policy has focused on separate stages of the policy cycle. Building knowledge about the migrant integration policy cycle instead requires accumulative review of related

literature. Some of the work on the migrant integration policy cycle has included topics such as discussing agenda dynamics in multilevel governance (Scholten, 2013; Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018; Spencer, 2018; Schmidtke and Zaslove, 2014), integration policy formulation and the importance of mainstreaming (Scholten et al., 2017; Ali and Gidley, 2014; Jensen, 2018; Maan et al., 2015; van Breugel et al., 2014), the implementation and governance of integration policies, emphasising the “local turn” (Phillimore, 2012; John, 2016; Caponio and Borkert, 2010; Hackett, 2017; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017; Galandini et al., 2019); and finally, evaluating refugee integration and establishing its measures (Ager and Strang, 2004; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019; Phillimore, 2012).

Accordingly, I identify two categories of key elements that influence the integration policy cycle: elements that influence integration policymaking, and elements that influence integration governance (see Figure 3.2:). The first category focuses on policymaking and encompasses elements affecting the first three stages of the cycle (i.e., agenda setting, policy formulation, and policy adoption) and includes agenda dynamics, mainstreaming through policy, the local turn, the multidimensionality of integration. The second category focuses on governance and refers to elements impacting the final two phases of the cycle (i.e., policy implementation and policy evaluation) and includes multi-level governance, mainstreaming through governance, the local turn, and the multidimensionality of integration. In the following sections, I will cover these key aspects of the integration policy cycle, exploring how they interact and influence each other. This approach aims to create a cohesive understanding of refugee integration policy practices and governance, in order to identify where design thinking can fill some of the gaps that exist within this policy cycle.

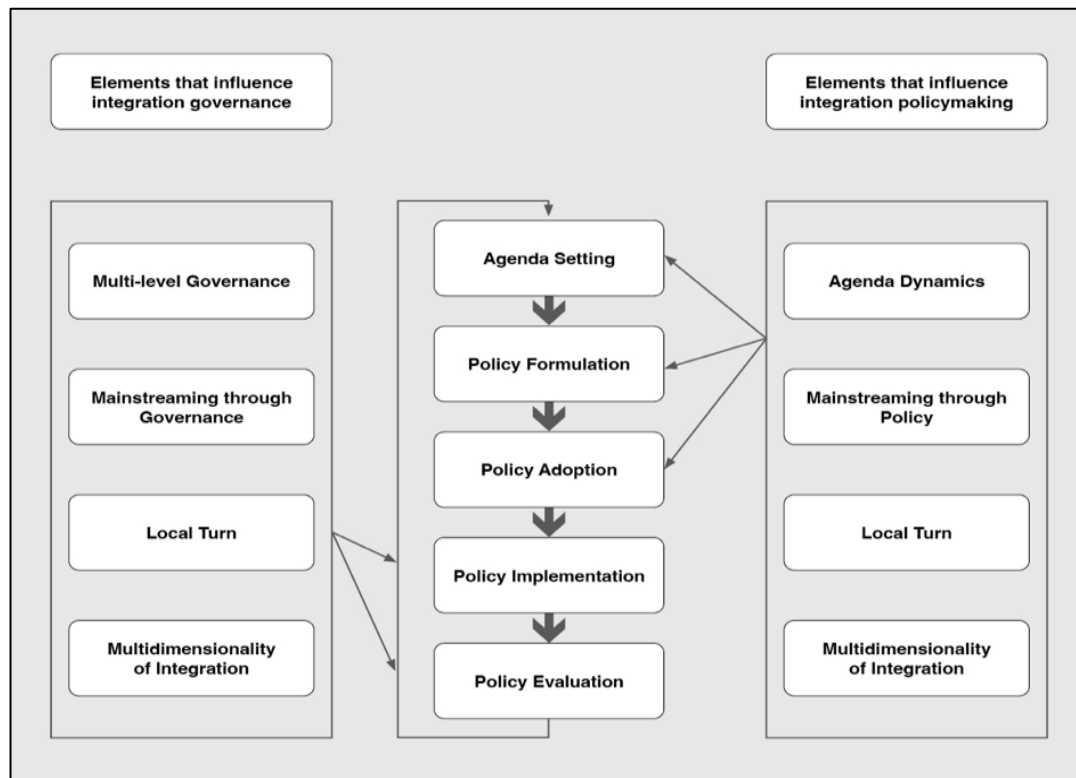


Figure 3.2: Key Elements that Influence Integration Policy and Governance (Author)

3.3 Multidimensionality of Integration

The debate regarding the identification of the most effective model for migrant integration policymaking and governance requires consideration of other influential aspects within this policy cycle, such as the multidimensionality of integration. Multidimensionality implies that integration occurs across various dimensions. It also encompasses the interaction between functional aspects and policy levels. The recognition of the need to view integration through a multidimensional lens emerged after many years of learning and development in the field. Phillimore (2020) notes that the shift towards a multidimensional model of integration is the result of a continuous journey, marked by multiple developments that have transitioned the understanding of integration from previously unidimensional models to a more complex multidimensional framework.

One of the earliest unidimensional models of integration was the assimilation model, which adopted a one-way approach. This model expected migrants to gradually abandon their identity and beliefs until they became indistinguishable from other members of the host community (Gordon, 1985). Subsequent models of integration

also adopted unidimensional perspectives, building upon the assimilation model while considering the socio-economic impact on integration. The "segmented assimilation" model, for instance, introduced the element of socio-economic influence, suggesting that the children of migrants integrate into different segments of society based on class and ethnicity (Portes and Zhou, 1993). According to segmented assimilation theory, different immigrant groups can experience three main paths of assimilation: assimilation into the mainstream, downward assimilation into the underclass, or a mixture of socio-economic assimilation while retaining aspects of the home culture (Lessard-Phillips, 2017). However, these unidimensional models overlooked critical factors affecting integration, such as the experiences refugees encounter during their interactions with the host communities and the role of host communities' members in facilitating integration processes (Castles et al., 2002). Consequently, they failed to attribute the responsibility for integration to both refugees and the host community (Bourhis et al., 1997; Castles et al., 2002).

In an attempt to address these shortcomings, bi-dimensional models of integration were proposed. One such model is the acculturation model, which views integration as a process wherein migrants begin to develop relationships with other members of society while maintaining their own culture (Berry, 1997, 1997). However, as Phillimore (2020, p.6) argues, this model falls short in considering "social justice in identity formation" and the "socio-economic realities" of refugees. It also perpetuates the controversial assumption of a "dominant culture," placing excessive pressure on refugees to adapt to this culture. Even updated versions of this model, which acknowledge the role of interaction between refugees and the host community in creating different realities for refugees, such as the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM), still link the success of refugee integration to the adaptation to the "dominant culture" (Ngo, 2019).

Considering the above-mentioned shortcomings, Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016) proposed a multidimensional model suggesting that integration processes comprise two parties, encompass three dimensions, and occur on three levels (Figure 3.3:). In this model, integration is built on interaction between two parties: immigrants and the receiving society (including civil society organisations and the state). It is important to know that *"these two 'partners' are fundamentally unequal in terms of*

power and resources” (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, p.17). During the interaction between these two unequal parties, there are three dimensions in which refugees can become part of the society: the legal-political dimension (i.e., political rights and legal status), the socio-economic dimension (i.e., access to and participation in socio-economic domains), and the cultural-religious dimension (i.e., reaction to diversity and differences in culture and religion). For each party and dimension, there are three levels at which integration can be measured: individual (i.e., measuring outcomes in these dimensions for individuals from both migrant and host groups), collective/group (i.e., measuring integration at the collective level for both migrant and host groups), and institutional (i.e., measuring integration in general public institutions and regulations, as well as migration-specific institutions and regulations). Although this model offers a comprehensive framework to understand integration through a multidimensional lens, it has yet to be applied in the context of refugee integration.

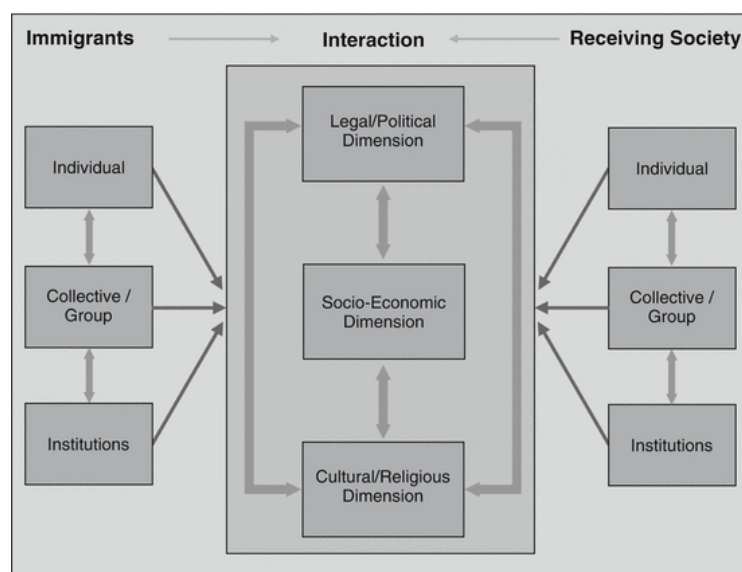


Figure 3.3: Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas' multidimensional model of integration (2016, p.16)

While in policy-related research the focus tends to consider the macro level of migrant integration, its structuring, and the interplay between national and local levels (Scholten and Penninx, 2016; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017; Caponio and Borkert, 2010; Scholten et al., 2017), researchers in academia tend to focus on the functional dimension (i.e. accessing education, employment, housing and health) when studying refugee integration. This emphasis is particularly evident in the implementation and

evaluation stages of the refugee integration policy cycle. In such research, integration is viewed through the lens of accessing public services and can be measured using specific indicators (Ager and Strang, 2004; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019; Phillimore, 2012). However, it is essential to examine the multidimensionality of refugee integration and explore the various dimensions of this process, as well as the interaction between the host community and the refugees themselves, to fully understand the role they play in achieving successful integration (Cheung and Phillimore, 2014).

In the UK, similar models related to integration have been proposed, such as the Ager and Strang framework for refugee integration (2008), the Spencer and Charsley model of migrant integration as interrelated, multidirectional processes across domains (2016), and the revised Indicators of Integration (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). The Ager and Strang framework added new dimensions to the existing functional aspects of refugee integration (i.e., access to education, employment, housing, and health). These included practices regarding rights and citizenship, the social connection between groups within the community, and facilitators of these connections, such as culture and language (Ager and Strang, 2008). Although this framework has been widely used globally, it has been criticised for its focus on measuring the educational and economic outcomes of refugees rather than the environment in which integration occurs (Phillimore, 2020). Building on the ideas proposed by Ager and Strang, Spencer and Charsley (2016) emphasised the factors that facilitate the migrant integration process, referred to as "effectors." These include individuals, families, social networks, opportunities and structures of society, policy interventions, and transnational effectors, each playing a crucial role in facilitating integration (Spencer and Charsley, 2016, p.7). More recently, in 2019, the Home Office published a new edition of the Indicators of Integration (IoI) to address some of the previous shortcomings and emphasise that refugee integration should be viewed *"as a multi-directional process involving multiple changes from both incoming and diverse host communities"* (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019, p.11). This new IoI framework echoed the "local turn" position (see also next section), approaching integration from a multi-level governance perspective based on bidirectional thinking (given the UK context specificity) while stressing the shared responsibility of integration between migrants and the host community. This model is seen as a promising approach to studying integration and providing solutions to the issues previously faced by policymakers and

implementers (i.e., local authorities, SMPs, and voluntary sector organisations) (Phillimore, 2019). However, it is too early to determine whether or how this framework will be used as an effective multidimensional model of integration.

Furthermore, given the lack of empirical evidence or enquiry around the multidimensionality of refugee integration, further discussion is necessary to explore a multidimensional model and how to coordinate integration across different dimensions. Linking integration policy to integration outcomes, as well as individual and contextual factors, is crucial for building a holistic understanding of how policymaking can affect integration outcomes and vice versa, how these outcomes can influence policy (Bilgili et al., 2015). Applying multidimensionality to the policy cycle would encourage the creation of more comprehensive strategies that address various dimensions of refugee integration. For instance, refugee integration policies informed by a multidimensional approach would not only focus on economic integration (like employment) but also on social aspects (such as community connections) and legal dimensions (including rights and citizenship).

3.4 The “Local Turn” in Integration

Another aspect that influences refugee integration policymaking and governance is the “local turn”; which refers to the expected involvement of local authorities in all stages of the policy cycle. The significance of the local level in shaping refugee integration policy and its governance stems from the fact that integration predominantly occurs at this level (HM Government, 2018c). Additionally, agenda dynamics at the local level can often be more receptive to welcoming refugees than those at the national level, primarily due to the direct interactions between local authorities, refugees, and community members (Caponio and Borkert, 2010). This proximity facilitates a pragmatic and solution-focused response to challenges (ibid). Moreover, local officials frequently leverage these interactions to cultivate a hospitable atmosphere, deploying community-led initiatives and programs aimed at enhancing refugee integration (Scholten and Penninx, 2016). Therefore, incorporating the local perspective into policymaking is crucial to diminish the dominance of national decision-making and challenge the notion that policymaking predominantly occurs “behind closed doors” (Guiraudon, as cited in Scholten, 2013).

The "local turn" thesis, recently discussed in migration policymaking literature (Caponio and Borkert, 2010; Hackett, 2017; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017; Galandini et al., 2019; Scholten et al., 2018; Scholten and Penninx, 2016), has been highlighted by researchers such as Scholten and Penninx. They advocate addressing integration at the local level to move away from historical national migrant integration policies that imposed "nationally specific models of identity and belonging" (Scholten and Penninx, 2016, p.98). The "local turn" has emerged in migrant integration and diversity policy literature, as it has been demonstrated that local authorities can introduce diverse perspectives and solutions in the planning and implementation of these policies (Caponio and Borkert, 2010; Alexander, 2007). Moreover, recognising the crucial role of the local level has shifted integration governance from the top-down model, into a bottom-up model of integration governance (Scholten, 2013). This localist model of governance believes that integration is a local problem requiring local solutions, leadership, and minimal coordination with the national level (Scholten, 2013).

In the UK, the government has begun to acknowledge the effectiveness of local-level approaches to migrant integration. This shift came in as result of devolving responsibilities to local governments in line with the Coalition Government's 2011 Localism Act as a cost saving mechanism (Galandini et al., 2019). The strategy describes localism as a "series of measures with the potential to achieve a substantial and lasting shift in power away from central government and towards local people" (gov.uk, 2011, p.1). This shift was evident in relation to refugee integration in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2012 report *Creating the Conditions for Integration* (DCLG, 2012). More recently, the 2019 Home Office's Indicator of Integration emphasised the significance of local actors' role in promoting integration. It stated that local organisations, communities, and policymakers play a crucial role in supporting integration at the community level. They can provide support services, facilitate social connections, and create inclusive environments that promote integration alongside national initiatives (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019).

Subsequently, responsibilities for migrant integration in the UK, which crucially includes refugee integration, have been gradually transferred to local authorities, often through mayors, "without necessarily transferring any additional powers or financial resources to Local Authorities (LAs)" (Galandini et al., 2019, p.690). This shift not only

places the financial burden of general migrant integration onto the local level but also poses specific challenges for refugee integration. Refugees often have distinct needs, such as trauma support, language training, and legal assistance, which are principal for effective integration (Hynie, 2018). However, without adequate resources and powers, local authorities may struggle to provide these specialised services (Phillimore et al., 2022).

Earlier discussions about devolution have raised concerns about the capacity of local governments to handle specialised integration needs (Mitchell, 1998) such as health and social care, which require not only financial resources but also strategic planning and specialised expertise, often lacking at the local level (Rodríguez-Pose and Krøijer, 2009). Furthermore, transitioning to a local model of integration, which includes refugees, can be challenging. It might lead to divergence in policy coordination efforts between various levels and sometimes result in decoupling, as observed in Glasgow and some London boroughs (Scholten et al., 2017; Hackett, 2017). Although devolution has enabled localised integration service management, it has also created disparities in service quality, often due to varying levels of local government capacity to integrate and manage specialised services effectively (Sandford, 2009). For instance, post-devolution, some local authorities have developed innovative integration practices, but others have struggled due to limited expertise and resources. This has led to a postcode lottery in service quality and accessibility for refugees, emphasising the problem of uneven capacity across local governments (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). Even localising refugee integration within a multi-level governance setting has proved perplexing (see section 3.5), especially in governments like the UK, which still retain state-centred control of regulations. This is intensified by the need to mainstream refugee and migrant integration across other policies, which requires a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges they faced, beyond those faced by other migrant groups (Galandini et al., 2019).

3.5 Multi-level governance and integration

Governance, as understood in the policy literature, refers to the diverse modes through which governments coordinate collective action and engage with other actors in the policymaking process. Rather than being limited to hierarchical, top-down control, governance encompasses a range of relationships — from tightly structured authority

to more decentralised, networked, or market-based forms of coordination (Kooiman, 1993, 2000; Rhodes, 1996; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). These relationships structure how power is shared, how decisions are made, and how implementation is shaped by the interaction of governmental and non-governmental actors (Capano et al., 2015).

In the context of refugee integration, this complexity has been explored through the lens of multi-level governance, which focuses on how responsibilities are distributed and negotiated between national and local governments (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018). The multi-level governance perspective was introduced to bridge this gap and to combine elements of earlier models that emphasised top-down control (Scholten, 2013). Multi-level governance refers to the “interaction and joint coordination of relations between the various levels of government without clear dominance of one level” (Scholten and Penninx, 2016, p.94). Maintaining such a degree of coordination requires what are termed “vertical venues”, allowing governments from different levels to engage in forums or workshops in order to discuss and facilitate migrant integration policy (Scholten and Penninx, 2016). Therefore, it enforces a degree of interdependency among all actors, implying that migrant integration policy could not be executed by just one level of government but rather requires a collaboration between various levels of government, and ultimately, the involvement of non-governmental actors (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018).

On this basis, the multi-level governance model promises policy convergence across various levels of government and enhanced consistency in addressing controversial policy issues such as migrant integration (Scholten et al., 2018). The significance of the multi-level governance approach in refugee integration policy lies in its challenge to both the vertical dimension of migrant integration governance (which challenges the state hierarchy and division of labour) and its horizontal dimension (which challenges boundaries between society and state by involving NGOs) (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018). In the UK, the adoption of a multi-level governance of integration and coordinating its vertical relations was driven by the need for a more comprehensive, coordinated, and effective response to integration challenges, taking into account the different levels of government and the diverse actors involved in the process. This was influenced by the push towards mainstreaming migrant integration and involving the local turn (Scholten and Penninx, 2016), as well as devolution and the overall

immigration policy (Galandini et al., 2019). Immigration policy (which determines who is allowed to come into the country) is typically controlled by the central government, while integration policy (which focuses on the integration of migrants once they arrive) is often devolved to local or regional governments (Galandini et al., 2019).

3.6 Agenda Dynamics in Integration Policy

Migrant integration policy is “a normative political process in which the issue of integration is formulated as a problem, the problem is given a normative framing, and concrete policy measures are designed and implemented to achieve a desired outcome” (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016, p.20). Agenda dynamics can play an important role in framing integration as a policy problem and in shaping its policies (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Bacchi, 1999; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Refugee integration is often perceived as what Schön and Rein describe as an “intractable” policy problem that challenges decisions around its solution due to its “multiple social realities” (Schön and Rein, 1994, p.4). Scholten (2013, p.218) argues that agenda dynamics play a significant role in a multi-level governance setting. This is due to the problem’s definition being contested and challenged by the “multiplicity of problem frames that compete for policy attention”. He suggests that the way problems are defined in a multi-level setting can be understood through a combination of the Problem Agenda, Political Agenda, and Policy Agenda.

The Problem Agenda means that problems are specific to each level; in that sense, problems that are recognised at the local level might not be recognised at the national level, potentially leading to the absence of a related policy at the national level (Scholten, 2013). Framing refugee integration as a problem has been perceived differently at the national and local level; and understanding these varied perspectives and interpretations could indicate whether it is a public problem that requires a related policy or not. In the UK, there is a consensus that refugee integration is a public concern requiring solution at both the national and local levels. While the responsibility for integrating refugees is allocated to the Home Office along with other legal rights (settlement and citizenships) and supported by local strategies and initiatives focusing on functional integration (Broadhead and Spencer, 2020), yet there is no standalone national policy focusing on migrant integration (Saggar and Somerville, 2012; Spencer, 2011b), let alone having a national policy that focuses on refugee integration.

While early work on migrant integration in the UK took a national approach, as discussed in Chapter 2, however, the need to consider the local level's role has increasingly emerged, especially after the Coalition government in 2010, which emphasised the importance of delivering integration through local partners (DCLG, 2012).

On the other hand, the Political Agenda recognises the political balance and how the prioritisation of issues is determined by the institutional principles of each level (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). Accordingly, politicising or depoliticising certain issues, such as refugee integration, can influence how they are perceived by the central government, and whether it will choose to deal with refugee integration directly or through venue shopping. Venue shopping refers to “the idea that policymakers, when encountering obstacles in their traditional policy venue, tend to seek new venues for policymaking that are more amenable to their preferences and goals” (Kaunert and Léonard, 2012, p.1397). Such an approach can be observed in the UK's strategy of delegating refugee integration to local authorities through different programmes such as its resettlement programmes, including the Community Sponsorship Scheme (HM Government, 2018a) and the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (Home Office, 2018), often without providing adequate financial support.

The decision on how to address the policy problem at hand is also affected by the Policy Agenda, particularly since each level has its practices and legacies of policy. These factors affect the form of coordination and structuring that can either take forms of path dependency (i.e. decisions and strategies are significantly influenced by past decisions and established practices) or vertical policy practice (i.e. top-down or bottom up) (John, 2016). Under these circumstances, migrant integration can either follow a top-down approach if it is framed under the national policy agenda, or bottom up approach if it is framed under the local policy agenda (Scholten, 2013). Conversely, when governments attempt to balance between national policies and local policies, they tend to adopt a multi-level setting governance approach when dealing with refugee integration, as observed in the UK.

Refugee integration, being an “intractable” policy problem, can introduce specific complications in the governance of multi-level setting governments, such as in the UK. This complexity arises because stakeholders involved in establishing refugee

integration policy often have differing perspectives on integration and may disagree on the methods of addressing it. In such a multi-level setting, efforts to coordinate policy might be hindered, as policymakers at different levels tend to frame integration in conflicting ways (Scholten, 2013). These contested perspectives of integration could lead to conflicts between various levels of government, making the coordination of policy challenging. Therefore, there is a need to develop a new method to communicate these different interpretations of the problem. This would help in framing a shared policy that guarantees convergence in refugee integration at the national level.

3.7 Mainstreaming Integration

The academic discourse on mainstreaming migrant integration explains a dual shift: firstly, in integration policy, transitioning from migrant/refugee-specific policies to broader ones that encompass the entire society; and secondly, in integration governance, evolving from a state-centric model to a more poly-centric one (Scholten et al., 2017). Mainstreaming integration within policy frameworks implies moving away from targeted policies exclusively focused on migrants, to inclusive policies that address the needs of the whole society. Mainstreaming integration within governance involves a departure from a state-centric approach, where national government acts as the central authority in policymaking, to a poly-centric model instead. This poly-centric model is characterised by two primary dimensions: the horizontal dimension, which distributes policy responsibilities across various government departments, and the vertical dimension, which enhances coordination across multiple levels of governance (Collett and Petrovic, 2014). The poly-centric model, as described by Collett and Petrovic (2014), fundamentally differs from multilevel governance in its structural and operational dynamics. Polycentric governance is marked by multiple centres of decision-making authority that are formally independent of each other, allowing for a variety of overlapping jurisdictions (Ostrom, 2010). This configuration is distinct from multilevel governance, which primarily emphasises a vertical integration of policy across different levels of government. The poly-centric model fosters a diverse set of solutions and innovations, as it allows various centres to experiment and learn from each other; in contrast, multilevel governance typically refers to the interaction and coordination between different levels of government.

The push to mainstream migrant integration emerged as a response to the increasing superdiversity in cities worldwide, a topic discussed earlier in Chapter 1. “A very simplistic rationale for mainstreaming integration might be that there is more migration and thus more diversity and that this in turn also requires more integration work” (Meissner, 2018, p.166). This trend led to a shift to generic policies that target the entire diverse population, rather than focusing on one specific group. Such generic policies were argued to promise a more inclusive society and ensure better integration outcomes (van Breugel et al., 2014). In the context of superdiverse cities (like Birmingham), having a specific policy targeting refugee integration is no longer seen as effective. That is why mainstreaming was suggested; as it can help facilitate the shift from specific policies targeting a particular group to generic policies that encompass the whole society (Scholten et al., 2017).

In Western Europe, the process of integrating migrants, particularly refugees, has evolved to include three primary strategies: mainstreaming through discourse, governance, and policy (Collett and Petrovic, 2014). Mainstreaming through discourse involves framing refugee integration within broader societal goals, such as social inclusion. This approach embeds integration within a wider context, emphasising its relevance to the overall social fabric. Mainstreaming through governance entails the coordination of integration goals across various government levels, ensuring a unified and comprehensive approach. Lastly, mainstreaming through policy is characterised by the adoption of inclusive, generic policies that cater to a diverse population, moving beyond measures targeted at specific groups. While mainstreaming through discourse is important, yet it cannot be fully effective without supportive policies and governance that incorporate integration into broader social goals.

In the UK, as discussed in the previous chapter, the early assimilationist approach did not involve specific integration policies targeting migrants. Instead, the focus in this model was on adapting assimilation through generic policies, characterised by a state-centric approach. However, the subsequent multiculturalist model adopted a more group-specific approach, yet it remained state-centric (Scholten et al., 2017). More recently, the UK government attempted to mainstream social inclusion (and integration as consequence) through policy in the Community Cohesion approach. This approach operates through generic policies but adopts a more polycentric focus in governance

(Scholten et al., 2017). While the mainstreaming of migrant integration in the UK has significantly increased in recent years, some argue for a shift away from this approach, advocating the development of specific integration policies targeting migrants. Some scholars argue that migrants “suffer from specific disadvantages and face different challenges compared not only to the majority mainstream but also settled ethnic minorities” (Galandini et al., 2019, p.699). Furthermore, the emphasis on mainstreaming migrant integration might unintentionally justify the absence of specific refugee integration policies, potentially leading to discrimination against this vulnerable group and hindering their integration into British society. While mainstreaming has its advantages in promoting a holistic and inclusive approach to integration, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this approach in adequately addressing the specific needs of refugees. A balance between mainstreaming and targeted approaches is crucial to ensure that the diverse needs of all migrant groups, particularly the more vulnerable ones like refugees, are met effectively. For instance, research from Sweden indicates that while refugee children in mainstream classrooms experience enhanced social integration, they often encounter academic challenges due to insufficient language support (Bunar, 2015). Similarly, refugees accessing a generalised health system in the United States face difficulties in receiving adequate mental health services, underscoring the necessity for targeted interventions specifically tailored to address trauma and cultural sensitivities (Morris et al., 2009). Moreover, initiatives in Germany reveal that generic employment programs frequently fail to consider the diverse qualifications of refugees, leading to job mismatches and underemployment, thereby highlighting the effectiveness of bespoke programs that recognise and validate refugees’ professional credentials (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018).

3.8 Influencers and Dynamics in the UK Refugee Integration Policy Cycle: An In-Depth Examination

As discussed in previous sections, the UK's integration policy cycle has been influenced by various factors, including the multidimensionality of integration, the local turn, mainstreaming of integration, multi-level governance, and agenda dynamics. In this section, I will collate these influences to understand how each has played a role in the absence of a national refugee integration policy and to examine the impact of

this absence on refugee integration outcomes. Grasping the overall picture will help me identify the gaps and locate my research within this policy context.

The shift to localising refugee integration governance in the UK was a result of government efforts following the Localism Act in 2011. Since then, separate strategies of refugee integration were adopted in each of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The primary goal of the government was to transition from the old centrally-led policies, which placed the responsibility of integration on the government, to the new locally-led policies that acknowledged the role of local communities in facilitating integration outcomes. Phillimore (2020) argued that since 2012, the UK government has consistently highlighted the importance of localising refugee integration, justifying this by stating that integration is influenced by employment opportunities, housing, and social connections, which in turn are affected by the other local policies. This was reflected in “the absence of a clear national policy framework and effort not to impose a one-size-fits-all approach” (Scholten, 2016, p.986). Although this shift towards localising migrant integration in the UK is significant, it can be argued that it has placed a financial burden on local authorities (Galandini et al., 2019). Furthermore, this could lead to mixed policy messages about refugee integration, eventually resulting in decoupling (Hackett, 2017). This highlights the need, especially in a multi-level governance setting as discussed earlier, to promote more coordination between national and local levels. Such coordination would ensure consistent messaging about refugee integration, guaranteeing its implementation and fostering a stronger integration policy. A design thinking approach could provide a solution for such shortcoming, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

On the other hand, since its early stages in 2000, refugee integration has been influenced by the government's efforts to mainstream migrant integration as a part of its community cohesion approach. However, the government still maintained a central role in managing refugee integration through specific strategies under the Home Office until 2012. It was not until then that refugee integration was completely mainstreamed, with responsibility for it shifting to the local level and the adoption of generic policies rather than a single specific policy. As discussed earlier, the drive towards mainstreaming refugee integration has a direct impact on integration outcomes and is argued to cause injustice to refugees. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the journey

of refugees towards integration under the current UK policies in order to improve the system and develop specific strategies that address the challenges they face in integrating into British society. In Chapter 7, I will discuss some of the findings obtained from observing the refugee integration journey and address some of the issues they are encountering.

In doing so, it is also crucial to understand the multidimensionality of refugee integration, which has been recognised in the recent Home Office Indicators of Integration (IoI). Recent efforts in the UK have acknowledged that refugee integration comprises multiple factors and necessitates changes from all societal groups, not just refugees (Coley et al., 2019). The 2019 IoI underscores the importance of examining combinations of integration indicators when analysing outcomes, as achieving positive outcomes in one indicator area does not necessarily lead to long-term integration. Furthermore, it has been argued that positive outcomes in one domain, if inconsistent with others, might lead to an ineffective model of integration. For instance, access to the labour market in the UK without knowledge or use of the English language could marginalise refugees and result in a segmented assimilation model of integration (Collyer et al., 2018; Coley et al., 2019). Interactions between domains can also lead to both positive and negative outcomes, such as in the case of establishing social networks, which could lead to better outcomes in other domains if appropriately facilitated, or to disengagement and segregation if faced with discrimination (Spencer and Charsley, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to interlink integration outcomes and hold the entire society accountable for refugee integration, involving them in decision-making about integration strategies and their implementation. This topic will be discussed in detail in my findings' chapters.

3.9 Analytical Approaches to Policy and Governance

The field of policy analysis offers a diverse set of conceptual tools for understanding how public issues are framed, how decisions are taken, and how policy instruments are selected, implemented, and evaluated (Howlett et al., 2009; Sabatier, 2007). It encompasses both empirical and normative concerns, addressing not only what policies are and how they work, but also how they ought to respond to complex and contested societal challenges. Early contributions to the field emphasised policy analysis as a means of systematically evaluating and developing policy options

informed by evidence and rational deliberation (Jenkins, 1978). Over time, this perspective has expanded to include recognition of the tensions between normative goals and practical constraints, with greater attention to complexity, uncertainty, and the presence of diverse and sometimes conflicting values within governance processes (DeLeon, 1999).

As discussed above, the early work of Lasswell (1956) proposed a linear "stages model" of the policy cycle, moving from agenda setting through to implementation and evaluation. However, subsequent scholarship has problematised this model's assumptions of sequentially, rationality, and control. Scholars such as Kingdon (1984), Schön and Rein (1994), and Cairney (2012) have emphasised the nonlinear, political, and value-laden nature of policymaking, drawing attention to processes such as agenda-setting, framing, and institutional path dependency.

In the context of refugee integration, these challenges are especially evident. The field is characterised by multilevel governance, institutional fragmentation, and contested norms, making it a "wicked problem" that resists simple, top-down solutions. As Bacchi (2009) argues, policy itself is a site of power, not just a tool for solving problems, but a means of constructing them. This study therefore draws on a combination of policy stages thinking and more interpretive approaches, including the role of actor networks, and governance types.

Within this evolving landscape, design thinking (see chapter 4) can be seen as a response to the limitations of traditional, expert-driven models of policymaking. Its structured yet participatory framework aligns with more adaptive and user-informed policy practices (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016; Kimbell, 2011).

3.10 Conclusion

Analysing refugee integration policymaking and governance presents a challenge, as it is often subsumed within the broader literature on migrant/immigrant integration. However, building on models of migrant integration policymaking and governance, I have observed that while there is an abundance of literature discussing specific stages of what I term the 'integration policy cycle' and the aspects influencing it, there is a lack of comprehensive studies on the refugee integration cycle. In this chapter, I mapped important aspects linked to the refugee integration policy cycle to 'complexify'

the understanding of the current models of refugee integration policymaking and governance.

The examination of the integration policy cycle above has highlighted the need to redefine refugee integration and distinguish it from migrant integration (see Chapter 2). Scholten's (2013) agenda dynamics offer a starting point for understanding the challenges of defining refugee integration at different government levels. Exploring agenda dynamics demonstrates the necessity of finding new ways of communication between national and local levels within a multi-level governance setting. Rather than framing refugee integration solely at the national or local level, a new approach that combines the efforts of both levels in refugee integration policymaking is needed. The importance of the 'local turn' underscores that the local perspective on refugee integration can be more practical, since implementation occurs at this level (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017); meanwhile, national-level policymakers are often detached from the realities of refugee integration and its local-level implementation, which is critical in governments following multi-level governance and mainstreaming approaches.

Although refugee integration policy in the UK was only established in 2000, it has been influenced by previous and current models of migrant integration in the UK (see Chapter 2), as well as other government efforts towards localism and mainstreaming. The Community Cohesion approach directly impacts the current refugee integration strategies implemented in England. The absence of a UK wide refugee integration policy and related strategies at the local level is a consequence of these models and the mainstreaming approach. While the Home Office addressed integration in its 2019 Indicators of Integration (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019), it is not yet linked to a specific refugee integration policy. Recognising that integration is multidimensional and multidirectional, and addressing linkages between its domains, is a positive step towards ensuring long-term integration results. However, it lacks the support of a related national refugee integration policy or local strategies. Reversing the effort to mainstream refugee integration and allocating specific policies and strategies that focus on refugees' individual experiences, and linking their outcomes to policymaking and governance, is crucial. At the same time, devolving refugee integration responsibility to the local level necessitates allocating special funding for its

implementation through local authorities, as well as establishing national guidelines to coordinate efforts between national and local levels.

The lack of a specific refugee integration policy in the UK as result of devolution highlights the urgent need for a new, inclusive model of policymaking in this field. This new approach must actively involve the most critical stakeholders – the refugees themselves. Given the multinational nature of refugee integration, incorporating the varied perspectives of these stakeholders is not just beneficial but essential for crafting effective and successful integration strategies. Their first-hand experiences and insights are invaluable in understanding the real-world challenges and opportunities of integration. This inclusive approach aligns with the evolving trends in other areas of social policymaking, where there is a growing emphasis on learning directly from the experiences of those affected by the policies and engaging in co-production (Kimbell, 2011a). Such participatory approaches ensure that policies are not only responsive but also tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the target populations. In the next chapter, I set out the concept of 'design thinking' – a methodology known for its user-centred approach to problem-solving. This exploration aims to assess how 'design thinking' might provide innovative and effective solutions to the current challenges in refugee integration policymaking. By examining this approach, the goal is to identify strategies that are not only theoretically sound but also practically feasible, ensuring that the policies developed are both impactful and implementable in the real-world context of refugee integration.

CHAPTER 4: DESIGN THINKING

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in relation to design thinking, a methodological approach that I utilise in this PhD which is increasingly being recognised for its potential in reshaping policymaking, particularly in complex and dynamic contexts such as those involving refugees (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016). The aim of this chapter is to lay a foundational understanding of design thinking and to highlight its relevance and applicability in social policymaking with specific focus on refugee integration. I argue that design thinking in refugee integration policymaking addresses deficiencies in current strategies by fostering better communication across different government levels and promoting policy convergence between local and national perspectives. This method supports the "Local Turn" by involving both policymakers and refugees in co-producing policies, thereby integrating practical insights from refugees and local knowledge early in the policy cycle. This chapter combined with the previous chapter will then feed into Chapter 5 in which I will discuss the conceptual framework that my PhD is based on.

In this literature review, I provide an overview of the current state of knowledge and practice at the intersection of design thinking and policymaking. I start by examining the historical evolution of design thinking, then move to exploring its theoretical underpinnings, its process, its methodologies and tools, its applications in policymaking, its application in refugee and migrant studies, and finally its potentials in refugee integration policymaking. The review also intends to identify gaps in the current literature, especially in leveraging design thinking for more inclusive and effective policymaking in the context of refugee integration.

4.2 What is Design Thinking?

Design thinking, as an approach, is argued to facilitate the involvement of the end user in the product design process, which should help in reaching a final output that aligns with what the end users need and want (Bender-Salazar, 2023). The approach is getting noticed in policymaking as it prioritises the end user needs and experience when formulating policies (Allio, 2014). Moreover, this human-centred approach uses

experiments to solve wicked problems by adopting the design process to tackle complex issues. Design thinking has been evolving over time in various fields of study; yet there is no specific definition for it (see section 4.3).

Design thinking is described by Cross (2011) as an "abductive" process that diverges from traditional deductive and inductive reasoning by fostering the creation of innovative solutions through the identification and transformation of understanding, making it essential for shifting and transcending between the intended purpose and the actual function of the object to satisfy its purpose. Brown and Wyatt (2010) emphasise that design thinking does not merely focus on generating products but significantly concerns itself with the experience around human-centred practices. They describe design thinking as a system of overlapping spaces with key stages including inspiration, ideation, and implementation, highlighting a structured process that moves from understanding a problem or opportunity to developing and testing ideas and finally integrating solutions into people's lives.

Building on the above, Brown (2005) contrasts design thinking with analytical thinking, which many are traditionally trained in. Analytical thinking excels at demystifying and compartmentalising the world for analysis and prediction based on past data; however, it falls short in envisioning and shaping a new future (Brown, 2005). Consequently, Brown (2005) advocates adoption of design thinking, which is inherently generative and goal-driven, aimed at creating futures and bringing innovative solutions to the marketplace. Brown's description of design thinking's emphasis on generative thinking highlights the goal-driven and optimistic nature of design thinking, aimed at creating and realising a new future, distinct from the analytical methods focused primarily on deconstruction and linear projections. Plattner et al. (2015) advocate for a holistic approach to design thinking, which transcends traditional boundaries and encourages fundamental innovations. This methodology provides a comprehensive framework that views problems from a human perspective and strives to deliver innovative products, services, or experiences that are desirable for the target group. Lockwood (2010) adds that design thinking should be seen as a human-centred innovation process that emphasises observation, rapid concept visualisation, and user needs analysis, all aimed at developing a strategically viable and innovative solution.

Through the integration of these diverse perspectives, design thinking emerges as a multifaceted and dynamic field that combines various methodologies and tools aimed at fostering innovative solutions centred on human needs. It extends beyond solving immediate issues, employing a comprehensive strategy that includes user observation, problem reframing, idea visualisation, and the development of creative solutions. I argue that this rich, layered understanding of design thinking can be organised into the following:

- Design thinking is described as having an approach that is geared towards addressing problems and envisaging future solutions through experimental practices and the exploration of various possibilities.
- It is known for extending beyond the immediate scope of problems, employing a comprehensive approach in addressing challenges.
- The approach is recognised for utilising an array of tools to enhance understanding of problems, including user observation, deductive reasoning, stakeholder consultation, problem reframing, idea visualisation, and the development of inventive solutions.
- Design thinking is noted for its user-centric focus, prioritising end-user requirements throughout the creative process to develop products and services that meet their needs.

After carefully looking at design thinking elements, the definition which I will use for the purpose of this PhD follows the UNDP's definition, in which it is described as:

An explicit human and user-centred approach. It leads to solutions that are progressively refined through an interactive process of providing voice to end-users and engaging them in shaping decisions (professional empathy and co-creation); considering multiple causes of and diversified perspectives to the problems at hand (scaling); and experiment with initial ideas (prototyping and testing) (Allio, 2014, p.4).

This definition encapsulates the core principles of design thinking, including the iterative nature of refining solutions, the centrality of user involvement, and the

importance of empathy and co-creation. It provides a holistic overview that encompasses both the mindset and the actionable components of design thinking. The definition's special quality lies in its clarity and alignment with the elements of design thinking discussed above, including user-centricity, iterative process, engagement and empathy, inclusiveness, and experimentation. It will serve as a solid foundation for my research, providing a clear lens through which to examine and apply design thinking principles across the refugee integration context.

4.3 Evolution and History of Design Thinking

Design thinking has been extensively debated by scholars over the past decade, with many emphasising its significance in a multitude of fields and advocating its role as a universal solution to user-centric problems (Johansson-Sköldberg et al., 2013). Originating from the convergence of diverse disciplines such as architecture, engineering, cognitive science, and industrial design, design thinking began to take shape in the 1960s. This period, marked by significant societal shifts due to the Industrial Revolution and World War II, witnessed a rapidly evolving environment that necessitated novel responses to new challenges (Dam and Siang, 2024). Over time, design thinking has evolved, integrating human, technological, and strategic considerations to become the prominent innovation methodology it is today (see Figure 4.1 and following text). The evolution of design thinking has been influenced by key figures like Nigel Cross, Herbert A. Simon, and Peter Rowe, each contributing foundational ideas and principles (Dam and Siang, 2024). The design thinking process has continued to be utilised across a wide range of businesses and areas of study, and is still being investigated and improved by those leading in the field.

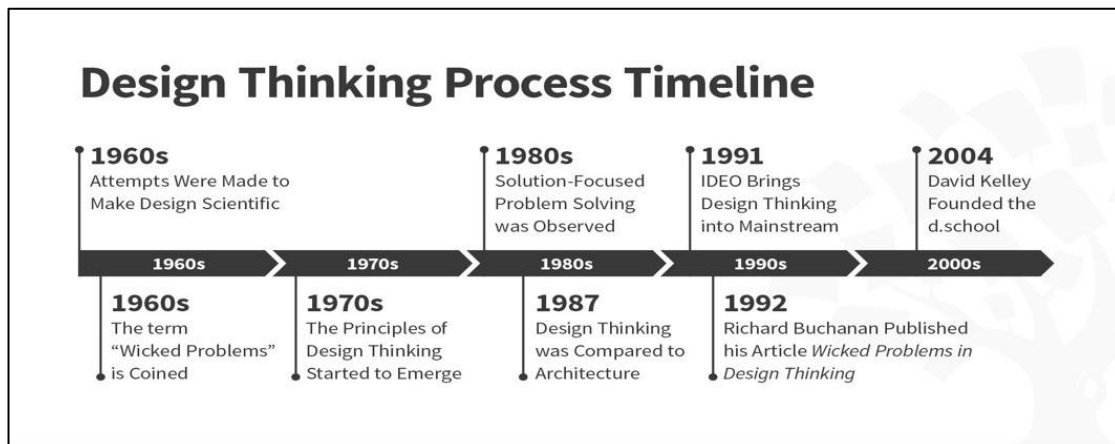


Figure 4.1: The History of Design Thinking (Dam and Siang, 2024)

Research into design thinking traces the early work on design methodology in the 1960s, notably the exploration of designers' capacity to solve "wicked problems" (Buchanan, 1992). Design thinking began to take shape as people applied methodology and processes to understand every aspect of design. This era was characterised by efforts to align design with the rational sciences, making the design field more scientific (Dam and Siang, 2024). This meant that there was a conscious effort to move away from purely intuitive or artistic approaches and instead integrate more structured, logical, and evidence-based methods into design processes (Huppatz, 2015). Herbert A. Simon was instrumental in this period, with his book "The Sciences of the Artificial" exploring design as a process aimed at enhancing environments. He highlighted the human brain's limitations and introduced "satisficing" as a design approach, advocating for prototyping as a method to achieve satisfactory solutions. Simon also underscored the importance of stakeholder understanding and collaboration in addressing large-scale issues (Di Russo, 2012). He advocated for simulation (prototyping) as a means to achieve satisfying solutions. Simon also stressed the importance of understanding and collaboration among stakeholders when addressing large-scale societal and environmental issues, emphasising the need for open and evolving solutions without final goals (Di Russo, 2012).

Later in the 1960s, Horst Rittel, a design theorist, coined the term "wicked problem" to describe multidimensional and extremely complex problems, which are at the core of design thinking (Dam and Siang, 2024). Wicked problems are difficult to define and solve. They are characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, conflicting values among stakeholders, and the absence of a clear solution (Pachocka et al., 2020).

Wicked problems often have no definitive formulation, making them challenging to address (Buchanan, 1992). Additionally, the solutions to wicked problems are not true or false, but rather good or bad, and they can have unpredictable and far-reaching consequences (Pachocka et al., 2020). These problems are unique and interconnected, making them difficult to solve using traditional problem-solving methods (Di Russo, 2012). As a result, addressing wicked problems requires a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves the active participation of various stakeholders, including end-users, in the problem-solving process (Pachocka et al., 2020). Rittel specifically focused on how design process could be used to tackle wicked problems and how these methodologies influenced the work of many design practitioners and academics of the time (Dam and Siang, 2024).

The 1970s saw the emergence of design thinking principles, with Simon's work emphasising rapid prototyping and observation-based testing, forming the core of many contemporary design processes (Simon, 2008). His emphasis on rapid prototyping allowed designers to quickly develop and test ideas, ensuring that solutions were both innovative and practical. This methodology not only speeded up the design process but also increased its efficiency and effectiveness by incorporating continuous feedback and improvements (Brown, 2008). Additionally, the impact of visual thinking on problem-solving was explored by Robert H. McKim, who emphasised the combination of left and right brain modes of thinking (Dam and Siang, 2024). These ideas, discussed in his book "Experiences in Visual Thinking," laid the groundwork for the design thinking methodology that continues to evolve and shape innovation processes across various industries (Dam and Siang, 2024). McKim provided a framework for understanding how visual tools and techniques could enhance cognitive processes, thereby facilitating more comprehensive and innovative problem-solving. His work emphasised the use of sketches, diagrams, and other visual aids to unlock new insights and perspectives, which are crucial in tackling complex design challenges (McKim, 1980).

In the 1980s, Nigel Cross and Bryan Lawson continued to shape design thinking. Cross examined the nature of problem-solving by designers in his (1982) paper "Designerly Ways of Knowing" and argued that designers possess a specialised form of knowledge that is integral to the design process, emphasising the importance of

creativity, visual thinking, and iterative development in generating solutions. Meanwhile, Rowe sought to connect architectural designers' approaches to design thinking, emphasising the cognitive and methodological aspects of design and exploring how designers use both intuition and systematic approaches to tackle complex challenges (Rowe, 1991). The movement that followed advocated the use of design methods in research (Jones, 1992; Buchanan and Margolin, 1995). This movement, combined with early thoughts about design thinking, grew into an investigation of how designers think, and shifted towards understanding the cognitive process that designers use to generate successful ideas (Cross, 1982, 2001; Kimbell, 2011b). It also advanced the understanding of wicked problems, emphasising the integration of specialised knowledge fields to address complex modern issues holistically (Buchanan, 1992). Rowe's work (1991, p.2) provided some early definition to the term design thinking in which he described it as "interior situational logic and the decision-making processes of designers in action, as well as the theoretical dimensions that both account for and inform this kind of understanding". Since then, design thinking has been applied in various fields including industry, business and most recently social science.

However, in the 2000s, a company named IDEO began utilising design to address broader questions about customers' needs, shifting from designing customer products to designing customer experiences (Brown and Wyatt, 2010). In 2004, design thinking gained recognition as a practical method for addressing social issues, particularly when prominent consultancy firms like IDEO adopted design thinking innovative approaches in their social problem-related projects (Melles et al., 2011). This consultancy firm not only played a central role in projects addressing social issues (Kimbell, 2011a), but also promoted the use of experimental methods at institutional levels (Brown and Wyatt, 2010). For instance, IDEO worked on the "Human-Centered design (HCD) Toolkit" project in collaboration with NGOs, aiming to improve access to clean water in African communities (see also section 4.7.2 for more examples).

Based on IDEO's experiments with users from developing countries, Brown (2008) advocated for the adaptation of the design thinking approach in social research. He suggested that this approach could enable social researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the contexts in which users live, thereby offering a more holistic view

of the social problems at hand. Other existing methods had already started focusing on empowering participants and ensuring that their voices are central to the research process by employing methods like focus groups, community meetings, and collaborative decision-making processes to ensure that the research outcomes reflect the needs and perspectives of the community (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). Design thinking, on the other hand, is inherently a problem-solving approach that integrates creativity and innovation. It combines empathy with creativity and rationality to develop new and innovative solutions to complex problems (Brown, 2008).

Brown also proposed that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should collaborate with businesses to address social and global challenges. As a result, design thinking could serve as a mediator between various sectors, tackling complex local issues and fostering a bottom-up approach (Brown and Wyatt, 2010; F. Camacho, 2016). The early initiatives of large consultancy firms have significantly contributed to the development of design thinking as a resource in social research and policy analysis. This includes encouraging partnerships between the public and private sectors and promoting the use of participatory methods in service design (Kimbell, 2011a). This aligns with Buchanan's (1992) earlier proposition of design thinking's potential to function as an “integrative discipline”. Consequently, there has been a shift towards employing a human-centred design approach to address some of the most pressing social issues. Some scholars have even suggested the need to “consider how design can support or constrain the needs of people whose lives are affected by the systems and policies created in a more digitised world” (Rose, 2016, p.428). (Refer to section 4.5 for additional information on the methods.)

However, Brown's work on design thinking as a contextual and holistic methodology did not escape criticism, as some researchers claimed that he is reducing the work of designers to simple toolsets by changing its context (Johansson-Sköldberg et al., 2013). Moreover, some argued that the concept of design thinking is centred around designers (Kimbell, 2011a), and explained that design activity involves people beyond designers; including those who are engaged in the design process and those who interact with its outputs (Kimbell, 2012). In this context, Kimbell (2009a, 2011a) suggested using two new terms when considering design thinking: “design-as-practice” and “design-in-practice”. Design-as-practice is used to describe the way

design is positioned in many professions and involving people from all these professions – not only designers (Kimbell, 2012), while design-in-practice recognises “the emergent nature of design outcomes as they are enacted in practice” (Kimbell, 2009a, p.11). As she explains, the combination of these terms could switch the focus of research from the “individual designer or user, or the organisation or group and its norms, to a wider frame” (Kimbell, 2011a, p.11).

The exploration of design thinking within the context of social research and its broader application across various sectors highlights its transformative potential. As evidenced by the work of influential figures and organisations, design thinking exceeds traditional problem-solving methodologies, advocating for a more integrative, human-centred approach (Brown and Wyatt, 2010; Kimbell, 2011). Its role in facilitating collaboration between public and private sectors, and its emphasis on innovative methods, reflects a paradigm shift towards more inclusive and adaptive problem-solving strategies (Bason, 2014). The ongoing dialogue and critique surrounding design thinking highlight the evolving nature of this approach and its relevance in addressing contemporary societal challenges. Ultimately, design thinking stands not only as a methodology but also as a testament to the dynamic interplay between design, research, and social impact, continually shaping and being shaped by the complex world it seeks to improve (Buchanan, 1992).

In this study, design thinking is not treated merely as methodology, but as a practice embedded in cultural, political, and institutional contexts. As Kimbell (2011) argues, designers increasingly act as “interpreters of changes in culture who then create new kinds of cultural form” (p.287), shifting their role from problem-solvers to cultural intermediaries. This repositions design thinking as a way of unsettling established norms, enabling new perspectives, and fostering participation in spaces traditionally shaped by technocratic logic. Furthermore, Kimbell (2012) notes that in much of the discourse around design thinking is attributed with the power to “stimulate or drive innovation and transform organizations and even societies” (p.2), reinforcing its image as a catalyst for cultural change. This perspective resonates with the aims of this thesis, where design thinking was introduced into the refugee integration policy space not to fix a predefined problem, but to open up the policymaking process to more inclusive and reflective dialogue.

4.4 The Design Thinking Process

Over time design thinking has been conducted using a variety of tools and practices, and there is no standard or firm process for it. However, some similarities in tools and steps can be observed (Liedtka et al., 2013). The design thinking steps varied between three and five; however, the main ideas and tools were agreed upon but labelled under different stages. There is an agreement in the literature that design thinking has two main stages: redefining a problem and finding a solution for it (Pusca and Northwood, 2018). In fact, design thinking has been thought of as a linear process that has “recognizable phases, and these, while not always in the same order, nearly always begin with analytic phases of search and understanding, and end with synthetic phases of experimentation and invention” (Owen, 1997 as cited in Stockholm, 2014, p.3). On the other hand, Beckman and Barry (2007) argue that the design thinking process is about balancing four stages: problem finding; problem selecting; solution finding; and solution selecting. And many followed in adopting these stages and adding and removing some steps (Fraser, 2009; Martin, 2009; Dym et al., 2005). Brown (2008, 2009) suggests three points that could help defining activities and the way to move between them to reach a solution to the problem:

- Inspiration: which includes reviewing sources to collect insights about the context.
- Ideation: in which ideas of new solutions are generated, developed, and tested.
- Implementation: developing a solution into a final product that should help tackle the main problem

One of the most used design processes is the Design Diamond, introduced by the British Design Council in 2004, which presents a visual representation of the design process, dividing it into four distinct phases: Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver (see Figure 4.2). The Double Diamond encapsulates two key phases of design thinking: divergent thinking (exploring an issue more widely or deeply) and convergent thinking (taking focused action) (Design Council, n.d.). The first diamond, 'Discover,' emphasises understanding the problem through real engagement with affected individuals, rather than relying on assumptions. This leads to the 'Define' phase, where insights from the discovery phase are synthesised to redefine the challenge. The

second diamond begins with 'Develop,' encouraging innovative solutions by looking beyond conventional boundaries and involving diverse perspectives in co-design. The final phase, 'Deliver,' focuses on experimenting with various solutions, refining successful ones, and discarding ineffective ones. This process is iterative rather than linear, with feedback loops allowing for continuous learning and adaptation. The Double Diamond thus not only delineates the stages of design but also underscores the necessity of an adaptive, responsive approach in an ever-evolving digital world (design Council, n.d.).

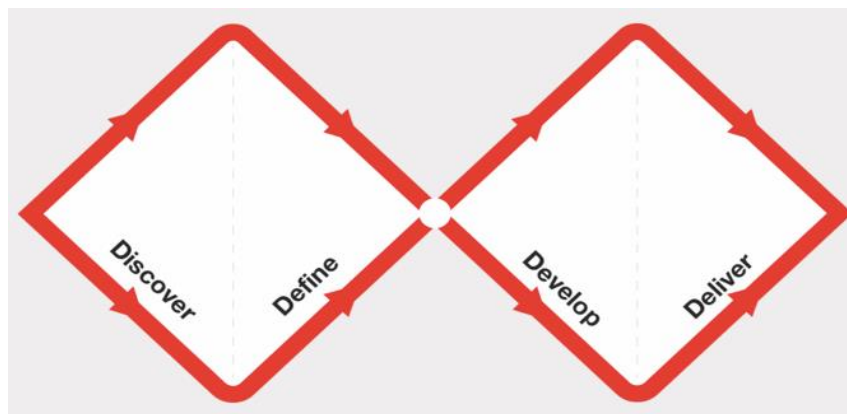


Figure 4.2: The Double Diamond (Design Council, n.d.)

Today, the design thinking process is commonly known as Brown introduced it and involves five key stages: Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test (Brown, 2008). These stages, which I follow in this PhD, are not necessarily sequential; they often occur in parallel and can be repeated iteratively. In the Empathise stage, designers immerse themselves in the users' environment to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences, challenges, and needs. This stage involves understanding the users' needs, experiences, and motivations through techniques such as ethnographic studies, interviews, and observation (Brown, 2008). This understanding is critical for the Define stage, where designers synthesise their findings to define the core problems identified during the Empathise stage and ultimately articulate the users' problems in a clear and actionable problem statement (Brown, 2008). Following this, the Ideate stage encourages broad and unconstrained thinking, generating a diverse array of potential solutions (Brown, 2008). The Prototype stage involves turning ideas into tangible, scaled-down versions of the product or service, which are then rigorously evaluated in the Test stage. Prototyping entails creating

scaled-down versions of the product or specific features found within the product (Brown, 2008). The Test stage involves testing the complete product using the best solutions identified during the prototype phase (Brown, 2008). The final stage assesses the viability and effectiveness of the solutions, leading to further refinements. The repeated nature of design thinking fosters continuous improvement and adaptation, ensuring that solutions are not only innovative but also deeply resonant with the user's needs and expectations.

While the Five Stages model of design thinking developed by Brown (2008) has been widely adopted in innovation, public sector, and policy contexts, it has also been the subject of critical scrutiny. Scholars have raised concerns about its over-simplification of complex social processes, its reduction of systemic problems into linear steps, and the risk of superficial participation if not implemented with deep contextual understanding (Kimbell, 2011; Vink & Wetter-Edman, 2021). While I recognise the critiques of design thinking, this study uses the approach as a flexible and responsive framework. The Five Stages served not as a strict sequence, but as a structure to support participation and reflection. Refugees weren't just included at the 'empathise' stage as a gesture but were meaningfully involved throughout. Likewise, policymakers took part in a reflective process focused on learning together, rather than finding quick fixes (see also chapter 6).

4.5 Design Thinking Applications

Following the emergence of design methodologies in the 1960s, there was a shift towards utilising the design process and developing novel methods based on it (see section 4.3). However, it is not easy to provide an overview of these practices in one section; therefore, I chose to focus here on key design methodologies identified from numerous sources that are close to the focus of my PhD, including human-centred design, participatory design, co-production, and service design. These methodologies have been selected due to their significant contribution to the evolution of contemporary design thinking practice as well as their relevance in the migration studies context.

4.5.1 Human-Centred Design

Design thinking offers a structured yet flexible framework for tackling complex problems in various domains. Its emphasis on human-centred design, coupled with the iterative process encapsulated in its five stages, provides a comprehensive approach to problem-solving. Human-centred design (HCD) is a core aspect of design thinking, prioritising the end-users' needs and experiences in the design process; it is also referred to as user-centred design (Pea, 1987). HCD is an approach to problem-solving that places the people who face challenges at the centre of the design process (Pea, 1987). HCD involves the integration of user experience, ensuring that the solutions are not only technically feasible and economically viable but also desirable from a user perspective (Pea, 1987). It focuses on understanding the needs and desires of the end-users before considering the viability and feasibility of a solution. HCD involves designing with, rather than for, the people being served, empowering them to be active participants in the design process (Hasselknippe et al., 2017). This approach is particularly valuable in humanitarian and community development contexts, as it aims to create products, services, and systems that are meaningful, relevant, and desirable to the target group. By involving the end-users in the design process, HCD fosters creativity, confidence, and collaboration, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable solutions (Hasselknippe et al., 2017). It emphasises empathy, active engagement with users, and iterative prototyping to create products, services, or systems that truly meet the needs of the people they are designed for (James and Forrester-Jones, 2022). HCD is characterised by a deep understanding of the context in which the design will be used, an emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, and a commitment to creating solutions that enhance the well-being and quality of life of the end-users (James and Forrester-Jones, 2022).

4.5.2 Participatory Design

Similar to HCD, Participatory design (PD) is a methodology that emphasises the active involvement of end-users in the development and design process of products or systems. PD, in essence, is a methodology that involves interaction with the community during the design process, incorporating various methods like ethnography, prototyping, testing, and launching products or services within the community. This approach can be applied in various ways, such as choosing specific methods like usability tests or interviews, or incorporating community members in a

design method, thereby making it participatory (Udoewa, 2022). Designing effective participatory processes has become a global commitment, characterised by a convergence of tools despite their diverse features. Common aspects of these processes include a highly structured approach with well-defined phases, pre-defined durations with strict time control, interaction in small groups, provision of complete and accessible information, and moderation by neutral facilitators. This global movement towards participatory methodologies has led to the emergence of a professional domain dedicated to designing and running public participation processes (Bobbio, 2019)

4.5.3 Co-production

Co-production or co-creation is a collaborative process where multiple stakeholders, such as employees, clients, and users, work together to develop and design products, services, or solutions. Co-production recognises the two-way nature of services and how the relationships and interactions between those providing and using a service influence its delivery, value, and outcomes (Robert et al., 2022). It is used as a creative way of understanding experiences and improving services through the adoption of a range of design methods, tools, and processes that are often described as "human-centred." These concepts have roots in participatory design movements as they both emphasise the importance of involving end-users in the design and delivery of services to improve their quality and effectiveness (Robert et al., 2022). This approach emphasises the active involvement and participation of all parties in the creation process, aiming to break down hierarchies and empower individuals to contribute their ideas and perspectives (Vardakosta et al., 2023). It often involves cross-departmental collaboration, role-playing, and visual methods to facilitate communication and idea generation. The goal of co-production is to foster a sense of ownership, responsibility, and empowerment among all participants, ultimately leading to more innovative and user-centred outcomes (Di Russo, 2016).

4.5.4 Service Design

Service design (SD) is a design methodology and discipline that focuses on the user experience and the journey and experience of using a product or service. It draws on traditions such as product, environment, experience, and interaction design, and shifts

the focus from considering products and services as separate entities to viewing everything as a type of service that plays a role in value creation (Kimbell, 2009b). This approach takes a holistic perspective and involves designers, users, and stakeholders in managing, influencing, or being affected by a service outcome. Visual tools, such as journey maps, scenarios, and storyboarding, play a central role in service design practice, and methodologies aim to generate a better understanding of all variables and personas involved with a service (Kimbell, 2010). The goal of service design is to resolve service problems and create socially innovative solutions for sustainability. In recent years, there has been a significant focus on interdisciplinary methods in service design, enhancing its versatility and application in diverse contexts such as digital service transformation and tourism service ecosystems (Prestes Joly et al., 2019).

4.5.5 Design Thinking Tools

Design thinking utilises a variety of tools to facilitate problem-solving and product development. These tools, integral to the design thinking process, are designed to foster creativity, empathy, and effective prototyping (Brown, 2009). Below I examine the key tools within design thinking, namely journey mapping, statement starters, brainstorming and mind mapping, empathy maps, personas, storyboarding and prototyping:

1. Journey Mapping: Also known as experience diagramming, is a tool used to understand and visualise the user experience. It involves creating a detailed map of the user's journey with a product or service, highlighting key interactions and emotional states (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2021). This process aids in identifying pain points and areas for improvement. Pain points are specific problems or obstacles that users encounter during their interaction with a product or service, which can cause frustration and hinder their overall experience (Kalbach, 2016). Kalbach (2016) emphasises that journey maps must be rooted in real data and should encompass the entirety of the user's experience, from initial engagement to long-term use. According to Stickdorn and Schneider (2021), journey maps create a holistic view of a customer's experience, thereby enabling designers to identify key moments that can either be improved or innovated upon (see also Chapter 6).

2. Statement Starters: Statement starters are used in the ideation phase of design thinking. They are open-ended prompts that encourage creative thinking and problem re-framing. Liedtka and Ogilvie (2011) suggest that statement starters, such as "How might we...?" or "What if...?", are effective in expanding the solution space and fostering a collaborative ideation environment. These prompts help move beyond obvious solutions and explore more innovative approaches. These starters help shift the focus from problem identification to solution ideation. These open-ended questions encourage divergent thinking, a cornerstone of brainstorming and mind mapping (see also Chapter 6).

3. Brainstorming and Mind Mapping: These tools are used to generate a wide array of ideas and to visually organise thoughts and concepts. Brainstorming encourages the generation of a large number of ideas, fostering creativity and diverse thinking (Interaction Design Foundation, 2024). Mind mapping, on the other hand, is a visual tool that organises thoughts and ideas around a central concept. Mind maps harness the full range of cortical skills – word, image, number, logic, rhythm, colour, and spatial awareness – in a single, uniquely powerful manner (Buzan and Buzan, 2006) (see also Chapter 6).

4. Empathy Maps: An empathy map is a tool that helps designers empathise with users by categorising and understanding their experiences (Gray et al., 2010). They are visual representations that articulate what designers know about a particular type of user. Gray et al. (2010) suggest that empathy maps enable designers to develop a deeper insight into their customers and users, creating a shared understanding of user needs and fostering empathy among team members. While journey maps are more focused on the user's interactions with a product or service over time, empathy maps focus primarily on gaining a deep, empathetic understanding of the users.

5. Personas: A persona is "a user representation intending to simplify communication and project decision making by selecting project rules that suit the real propositions" (Halvorsrud et al., 2014). They represent a "character" that embodies the characteristics of a target user group, facilitating effective engagement for both clients and design teams within the design process (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2021). Understanding customer segments with coherent identity was developed in 1994, and since then, the method has been used for the development of marketing products,

communication and service design purposes, to reflect the human perspective of design thinking. Personas can be used during the empathise or define phases of design thinking (Chasanidou et al., 2015).

6. Storyboarding: This tool involves creating a visual narrative to explore and communicate the user's experience. Storyboarding aids in visualising the implementation of a product or service within the context of the user's life (Little, 2013). It is argued that storyboarding assists in understanding and addressing the emotional journey of users, enabling the design of more effective and empathetic solutions (Little, 2013).

7. Prototyping: Prototyping is a core aspect of design thinking, allowing teams to quickly turn ideas into tangible artefacts or business proposals. Prototypes can range from simple sketches to functional models. Prototyping is crucial for testing hypotheses about both the problem and the solution, allowing for rapid iteration and improvement (Ries, 2011). Buchenau and Suri (2000) argue that the primary value of prototyping is not in the model itself, but in the learning that occurs from creating and testing it (see also Chapter 6).

In conclusion, the various tools of design thinking such as journey mapping, statement starters, brainstorming and mind mapping, empathy maps, storyboarding, and prototyping, serve as crucial elements in fostering creativity, empathy, and effective solution-building in the realm of problem-solving and product development. Each tool offers a unique way to understand and address user needs, making design thinking a powerful approach for innovation.

The tools of design thinking, while powerful, come with their own set of strengths and weaknesses. One of the key strengths is their ability to foster creativity and empathy, enabling designers to develop solutions that are deeply attuned to user needs. Journey mapping, for instance, provides a comprehensive view of user interactions, facilitating the identification of pain points and opportunities for innovation (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2021; Kalbach, 2016). However, these tools can also be time-consuming and resource-intensive, requiring significant input from users and stakeholders. Additionally, tools like personas and empathy maps rely heavily on accurate and representative data; any bias or misrepresentation can lead to flawed

insights (Gray et al., 2010; Halvorsrud et al., 2014). These design thinking tools align closely with existing methods in social research, such as ethnographic studies, surveys, and interviews, which also aim to understand human behaviour and experiences. For instance, journey mapping shares similarities with ethnographic fieldwork in its detailed exploration of user experiences, while empathy maps parallel the use of qualitative interviews to gain deeper insights into individuals' thoughts and feelings (Kalbach, 2016; Gray et al., 2010). By integrating these tools, design thinking enriches the research process, providing a structured yet flexible approach to problem-solving and innovation.

4.6 Design Thinking vs Other Participatory Research Approaches

While this research draws on principles familiar in participatory research, action research, and co-production, such as collaboration, reflexivity, and power-sharing, it is important to clarify how design thinking is distinct from these traditions.

Participatory and action research approaches are typically grounded in critical theory and often focus on process over product, with goals such as empowerment, consciousness-raising, or social justice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Co-production in research, meanwhile, aims to democratise knowledge production by recognising the value of lived experience alongside academic expertise (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Beresford, 2019).

By contrast, design thinking places strong emphasis on developing practical, actionable solutions through iterative stages. Its strength lies in translating lived experience into policy-relevant insights, and in moving beyond diagnosis toward experimentation and prototyping. Moreover, design thinking allows for a structured yet flexible framework that facilitates innovation without requiring long-term embeddedness in communities, as action research often does. It is particularly well-suited to policymaking contexts, where evidence of feasibility and outcome orientation is often necessary to influence decision-making.

In this research, the design thinking model enabled not just shared reflection, but shared invention, giving refugee participants structured tools to move from articulating problems to envisioning potential policy interventions. This emphasis on actionable

outcomes is what makes design thinking distinctive within the broader ecosystem of participatory approaches

4.7 Design Thinking in Policymaking

Design has been long considered as an element of policy development (Howlett, 2011; Schneider and Ingram, 1997b; Lynn and Gould, 1980), insofar as implementing any policy necessitates the design of services and products delivered by said policy (Alford, 2009; Wilson, 1991; Lipsky, 1980). This is particularly relevant in addressing wicked problems, which are complex, multifaceted issues that require innovative and adaptive policy design (Rittel and Webber, 1973). However, recent scholarship has begun to explore the potential role of design in policymaking more explicitly. Scholars have engaged with design thinking as a strategic tool in policy development, advocating for its use to address the needs and experiences of end-users more directly, from the outset (Moore, 2000; Shergold, 2015). Governments too are increasingly recognising the value of design thinking as a means to bridge the gap between citizens' expectations and the services and products resulting from policy. There is growing optimism about governments' capacity to leverage design within the policymaking process to better respond to public needs (Clarke and Craft, 2023). As Shergold (2015, p.17) explains, “good policy should harness the views of those likely to be impacted by the proposal”. Design-based policymaking seeks to view policies through the experiences of those who are directly impacted by them. Such a bottom-up approach results in policies that are human-centred rather than system-centred, promising a more empathetic engagement with users compared to traditional top-down methodologies (Kimbell, 2015). This approach has been applied in various policy areas, including healthcare, education, urban planning, and social services, where understanding and addressing the specific needs and contexts of users is crucial for effective policy outcomes (Bason, 2014).

The transition from the old process of public problem solving (i.e. top-down approach) to a new process (i.e. bottom-up approach) (see Figure 4.3) stems from a recognition of the importance of citizen engagement at the beginning of the public problem-solving process and the facilitation of connections with other problem solvers across various sectors (McGuinness and Slaughter, 2019). Traditionally, policymaking involved researchers and analysts collecting data, formulating solutions, and implementing

these through legislation or regulation, a process often lacking real-time feedback and adaptability. As Bovens et al. (2006, p. 321) note, “the politics of policy evaluation often involves struggles over the control of knowledge and expertise, the framing of problems and solutions, and the allocation of blame and credit”. In contrast, the contemporary practice of public problem solving adopts a human-centred approach, emphasising the understanding of individual needs, experimentation, data-informed decision-making, and scalable design (Brown and Wyatt, 2010). The new process advocates for initiating projects on a small scale, seeking local solutions (see also Chapter 3 for more details on the shift to localism), testing ideas with end-users, and evaluating impact prior to expansion. It aims to be more attuned to public needs, focusing on delivering empirically based results and incorporating real-time feedback. Overall, this shift towards a more agile, human-centred, and data-driven methodology represents a significant evolution in the approach to public problem solving, with design thinking at its core.

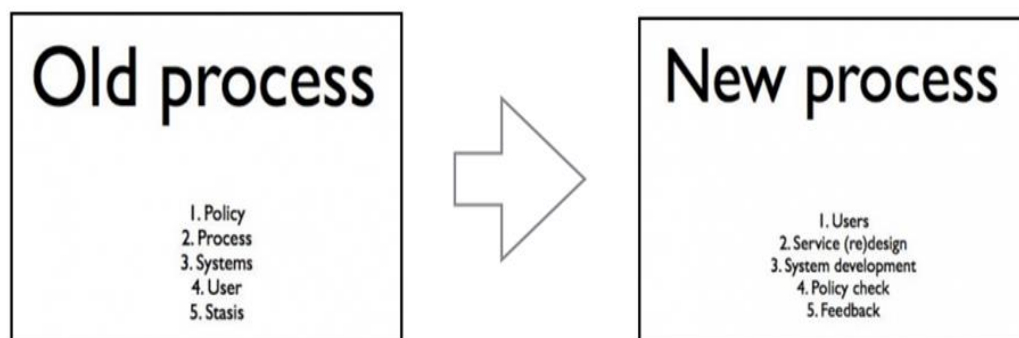


Figure 4.3: Old to the new process of public problem solving (Bracken, 2013)

Indeed, some argue that “policymaking has been characterised as an intentionally rational process involving a linear path from problem definition to the analysis of options and development of policy solutions” (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016, p.3). Thus, many have suggested that introducing design thinking to policymaking could help a better understanding of the problem and inform its definition through an early consultation with stakeholders and end users (Liedtka et al., 2013; Dorst and Cross, 2001; Rowe, 1991; Buchanan and Margolin, 1995). There is also an emphasis on the importance of early engagement with end users and the integration of design processes and capabilities into policymaking processes (Liedtka et al., 2013; Dorst

and Cross, 2001; Rowe, 1991; Buchanan and Margolin, 1995). Kimbell et al. (2022) argue that challenges in public policy processes are multidimensional and complex, requiring new problem-solving strategies that recognise different ways of knowing and informal processes.

In the 2010s, the incorporation of design thinking into policy analysis and development became increasingly prominent. Mintrom and Luetjens (2016) explored the potential of design thinking strategies in policymaking, emphasising their applicability beyond small-scale social issues to broader policy contexts. They outlined five strategies integral to design thinking, rooted in longstanding utilised methodology in social science methodologies (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016), as demonstrated in Figure 4.4.

The first suggested design thinking strategy is environmental scanning, which involves casting a wide net to explore different perspectives and absorb knowledge from areas not traditionally considered in policymaking processes. It helps policy developers question longstanding assumptions and review current policy settings by gathering information to create an initial analysis and generate hypotheses about the road ahead (Fahey and King, 1977). This approach can be used when considering new policy areas or improving existing policies, and it aims to fill knowledge gaps and develop a holistic understanding of systems (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016). Environmental scanning is a valuable tool for gaining insights that can inform and shape the development of effective and impactful government policies. For example, journey mapping can be utilised within environmental scanning to visualise and understand the entire experience of policy impact on stakeholders, identifying pain points and opportunities for improvement (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2021; Kalbach, 2016).

Mintrom and Luetjens (2016) also argue that participant observation is a valuable tool for policymakers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the needs, challenges, and behaviours of the people they are designing policies for, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive policy development. It is particularly useful for understanding the lived experiences of individuals and groups, as well as uncovering insights that may not be readily apparent through other research methods. Empathy maps can be utilised in this strategy, which can help to categorise and understand user experiences and emotions, fostering a shared understanding and empathy among policymakers (Gray et al., 2010).

Open-to-Learning Conversations are a key strategy of design thinking in policymaking (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016). They allow for the challenging of assumptions and preconceived ideas, leading to innovative solutions and a deeper understanding of the needs of the target population. The use of open-to-learning conversations in policymaking can lead to more effective and inclusive policy development processes (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016). These conversations can be facilitated through brainstorming and mind mapping sessions, which encourage the generation of diverse ideas and help to visually organise thoughts and concepts.

Mapping can also be used to systematically visualise human experiences and think about the steps or 'touchpoints' of a process. Mapping can help identify areas where services or processes can be eliminated, streamlined, enhanced, or changed (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016). This strategy utilises personas and journey maps to create detailed profiles and visual narratives that explore and communicate the user's experience, highlighting key interactions and potential areas for improvement.

Another strategy suggested by Mintrom and Luetjens (2016) is sensemaking, which is an action-oriented process that people automatically go through to integrate experiences into their understanding of the world around them. Sensemaking fosters the development of more effective solutions by allowing ideas to undergo continuous refinement, testing, and iteration. This iterative process is parallel to prototyping, where ideas are rapidly developed into tangible forms, tested, and refined based on feedback, ensuring that policies remain flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances (Ries, 2011).

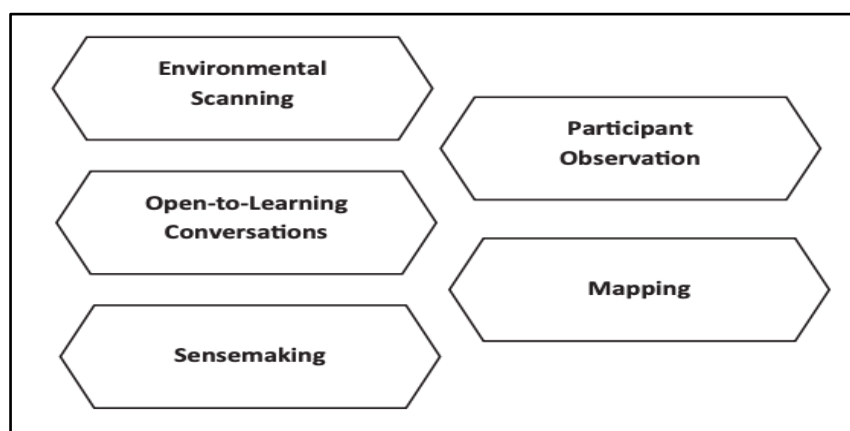


Figure 4.4: Key Design Thinking Strategies (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016)

Many of the design thinking strategies proposed by Mintrom and Luetjens (2016) are currently being adopted by policymakers worldwide, providing a structured framework for the use of tools and methods that were already in practice. See also Chapter 6 for more information on how some of these strategies were covered in the methods which I used.

In Europe, there has been a significant evolution in policymaking, with a growing adoption of design methods for service delivery and policy development. These methods include service design, user experience, and user-centred design. For instance, the UK government has incorporated service design in prototyping NHS services (Paul and Vipond, 2019). Denmark dedicated an entire programme, the "Programme for User-Driven Innovation," to implementing service design in the public sector from 2007 to 2009, incorporating elements like participatory design, personas, and co-creation (Byriel, n.d.). Innovation and policy labs are being established in Europe to apply design methods to complex policy issues, thus advancing policymaking practices (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016).

Kimbell (2016, p.1) highlights the diverse applications of design thinking in policymaking across European governments, including specialist units within government departments, local or city governments, and intermediary bodies like Nesta's Public Policy Lab in the UK (see section 4.7.1 for examples). Policy labs are new institutional forms that have emerged as instruments of governance and institutional designs (Kimbell et al., 2022). They are characterised by their emphasis on using expertise associated with design to improve the design of public policies. Studies of policy labs have highlighted their potential to facilitate co-productive models of public problem solving, but also the challenges they face in terms of institutionalisation and sustainability (Olejniczak et al., 2020). These labs represent an important area of research for understanding the institutionalisation of design for policy and the different variants of design practice within governmental hierarchies and policymaking processes. Policy labs utilise design thinking tools to empathise with citizens, define policy problems more accurately, and prototype policy solutions. There is a growing interest from global governments in operating policy labs to support policy practitioners with innovative solutions; in the European Union alone there are 78 policy labs (Olejniczak et al., 2020).

As the landscape of policymaking evolves with the integration of design thinking, there remains a vast potential for further exploration and application, especially in areas that are yet to be fully addressed, such as refugee integration policy. This exploration promises not only to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of policies but also to ensure they are more attuned to the nuanced needs of diverse populations. By fostering a culture of innovation, empathy, and user-centred design, policymakers can bridge gaps, overcome challenges, and craft solutions that are both innovative and inclusive. The momentum gained in various European contexts highlights the transformative power of design thinking in policymaking, urging a continued and expanded application to embrace all facets of societal needs, including the critical and often overlooked area of refugee integration.

However, while the integration of design thinking into policymaking offers numerous benefits, it is not without its challenges and limitations. Critics argue that the approach can sometimes be overly idealistic, assuming that all problems can be neatly solved through design methodologies without considering the deeper, systemic issues and power dynamics at play (Roberts, 2000). There is also a risk of oversimplification, where complex policy problems are reduced to more manageable but less representative issues, leading to solutions that do not address the root causes (Bason, 2018). Furthermore, the implementation of design thinking in government contexts often requires significant cultural and structural changes, which can be met with resistance from entrenched bureaucratic systems and traditional policymakers (Clarke and Craft, 2023). Additionally, the emphasis on user-centred approaches may unintentionally marginalise less vocal or harder-to-reach groups, raising concerns about inclusivity and equity (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). Therefore, while the potential of design thinking in policymaking is substantial, it necessitates a critical and nuanced application, one that continuously evaluates and adapts to ensure that it does not merely replace one set of problems with another, but rather, fosters genuine and inclusive innovation in addressing societal challenges.

4.8 Design Thinking in Migrant-related Challenges

Design thinking is starting to be used in different areas of service provision in relation to refugees and migrants; below, I explore various global initiatives where design

thinking has been applied to work on refugee and migrant-related issues, categorising them based on the nature of their application and the stakeholders involved.

4.8.1 Policy and Service Improvement

1. Home Office Policy and Innovation Lab (CoLab), UK: CoLab used design thinking to revamp the UK's refugee integration loans service. Through collaborative efforts involving designers, researchers, and technologists, they mapped the system, identified core issues, and proposed digital enhancements and process optimisations (Arlond, 2021). Through extensive research with refugees, support workers, and stakeholders, the team mapped out the entire system and defined three core problem statements (Arlond, 2021). They used a structured approach and design thinking to propose improvements, including a digital application form and streamlined back-office processes. CoLab applied design thinking to the refugee integration loan service by first identifying core issues through extensive research with refugees, support workers, and stakeholders (Arlond, 2021). They used insights from user research to define problem statements and establish target outcomes. Building on IDEO's definition of design thinking, they sought ideas that were desirable from a user point of view, technologically feasible, and economically viable. CoLab then used a combination of research and hypothesis-led, rapid experimentation to discard some ideas, iterate others, and take the best performing ideas forward for further development. This structured approach enabled them to build confidence that the proposed solution would deliver the intended outcomes (Arlond, 2021). Additionally, they adapted to challenging circumstances by proposing amendments to the policy, creating and testing designs for a digital application form, and streamlining back-office processes. The new service and policy changes were launched in September 2021, with the team expecting significant improvements in staff efficiency and decision-making. They are closely monitoring the service's performance to accurately measure its impact (Arlond, 2021).

2. Nesta UK and Migration Hub Network, Berlin: In 2017, this partnership focused on co-designing services with refugees to improve their integration into education, housing, the economy, and healthcare sectors. They utilised human-centred design tools in workshops to involve refugees directly in the design of services that affect them (Glennie and Reynolds, 2017). The workshop brought together policymakers,

refugees, and researchers to explore and experiment with human-centred design tools to see how refugees can be part of designing services and policies in relation to integration (Glennie and Reynolds, 2017). The workshop aimed to address the lack of direct involvement of refugees in the co-design of policies and services that empower them in their new communities. Through interactive exercises and discussions, participants identified the potential benefits of a human-centred design approach, such as generating better quality data, testing and proving concepts before implementation, and creating more tailored solutions that respond to the real needs of users (Glennie and Reynolds, 2017). The workshop also highlighted the challenges and opportunities associated with human-centred design, emphasising the need for a mindset shift in policy design and the systematic utilisation of the assets and experiences of newcomers. The organisers expressed a commitment to adapting and iterating the workshop approach to help policymakers and others apply these methods to various public challenges, recognising the importance of involving newcomers in the process to challenge assumptions and better understand their needs (Glennie and Reynolds, 2017).

3. Hansjörg Wyss Wellness Center, South Philadelphia: Dedicated to refugee and immigrant health, this centre used design thinking to tailor its clinical spaces to the unique cultural and healthcare needs of its diverse patient population, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity (Solomon et al., 2023). By integrating the principles of human-centred design, the centre was able to address the diverse needs and priorities of its patient population, which predominantly comprises migrants. Through a comprehensive process that involved focus groups, design workshops, and iterations of concept designs, the centre was able to incorporate themes such as access, resources, health education, and cultural considerations into its final design (Solomon et al., 2023). The resulting space reflects a patient-oriented approach, featuring a welcoming library reception, a gallery with local art and cultural artifacts, and multi-purpose areas that accommodate intergenerational family visits and community education. The innovative use of design thinking methods has allowed the Hansjörg Wyss Wellness Center to create a clinical space that is responsive to the unique cultural, language, and healthcare needs of its diverse patient population (Solomon et al., 2023).

4.8.2 Local System Analysis and Improvement

1. Austrheim Municipality asylum system, Norway: This project applied design thinking to explore the complexities within the local asylum and integration systems. By deeply understanding the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees, the initiative aimed to develop innovative and user-centred solutions for more effective integration (Percy and Nielsen, 2014). This approach aimed to provide participants with a deeper understanding of the complexities within the local system and identify key success factors for the integration programme. By engaging in the design thinking process, the project team sought to better comprehend the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees, ultimately working towards innovative and user-centred solutions (Percy and Nielsen, 2014). Through this method, Norway demonstrated a commitment to addressing the diverse needs of migrants and refugees, fostering a more inclusive and effective integration programme within the Austrheim municipality (Percy and Nielsen, 2014).

2. Immigration design thinking in Canada: Greenberg and Hameed (2023) introduced "Immigration design thinking" to creatively resolve talent acquisition challenges in Canadian businesses. This approach tailored immigration solutions to fit specific corporate needs, enhancing operational effectiveness and addressing skills shortages. This approach involved identifying skills and talent challenges specific to a business model and developing bespoke immigration solutions unique to the needs of each client. One of their applications of the Immigration design thinking was in a talent mapping project for a Canadian infrastructure and engineering company (Greenberg and Hameed, 2023). Their approach involved adapting a proactive and creative approach to strategically address talent gaps and access rare and diverse skills. By identifying specific business needs and developing bespoke immigration solutions, companies were able to gain a competitive advantage, enhance operational effectiveness, and drive business growth and innovation. The design thinking approach not only addressed immediate talent shortages but also provided long-term, sustainable talent solutions, showcasing the power of design thinking in the context of talent acquisition and retention (Greenberg and Hameed, 2023).

4.8.3 Humanitarian Innovation and Empowerment

1. UNHCR Innovation Lab: Established in Geneva in 2012, the lab employs design thinking to enhance humanitarian services delivery. It has fostered numerous projects aimed at improving the quality of life for refugees by encouraging creative problem-solving and direct involvement of refugees in the design processes (Strecker, 2014; UNHCR, n.d.). The Innovation lab “creates safe spaces for experimentation to take place in UNHCR’s operations, as well as at Headquarters, whilst instilling a future-oriented approach into how [to] solve problems and create impact for refugee communities” (UNHCR Innovation, n.d.). Under this service different projects have been funded to prototype new ideas that could contribute to creating a better life for refugees, such as a project titled “Connectivity for Refugees” which uses design thinking to find creative solutions for providing connectivity to refugees everywhere they go (UNHCR, n.d.). The UNHCR Innovation Service also hosts 20 fellows every year to train and mentor them to use creative thinking to address some of the most challenging issues that face refugees everyday (UNHCR, n.d.). Within its first two years, the UNHCR Innovation Lab has managed to create more than 25 projects (Strecker, 2014). This included a partnership with Stanford University to teach a design thinking course, in its law school, titled “Rethinking Refugee Communities” (Cuéllar, n.d.). The project aimed at challenging students into creating and prototyping solutions for refugees. This involved a collaboration between Stanford, UNHCR, and the International Rescue Committee, in which the students visited a Sudanese refugee camp and worked on ground with refugees. One of the ideas generated from this course was to develop software to ease the registration process in the camps; another was to create mobile software to facilitate communications between refugees and aid workers; while a third student project looked at ways to support and improve small-scale farming run by refugees (Duff-Brown, 2013).

2. Ideas Box for Somali Refugee Children, Ethiopia: Initiated by UNHCR Sub-Office Melkadida and implemented by Save the Children and Libraries without Borders, in coordination with the UNHCR Innovations Service in Geneva (Proczek and Garbarczyk, 2023). The Ideas Box was implemented for Somali refugee children and youth in in two refugee camps in Ethiopia, Melkadida and Bokolmany, with the aim of providing access to information, culture, and education to empower them and promote their rights. By using the design thinking method, the initiative was able to recognise the refugees’ true needs, thus fostering better communication and collaboration

between the project team members and the refugee populations. The method also allowed for the generation of diverse ideas and potential solutions to the challenges faced by the refugees, ultimately leading to the development of innovative and impactful solutions that were meaningful and usable for the refugee communities (Proczek and Garbarczyk, 2023). Through the application of the design thinking method, the Ideas Box initiative was able to address the wicked problems associated with migration and refugee issues, focusing on providing human-centred solutions to the complex challenges which the refugees faced.

3. OpenIDEO, the US: IDEO created an online platform dedicated to social innovation, in which one of its initiatives, called “Youth Helping Refugees”, was aimed at addressing refugee resettlement and youth unemployment. The project proposed was to create a Refugee Transition Community in collaboration with UNHCR that would act as a small town. Within this “town”, refugees were to be allowed to seek asylum and were provided with services and training provided by youth from the host countries, in order to boost the economy by creating job opportunities for both groups (Curtis, 2014). HCD Connect is another platform created by IDEO to allow people using human-centred design (HCD) methods and approaches to connect with other projects working on similar issues and to provide guidelines and support to each other to address different global challenges, including refugee support (IDEO, 2012)

4.8.4 Educational and Capacity Building

1. Adjumani Design Challenge, Uganda: The Adjumani Design Challenge (ADC) was a pilot project implemented by the Ugandan-Norwegian design company Design without Borders Uganda Ltd (DwB) on behalf of UNDP, in partnership with UNHCR and Adjumani Local Government (Hasselknippe et al., 2017). This project trained Ugandan and South Sudanese youths in design thinking processes to enable them to address community-specific challenges effectively. The training spanned three months and aimed to empower 30 participants, including Ugandan host-community and South Sudanese refugee youth, with relevant design thinking methods and processes. The goal was to equip the participants with the skills to design solutions for themselves and their communities, focusing on stimulating a mindset, creativity, and confidence necessary to turn challenges into opportunities for change. Through a series of workshops, the participants were guided through a complete Human-Centred

Design (HCD) process, enabling them to identify, frame, research, create, and implement solutions to the challenges they faced. As of late January 2017, three out of the six teams had implemented their solutions and were receiving income from them, indicating a success rate of at least 50%, although further study is necessary for long-term learnings (Hasselknippe et al., 2017). ADC's approach shifted from designing with the people served to giving the people the skills to design for themselves, showcasing the potential impact of such trainings in the context of refugee and host communities in Uganda.

2. Design Thinking for Integration Handbook Project: Funded by the Erasmus+ National Agency, this project produced a handbook to aid youth workers in using design thinking to integrate migrants and refugees. It emphasised creative and practical applications to enhance community engagement and policy development (Graceland Foundation, 2018). The project aimed at producing a handbook, titled “What design thinking can do for integration of migrants and refugees”, to provide the tools needed to guide the use of design to integrate refugees (Graceland Foundation, 2018). The project, carried out by organisations from Poland, Lithuania, and Spain, involved direct participants such as youth workers, youth, migrants, academic teachers, and indirect participants including other institutions dealing with migrant issues, local authorities, educational institutions, and local communities (Graceland Foundation, 2018). The activities included staff training on design thinking, developing design thinking solutions for integration, testing prototypes with migrants, and creating a handbook. The project aimed to enhance the creativity and communication skills of youth, bring positive changes for migrants, and develop the institutional capacity of partner organisations. The impact of the project extended to developing cooperation with NGOs, local authorities, and other organisations, as well as potentially influencing immigration policies and reaching the objectives of European policies. The longer-term results include the open-licensed handbook, being a practical example of design thinking implementation, and the use of acquired knowledge and skills by youth workers in various educational activities and organisational management (Graceland Foundation, 2018).

3. ALIEN Project, Europe: Spanning from 2016 to 2019 and funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, this project applied design thinking to address migration-related

challenges through interdisciplinary educational collaborations. It aimed to enhance social cohesion and equity within Europe by fostering knowledge exchange and developing innovative teaching methods (Proczek and Garbarczyk, 2023). It utilised the design thinking method to address wicked problems associated with migration and refugee processes (Proczek and Garbarczyk, 2023). The project involved an international consortium managed by the Polish Japanese Academy of Information Technology in collaboration with various European partners and a non-academic institution. By combining the knowledge and expertise of diverse stakeholders representing different scientific disciplines, such as economics, social work, education, social sciences, and art and design studies, the project aimed to contribute to greater equity and social cohesion within Europe (Proczek and Garbarczyk, 2023). The project's focus on interdisciplinary and participatory educational collaborations enriched the expertise on multiple social science disciplines and facilitated knowledge exchange and network building between academics, project partners, students, and diverse stakeholders, including NGOs, public institutions, and migrants. The project also developed lasting engagement of higher education institutions with local and international migrant organisations to build bridges and share knowledge, good practices, and raise awareness of issues around migration. Through its innovative teaching methods and living labs, the project advanced young people's intercultural competences, knowledge, and understanding of migration (Proczek and Garbarczyk, 2023). The project's outputs included method reports, manuals for educators, and workshop scenarios, contributing to the development of innovative solutions to wicked problems occurring around migrants and refugees (Proczek and Garbarczyk, 2023).

These diverse applications of design thinking in the context of refugee and migrant services demonstrate its versatility and effectiveness in addressing varied and complex challenges. By focusing on human-centred solutions, stakeholders across different sectors have been able to innovate and improve policies, services, and outcomes for refugees and migrants effectively. Most projects underscore the advantage of engaging directly with refugees, which helps in tailoring solutions that are practical and appropriate to their specific circumstances. The use of design thinking facilitates innovative solutions to complex problems, such as the digital transformation of services (e.g., digital application forms in the UK). Several projects involve a mix of stakeholders (academics, policymakers, technologists), fostering

interdisciplinary approaches and comprehensive solution development. However, many of the projects discussed are limited in scope and scale, often confined to specific locales or short-term implementations without clear strategies for broader application. Although projects are generally positive about potential impacts, there is often a lack of robust, long-term evaluative data to conclusively prove effectiveness and inform policy at larger scales. While these instances showcase successful applications of design thinking, they also hint at gaps in systematic adoption and scalability across different regions and contexts. There is a recurring theme of projects being pilot or localised without clear pathways to replicability of work or design thinking tools used. Additionally, the involvement of refugees in the design process, though highlighted, often lacks depth in terms of their influence on final outcomes and policy formulations. These gaps present an area for investigation into how design thinking can be more structurally applied to refugee policymaking and service design, which is what I am trying to explore in my PhD.

4.9 The potential of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking

In the context of migration and refugee challenges, which are often characterised by complexity and the involvement of multiple stakeholders, design thinking can offer a valuable framework for identifying, analysing, and addressing these issues (Pachocka et al., 2020). Migration and integration processes can be seen as wicked problems, which are difficult to define, have no single solution, and require the involvement of many stakeholders. Given that integration is acknowledged to be a shared responsibility, design thinking, with its emphasis on human-centred design and multidisciplinary collaboration, can be an effective approach to tackle these challenges. By integrating the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, including local governments, decision-makers, NGOs, and migrants themselves, design thinking can help in identifying the underlying needs and concerns, and in developing innovative and sustainable solutions (Pachocka et al., 2020). Unlike traditional policymaking approaches that often rely on top-down decision-making processes, design thinking actively involves the end-users and stakeholders throughout the entire process. This participatory nature ensures that the solutions are not only theoretically sound but practically viable and culturally appropriate.

The importance of applying design thinking in refugee integration policymaking comes from the part that it can play in covering some of the shortcomings that exist in the current refugee integration policy cycle discussed in earlier chapters. It provides a new way to communicate the different perspectives of refugee integration at different levels of government, which proved challenging as a result of the agenda dynamics discussed earlier (Scholten, 2013). For instance, journey mapping can be used to visualise the entire integration experience of refugees, identifying key interactions and pain points that need to be addressed (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2021; Kalbach, 2016). This method allows policymakers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the refugees' experience and areas for policy improvement. Moreover, empathy maps can help policymakers and stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of refugees' experiences, emotions, and needs, fostering a shared understanding and empathy among all parties involved (Gray et al., 2010). This approach aligns with the goal of bringing local perspectives into national-level discussions and ensuring an agreement on problem definitions, such as refugee integration.

Design thinking promises a convergence in policy as it should help to bring the local perspective into the national level and guarantee an agreement between these two levels on the problem definition (i.e. refugee integration). Moreover, design thinking could help support the “local turn” discussed earlier (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). Design thinking here can play a significant role in facilitating a co-production of policies that not only involve policymakers and authorities at local and national levels, but also learn from the refugees' knowledge of the system and its shortcomings. By involving refugees and local communities in the co-production of policies, design thinking ensures that the solutions are not only theoretically sound but practically viable and culturally appropriate. This co-production approach harnesses the lived experiences and insights of refugees, empowering them to contribute to the policymaking process (Robert et al., 2022).

Design thinking brings the last phase of the policy cycle (i.e., evaluating its outputs) into the first phases of the cycle (i.e. agenda setting and policy formulation). This could shorten the time wasted in the integration policy cycle and help produce more efficient policies that use the refugees' experience and local government's knowledge. This approach helps to involve the end user (i.e., refugee and host community) in the

integration design process, which should help in reaching a final output that aligns with what the end users need and want. For example, prototyping can be used to quickly develop and test new policy initiatives, allowing for rapid iteration based on feedback from refugees and stakeholders (Ries, 2011).

In the context of refugee integration governance, design thinking may help in improving both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of local governance: the horizontal dimension, which concerns involving local authorities and other stakeholders (i.e., NGOs and other social actors) in the refugee integration policymaking, and the vertical dimension, that includes relations and coordination of refugee integration policymaking between various levels (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). Using design thinking in the policymaking process of refugee integration ought to offer a new way to connect these two dimensions in a creative process that focuses on redefining refugee integration and mobilising efforts to prototype new systems of refugee integration. For instance, brainstorming and mind mapping sessions can facilitate the generation of a wide range of ideas from diverse stakeholders, fostering creativity and innovation.

Thus, the potential of using design thinking in migration and refugee challenges lies in its human-centred, collaborative, and creative approach to problem-solving. By integrating the perspectives of diverse stakeholders and emphasising empathy and innovation, design thinking can help in identifying, analysing, and addressing the complex issues related to migration (see next chapter). This approach has the potential to generate sustainable and inclusive solutions that address the needs and concerns of migrants and host communities alike.

4.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I reviewed the literature surrounding design thinking as a transformative approach in policymaking, with a special emphasis on its application to the complexities and dynamics of refugee and migrant integration. Through a detailed examination of design thinking's origins, theoretical foundations, processes, methodologies, and tools, as well as its practical applications in the realm of social policymaking, this review has underscored the approach's significant potential to

enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of policies aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees and migrants.

Through a comprehensive examination of its historical evolution, I learned that design thinking has emerged as a human-centred, empathetic, and iterative approach that goes beyond traditional problem-solving methods. It advocates for a participatory process that integrates the perspectives of all stakeholders, thereby fostering innovative, inclusive, and sustainable solutions. Moreover, through analysing some of the definitions associated with design thinking, I learned it is characterised by a commitment to understanding users' needs, a bias towards action, and a repeated process of prototyping and testing. The review confirmed that design thinking has emerged as particularly helpful in addressing the complex challenges in policymaking. Understanding its process and tools provided me with a solid foundation on where to start when designing my research tools and how to follow its five main stages (Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test).

As evidenced by the diverse applications and success stories highlighted in the chapter, design thinking offers a promising paradigm shift towards more practical and sustainable policymaking. The momentum gained in the application of design thinking across different policy contexts and the positive outcomes achieved underscore its significance and the urgent need for its broader adoption in policymaking processes. This exploration sets a solid foundation for further research and application of design thinking principles in the critical area of refugee and migrant integration, promising not only to enhance policy effectiveness but also to ensure policies are more responsive to the needs of diverse populations. Despite its promise, the review has also highlighted notable gaps in the literature, especially regarding the systematic application and empirical validation of design thinking principles in the specific context of refugee and migrant integration policies. Consequently, the review and the highlighted gap, placed my PhD research as an opportunity to examine design thinking application in this context.

The insights garnered from this examination of design thinking not only provide a foundational understanding of design thinking's relevance to social policymaking but also set the stage for the following chapters of this PhD thesis. Specifically, the findings and discussions presented herein will directly inform the development of a conceptual

framework in the following, aimed at leveraging design thinking for more nuanced, responsive, and effective policymaking in the context of refugee and migrant integration. By bridging theoretical insights with practical applications, the knowledge built in this chapter contributed to a deeper understanding of how design thinking can be harnessed to navigate the complexities of contemporary policymaking landscapes, thereby offering a promising pathway toward more humane, innovative, and sustainable policy solutions for the challenges faced by refugees and migrants. In the following chapter I will synthesise a comprehensive conceptual framework that integrates the key principles and strategies of design thinking, tailored specifically for refugee integration policymaking. This framework will draw upon the multifaceted insights discussed in the previous chapters, synthesising them into a coherent model that emphasises co-production and collaborative governance.

CHAPTER 5: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: INTEGRATING DESIGN THINKING TO ADDRESS GAPS IN REFUGEE INTEGRATION POLICY

5.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, I reviewed the literature related to refugee integration policymaking and the use of the design thinking approach in addressing social problems through policymaking. In Chapter 3, I identified a need for a novel perspective in refugee integration policymaking. The review of the refugee integration policy cycle highlighted the existing gap in UK integration policy between the national and local levels. It also addressed issues related to mainstreaming integration, particularly how it impacts refugees, who can be considered a vulnerable group with distinct needs and challenges. In Chapter 4, I reviewed literature in relation to design thinking and its applicability in policymaking. I also explored the potential benefits of applying design thinking to refugee integration policymaking, emphasising the advantages of involving end-users in the co-production of these policies and related services. This chapter interlinks concepts from both previous chapters within a conceptual framework. This conceptual framework forms the foundation for my research and provides a rationale for focusing my research around examining the implementation of the design thinking approach in developing refugee integration policies.

This chapter starts by building upon the policy cycle discussed in Chapter 3. It then moves to highlighting the gaps in refugee integration policy using a model developed by Haas et al. (2019) to understand gaps in migration policy. I identify two gaps in refugee integration policy: the implementation gap and the efficacy gap. I then bring the concept of design thinking in policymaking, which leads to a demonstration of its application in the context of refugee integration policy. The chapter concludes by synthesising these concepts into a conceptual framework designed to explore how the design thinking approach can enhance refugee integration policymaking and promote greater co-production.

5.2 Identifying Gaps in the Refugee Integration Policy Cycle: A Critical Analysis

In Chapter 3, I examined refugee integration policy through the lens of the policy cycle as outlined by Knill and Tosun (2017). This approach enabled me to map important aspects linked to refugee integration to 'complexify' the understanding of the policy process. It also facilitated the identification of key interlinkages among these phases. Moreover, I explored the influence of factors such as multilevel governance, mainstreaming integration, the multidimensionality of integration, agenda dynamics, and the 'local turn' on the policy cycle (refer to Figure 3.2: for more details). A critical review of the literature led me to the realisation that refugee integration policy is often subsumed under broader migrant integration policies (see also Chapter 1). This observation emphasises the need to distinctly define refugee integration, differentiating it from migrant integration. Scholten's (2013) work on agenda dynamics was instrumental in shedding light on the challenges in defining refugee integration across various governmental levels and the necessity to bridge the gap between policymaking and implementation. In addition, the multidimensional nature of refugee integration provides a better framework to understand integration and how to deal with the stakeholders involved, which necessitates involving refugees in the policymaking process. Their practical perspectives on integration are crucial not only for the richness they bring but also for their significant role in determining the success or failure of integration efforts. Moreover, examining the shift towards a 'local turn' in integration policies has also highlighted the imperative of incorporating the local level in policymaking, considering that the implementation of refugee integration policy mainly happens at the local level (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017).

But what do these insights imply for ensuring the effectiveness of refugee integration policy? Growing evidence suggests that the success or failure of a policy is linked to the policy implementation process as much as the merits of the policy (Hudson et al., 2019). Recognising that implementation is critical in ensuring policy success has led to the shift from traditional top-down policymaking to a more contemporary bottom-up approach. Conventional views of policy development and implementation are based on three problematic assumptions: first, that policy progresses in a sequential order where actions follow intentions; second, the process is viewed as a linear causal logic that begins with setting goals and selecting appropriate instruments and concludes in outcomes; and third, the hierarchy in which policy implementation occurs is considered less important than its formulation (Hill and Hupe, 2014). Although these assumptions

are increasingly questioned, many policymakers still adhere to a top-down and linear perspective, even as the policy context becomes more complex than in the past (Hudson et al., 2019). This increased complexity of the policy context is driven by the multifaceted nature of policy implementation and the complexity of recent policy problems, which exhibit diverse context-dependent causes and solutions, highlighting the nuanced challenges in policy design and execution (Hudson et al., 2019). The complexity of recent policies, alongside the existing 'implementation gap' extensively discussed in policy literature (Gunn, 1978), is further complicated by elements of nonlinearity, unpredictability, and adaptability (Braithwaite et al., 2018). To understand the gaps in refugee integration policy within this complex policy context, I utilise, in the remainder of this section, a framework designed by Haas et al. (2019) which identifies gaps in migration policies, and adapt it to explore gaps in refugee integration policy.

Haas et al. (2019, p. 901) differentiate in their model between two terms: “policy effects” and “policy effectiveness”. The former refers to the real, concrete impact of a given, implemented policy on migration processes, while the latter refers to the success of the policy in achieving its intended objectives. In the same way, I argue that a national refugee integration policy can shape the process of integration but also influence its perception and implementation by all stakeholders involved. In this context, I apply the terms used by Haas et al. (2019) to reflect on how current integration policies can affect the integration of refugees (i.e., policy effects). Additionally, I discuss the effectiveness of refugee policies by comparing the intended implementations with the actual outcomes experienced by refugees, typically assessed during the evaluation phase of the policy.

Policy effectiveness in migration policy literature is contested (Czaika and Haas, 2013). Such contestation is rooted in the misconception around the notion of effectiveness (*ibid*). In the Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘effectiveness’ is defined as “the fact of producing the result that is wanted or intended; the fact of producing a successful result” (OED, 2020a), whereas the word ‘effect’ is defined as “a change which is a result or consequence of an action or other cause” (OED, 2020b). Thus, policy effectiveness denotes the achievement of desired outcomes as specified in policy objectives, in contrast to policy effects, which are the actual outcomes achieved. Accordingly, in order to evaluate the successfulness of refugee integration

policy, it is crucial to compare these outcomes with the original objectives set at the start of the refugee integration policy cycle. It is important to note, particularly in the context of refugee integration in the UK, that there is a misconception in how the effectiveness of refugee integration policies is measured. Typically, this assessment is conducted through the lens of policy effects, such as measuring refugees' outcomes in areas like employment, education, health, and accommodation (Rogers and Hanson, 2022), rather than evaluating whether the policy objectives were appropriately set, implemented and led to these outcomes. This tendency to focus on measuring refugees' outcomes, as opposed to assessing policy effectiveness, could stem from the lack of a clear refugee integration strategy and the mainstreaming of refugee integration services. The model of refugee integration policy in the UK, as previously discussed in Chapter 1 (i.e., absence of policy, devolution, mainstreaming of services, and focusing on ad hoc local-level interventions), presents challenges in linking integration outcomes to specific policy objectives. Furthermore, within this model, efforts to establish metrics for refugee integration may seem pointless, highlighting the need for clearer policy objectives to define expected outcomes from refugee integration.

Building on the previous discussion, I argue that there are some identifiable gaps in both refugee integration policy and practice. By adapting the framework for gaps in migration policy from Haas et al. (2019. p. 902) to the context of refugee integration policy, I have identified two distinct gaps: the Implementation Gap and the Efficacy Gap, as illustrated in Figure 5.1:. The Implementation Gap refers to the discrepancies between the objectives set during the refugee integration policy formulation phase and the actual outputs implemented at the local level during the policy implementation phase. The Efficacy Gap, on the other hand, relates to the difference between how integration was implemented and the actual experiences of integration by refugees.

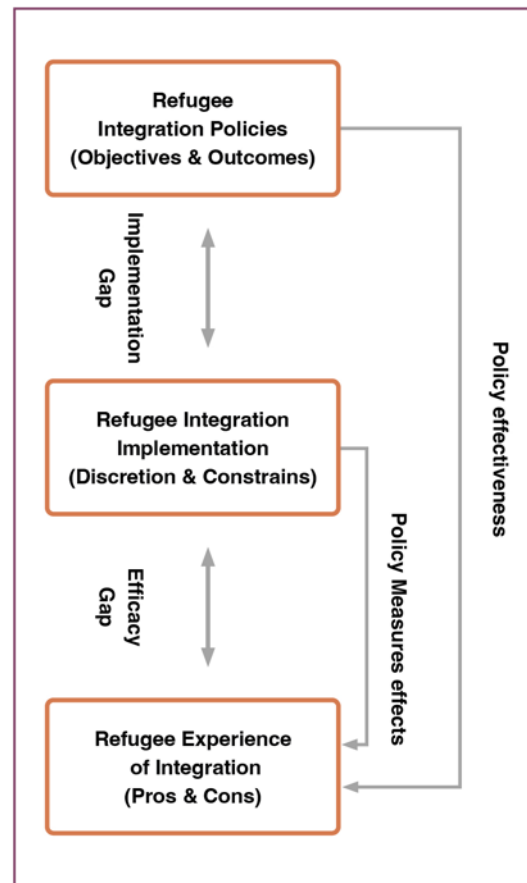


Figure 5.1: Gaps in Integration Policy (Author, adapted from Haas et al. 2019)

In the UK context, the implementation gap in refugee integration policy can be observed through the instances of decoupling and divergence at local levels, as previously discussed in Chapter 3 (Scholten, 2016; Mulvey, 2018). Besides, refugee integration encompasses a wide range of policy areas, including “immigration policy, employment and welfare, national security, citizenship and naturalisation, and foreign affairs (all reserved); housing, education, health, community planning, neighbourhood policy, policing, and social work (all devolved); and justice which, in terms of the asylum system in Britain, is both reserved and devolved” (Mulvey, 2018, p.162). On the other hand, one can argue that the implementation gap can be seen as reflecting the disconnect between policymaking and governance, particularly in a multi-level governance setting where sub-national and local governments are responsible for implementing policies in areas that fall under central government jurisdiction (Mulvey, 2015). However, at the same time local level and sub-national governments are held responsible for policy subjects that are considered devolved matters. Torn between

reserved and devolved/local matters, refugee integration in the UK suffers from an implementation gap between policymaking and its governance (Figure 5.1).

On the other hand, when examining the efficacy gap within refugee integration policy, this gap is evident in the UK's approach, especially due to the government's emphasis on quantifying integration and focusing on tangible outcomes, while neglecting individual integration experiences and outcomes (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015). Although recent literature has increasingly focused on individual experiences in refugee integration (Favell, 2001a; Valtonen, 2004; Atfield et al., 2007; Spicer, 2008; Losi and Strang, 2008a; Vreecer, 2010; Cheung and Phillimore, 2013; Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015), there is a gap in linking refugee experiences to policymaking or the implementation of integration. Moreover, the Home Office's recent efforts to provide guidance for measuring the effectiveness of integration interventions in the UK and to influence its strategy through updating the Indicator of Integration (IoI) (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019) seem ideal. However, this approach primarily focuses on implementation and overlooks the necessity of setting clear national integration objectives, thereby risking perpetuation of the efficacy gap. Finally, as Czaika and Haas (2013, p.491) observe, "a policy may have an effect, but this effect may be judged too small to meet the stated policy objective or may even be in the opposite direction to the intended". This situation is what could be referred to as an efficacy gap in refugee integration, where there is a divergence between the implemented policies in refugee integration and their actual outcomes (Figure 5.1).

Incorporating the conceptual framework of refugee integration policy gaps, as adapted from Haas et al. (2019) and portrayed in Figure 5.1, with the refugee integration policy cycle previously discussed (refer to Figure 3.2), I combine these components in Figure 5.2, presented below. Figure 5.2 illustrates how various elements that influence the refugee integration policy cycle contribute to the creation of both implementation and efficacy gaps, as elaborated upon in the above discussion. Combining these two figures provides a further layer to understanding the Implementation Gap and Efficacy Gap. The Implementation Gap here is directly linked to the policymaking process of the refugee integration policy cycle and influenced by agenda dynamics, mainstreaming of integration and the local turn, while the Efficacy Gap is directly linked to the governance phase of the refugee integration policy cycle and influenced by

multi-level governance, mainstreaming of integration, the local turn, and the multidimensionality of integration.

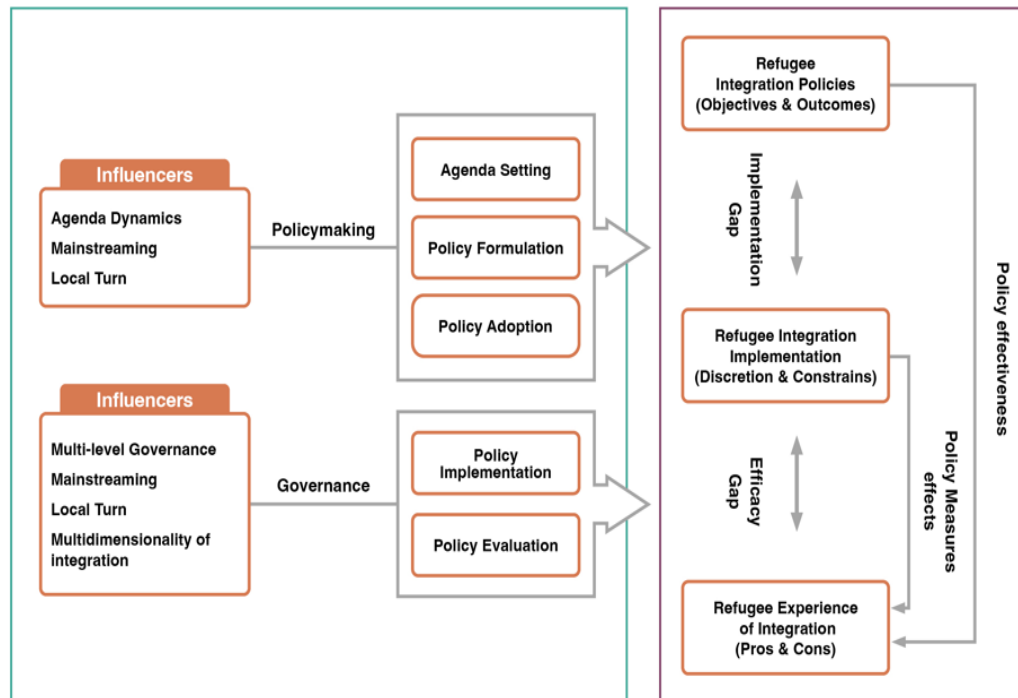


Figure 5.2: Refugee integration policy cycle and gaps (Author)

5.3 The Role of Design Thinking in Shaping Refugee Integration Policy

Moving from highlighting the gaps in refugee integration policy, I now explore conceptualising how design thinking could be applied in refugee integration policy to address the implementation and efficacy gap. In Chapter 3, I discussed the evolution of design thinking, particularly how it has emerged in social policy as a new way to address the increasing complex social challenges and facilitate co-production of policies. This section now turns to discuss how a design thinking approach might function in the policymaking process for refugee integration.

Design thinking in social policy could inform the policy problem definition process (discussed earlier in Chapter 3), by involving the stakeholders at an early stage of policymaking (Dorst and Cross, 2001; Rowe, 1991; Liedtka et al., 2013; Buchanan, 1992; Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016). This involvement brings new knowledge from the implementation level to policymakers, aiding them in redefining the policy problem.

Such a bottom-up approach seeks to view policies through the experiences of those who are directly impacted by them, resulting in the creation of human-centred policies, rather than system-centred ones. This approach is argued to foster more empathetic engagement with policy users (Luetjens, 2016). Contrasting with this, prevailing models of decision-making often adopt a top-down approach, where policy is shaped at a national level, implemented and processed through the system at local level, and users of this policy are involved primarily at the evaluation stage to provide feedback rather than contributing to the service design (Bracken, 2013).

However, a new shift in decision-making advocates for bringing the experience of the user to the first stage and then moving into redesigning services (refer to Figure 4.3 in Chapter 4). The shift emerged as a response to the growing understanding within the policymaking field of the implementation gap and the pressing need to link implementation to the success or failure of the policy (Mayntz, 1979; Goggin et al., 1990; O'Toole, 2000). The policy evaluation literature has highlighted the need for 'ex-post' evaluation of policy impacts as well as the need to link policy outputs to the governance process. Moreover, there is an emerging debate on the necessity of understanding the behaviour of policy targets through constructionist lenses, which took policy outputs and user experience beyond the policy implementation stage and brought it back to the policy formulation phase (Ingram and Schneider, 1990; Schneider and Ingram, 1990, 1994, 1997a). This shift has paved the way for applying design thinking to restructure traditional top-down policymaking, realigning the decision-making process through a bottom-up approach with current government issues (Howlett, 2014).

Figure 5.3 demonstrates how design thinking has emerged in policymaking as a response to the above discussed shift in decision-making, where end users are prioritised in the design of policy and its services. In this thesis, the concept of the 'end-user' of policy refers to those individuals directly affected by refugee integration policies, namely, refugees themselves. While policy design often privileges institutional perspectives (e.g., service providers, local authorities), this research positions refugees as active knowledge-holders and co-evaluators of policy. Their experiences of navigating housing, healthcare, employment, and education systems form the basis for assessing the efficacy and equity of integration efforts.

This prompts the question: How can the design thinking approach be utilised in reshaping refugee integration policy? In alignment with the new decision-making process and design thinking strategies, I was able to develop a five-step framework for employing design thinking in refugee integration policymaking (see Figure 5.3). I argue that design thinking in refugee integration policymaking starts by inviting all people involved in this policy, including refugees, policymakers, and other stakeholders, to review existing integration services. This collective review aims to identify and address gaps in the current model of refugee integration.

The first step in the design thinking approach is to redefine the policy problem in hand, which, in the context of refugee integration in the UK, includes identifying the challenges in existing integration services. Due to the absence of a clear national refugee integration policy, it is essential to start by understanding how different stakeholders (refugees, stakeholders/implementers, and policymakers) perceive the current integration services. These services may be mainstreamed, offered under other general services, or provided through specific interventions designed for refugee integration at the local level. By comparing these varied perspectives, a deeper understanding of the integration system's gaps can be gained, highlighting issues that contribute to gaps in implementation and efficacy.

Subsequently, the design thinking approach incorporates a knowledge sharing phase, wherein refugees and policymakers exchange knowledge on existing refugee integration issues. This collaboration potentially generates new knowledge and innovative solutions, facilitating the development of new integration objectives based on a shared understanding of refugee integration goals. Ultimately, the new insights gained will be instrumental in developing a set of new outcomes that could be used for future reformulation of refugee integration policy. These refined policy and outcomes aim to enhance policy effectiveness and are crucial for future evaluation.

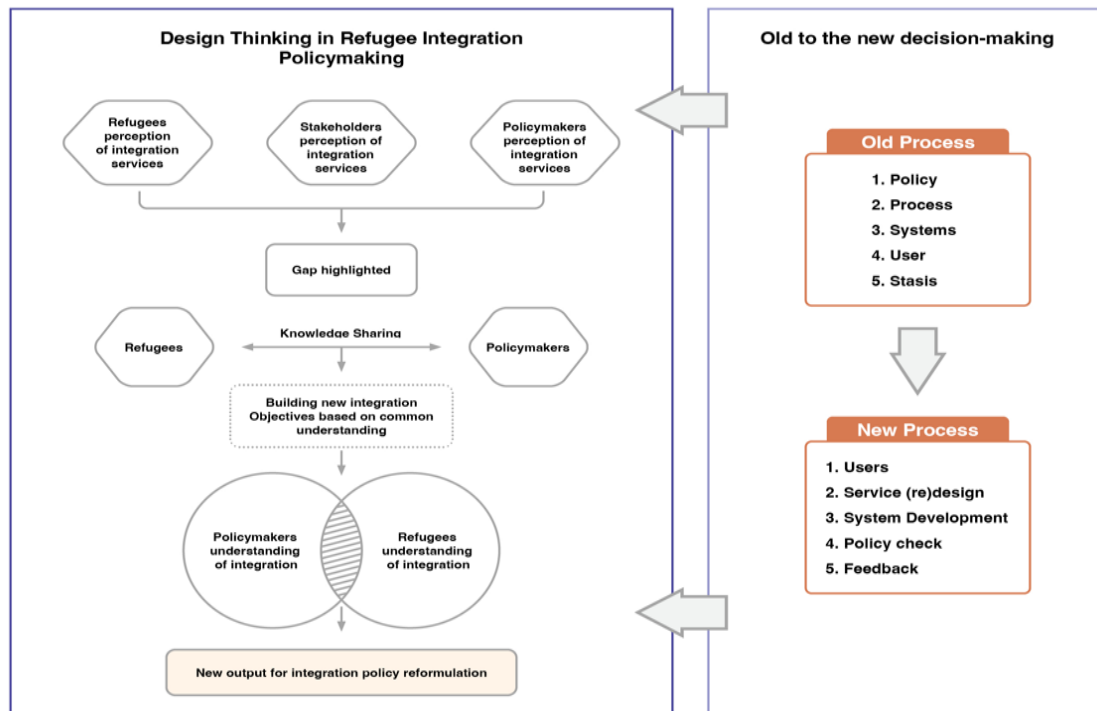


Figure 5.3: From Old to New Decision Making, A Framework for Using Design Thinking in Refugee Integration Policymaking (Author)

This five stages model is following Brown's design thinking model (2008) as a way to explore how design thinking might support refugee policymaking. This approach acknowledges critiques of traditional policy analysis that emphasise complexity, power, and institutional learning (Howlett, 2011; Colebatch, 2002), and positions design thinking as a means of opening up policy analysis to user-led reflection and iterative sense-making. In this way, the research bridges classic models of policy development with more recent calls for participatory and design-informed policy innovation (Bason, 2014; Kimbell & Bailey, 2017).

The choice to adopt Brown's (2008) Five Stages in this study is rooted in both its practical suitability and its analytical compatibility. While Brown's model originates from business and product design, its structured and iterative nature mirrors key features of public policy cycles, especially in problem-oriented governance and participatory approaches. Brown's model complements policy analysis frameworks by providing a human-centred methodology that can operate within each stage of the policy cycle. Furthermore, recent scholarship has advocated for expanding the policy toolkit to include design approaches (Kimbell, 2011; Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016),

particularly in contexts where traditional policy analysis methods fall short in capturing complexity, ambiguity, and user insight. Given the multidimensionality and contested nature of refugee integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2020), Brown's model provides a framework that enables deep, participatory engagement with policy end-users (refugees).

For this PhD, it was necessary to simplify the five-stage process to align with the practical realities of the case study I was able to access. Rather than using design thinking purely to generate new services, this research repurposes the five stages to examine how well existing integration policy aligns with the lived experiences and needs of refugees. In doing so, the model sought the subjective views of end users about the impact of the policy on their lived experience, while also producing insights to inform future policy design. This adaptation is explained in detail in the next chapter, where the structure of participant engagement and the rationale for sequencing are described.

5.4 A Framework for Using Design Thinking as A Solution to The Gaps in Refugee Integration Policy

Combining the knowledge discussed above, I have designed a framework for using design thinking in refugee integration policymaking. Before discussing the framework, I want to define/redefine some of the concepts that are used in this conceptual framework based on what has been discussed before, as follows:

UK Refugee Integration Policy: A collection of policy elements provided by the UK government in relation to refugee integration including services provided through mainstreaming integration to other general services (e.g., education, health, employment, housing); and other services provided under intervention specifically targeting refugees (i.e., ad hoc interventions provided at the local level plus any other specific programmes provided by the Home Office).

Refugee Integration Policy Effectiveness: The extent to which refugee integration policy outcomes have met the planned objectives set in the policy formulation phase.

Refugee Integration Policy Effects: These are the overall impacts of refugee integration policies on the actual integration of refugees and their individual experiences.

Implementation Gap in Refugee Integration: The existing gap between refugee integration policymaking and its governance. It reflects the changes that happen to policy objectives when implementing them at the local level.

Efficacy Gap in Refugee Integration: The existing gap between what refugees experience during their integration journey and what is implemented at various levels of governance. It reflects the differences in perspectives of refugee integration between all stakeholders.

Design Thinking in Refugee Integration Policymaking: The application of the design thinking approach and methodologies to foster the co-production of refugee integration policies, aiming to create more effective and responsive policies.

Integration Policy End-User: In the context of this thesis, the ‘end-user’ of refugee integration policy refers to refugees themselves, as they are the individuals directly affected by the design, implementation, and outcomes of such policies.

Refugee Integration Governance: In the context of refugee integration, governance includes the interaction between national, regional, and local actors — including government departments, local authorities, NGOs, and community stakeholders. It shapes how policies are translated into practice and determines the degree of centralisation, coordination, and flexibility in implementation.

Combining these components, I have developed a conceptual framework that synthesises ideas discussed in previous sections to provide a rationale for the proposition that I make in my PhD: to utilise design thinking in refugee integration policymaking. As discussed earlier, the increasing complexity of the policy context has contributed to the perception of the implementation gap within policies that are unpredictable, messy, and nonlinear (Hudson et al., 2019; Braithwaite et al., 2018). The elements that influence the refugee integration policy cycle (i.e., agenda dynamics, mainstreaming integration, the local turn, the multidimensionality of integration, and multilevel governance), play a role in making refugee integration policy more complex and requiring more flexibility. I argue that the multifaceted and intertwined nature of these elements with other public policies could resemble the so-called “wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber, 1973). According to Rittel and Webber

(1973), these problems are unique to social policy, characterised by their complexity and the necessity for distinctive approaches to address them. These social problems are wicked because unlike the “tame problems” they are not easily solvable and fall into the category of “vicious-circle problems”, requiring ongoing resolutions (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Buchanan (1992, p.15) defines wicked problems as a “class of social-system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision-makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing”. Refugee integration aligns with this categorisation, as it is a contested term within social challenges that evolve over time, demanding continuous rather than one-time solutions.

On the other hand, the efficacy gap highlights the necessity of involving those responsible for implementing the policy at the local level and the end-users of the policy, namely refugees, in the design stage of integration services. While involving these stakeholders (implementers and refugees) in designing services is crucial for measuring the effects of integration interventions, it is imperative to also engage stakeholders at the policymaking level, where the objectives of integration policy are formulated. In my PhD, I examine the extent to which incorporating these stakeholders’ perspectives into the policymaking process can bridge the implementation gap, particularly through discussing and redefining refugee integration and its objectives. I argue that clarity and consensus among all levels and stakeholders regarding policy problem definition and policy objectives are essential for achieving policy effectiveness.

The application of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking is crucial due to its potential in addressing the gaps identified in the refugee integration policy cycle. Employing design thinking could enhance policy effectiveness by offering solutions to narrow the efficacy gap. Furthermore, design thinking might provide a means to tackle certain elements of the implementation gap by ensuring that an established refugee integration policy, when it exists, can have positive effects on the refugees and host community. Synthesising the ideas discussed above, I have developed a conceptual framework (Figure 5.4:), which demonstrates how the design thinking framework (refer to Figure 5.3) can address the gaps in refugee integration and its cycle (refer to Figure 5.3:).

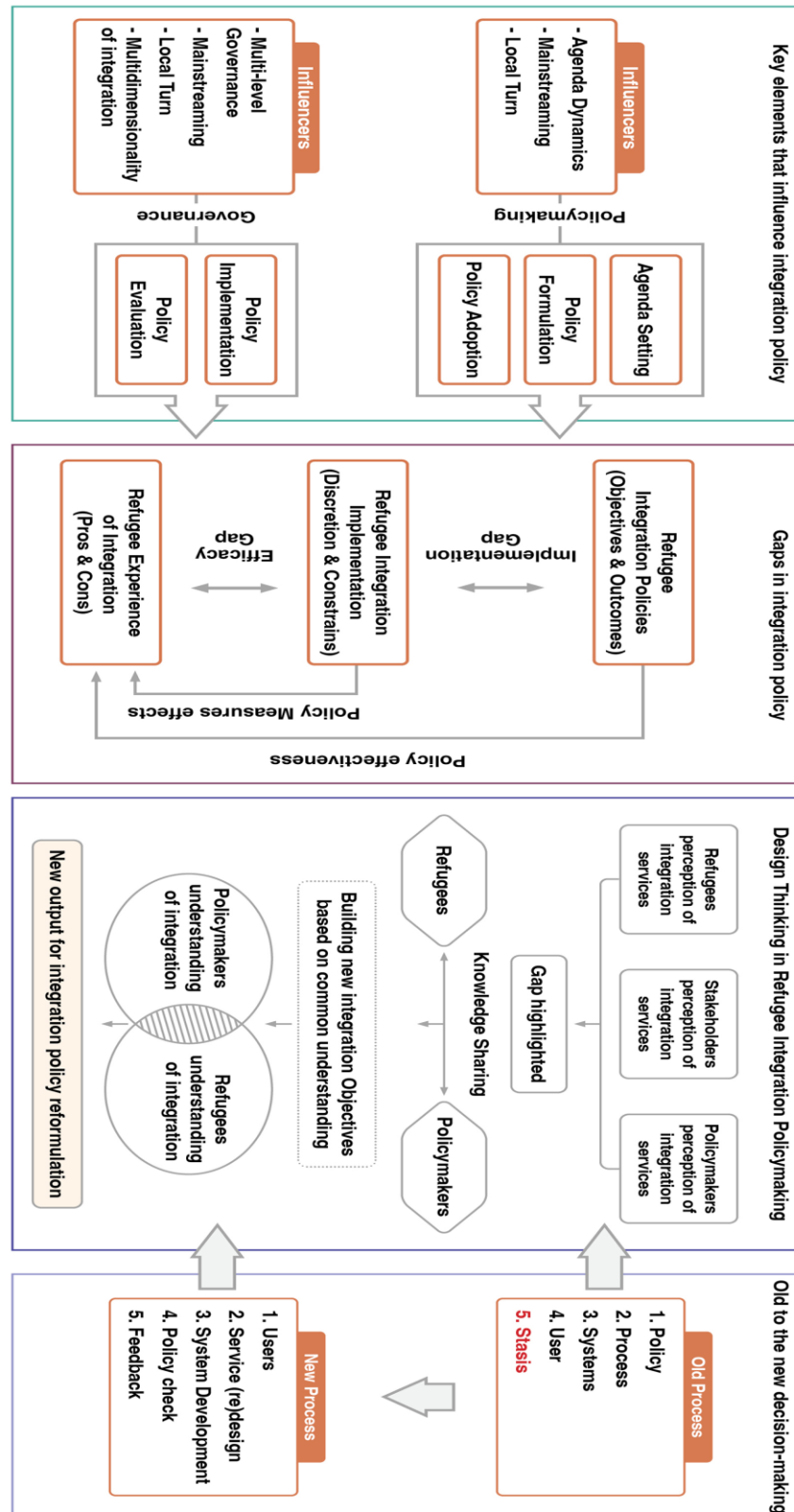


Figure 5.4: Conceptual Framework for Using Design Thinking in Refugee Integration Policymaking (Author

The Implementation Gap between national and local levels demonstrates the shortcomings in communication between these two levels, as reflected in the agenda dynamics discussed earlier in Chapter 3 (Scholten, 2013). Here, design thinking offers an innovative approach to connect the varying perspectives of refugee integration across different levels of government. This connection is achieved by involving stakeholders from each level in the knowledge sharing stage and the earliest phases of the policy cycle. Design thinking has the potential to foster policy convergence by incorporating local perspectives into the national level and aiding in the reshaping of problem definitions, such as refugee integration. Consequently, design thinking can facilitate recognition of the 'Local Turn' in refugee policy (see Chapter 3) (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017).

In addressing the Efficacy Gap, design thinking can play a significant role by facilitating a coproduction of policies that not only involve policymakers and authorities at local and national levels, but also learn from refugees' experiences of the integration services and their shortcomings. Design thinking brings the last phase of the policy cycle (i.e., evaluating its outputs) into the first phases of the cycle (i.e., agenda setting and policy formulation), by integrating users' experiences and feedback at the beginning of the cycle. The collaboration between all stakeholders across diverse phases of the policy cycle, has the potential to change the way policymakers view policy problems at the national level (Mintrom and Luetjens, 2016), thereby preventing "public actors from wasting money, time and energy on solving the 'wrong' problem" (Sørensen and Torfing, 2015, p.152). Applying a design thinking approach in refugee integration policymaking could lead to more efficient policies that leverage the experiences of refugees and the expertise of local governments. By involving end-users, namely refugees, in the design process, design thinking ensures that the final policy outputs align with their needs. This approach is significant as it "puts end-users' needs at the centre of the policy formulation system" (Allio, 2014, p.6).

In the context of refugee integration governance, design thinking plays a pivotal role in enhancing both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of local governance. The horizontal dimension concerns the involvement of local authorities and other stakeholders, such as NGOs and social actors, in refugee integration policymaking. Meanwhile, the vertical dimension includes the relationships and coordination between national and local levels in refugee integration policymaking (Zapata-Barrero

et al., 2017). Employing design thinking in the process of formulating refugee integration policies offers a novel approach to synergise these two dimensions in a creative process that emphasises redefining refugee integration and mobilising efforts to prototype new integration services. The ultimate goal is to shape a comprehensive national refugee integration policy that provides clear guidance for implementing interventions at the local level.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified gaps in refugee integration policy and explored how design thinking could bridge these gaps. I argued that enhancing refugee integration policymaking requires an understanding of the difference between policy effects and policy effectiveness. I called for a shift towards a more participatory, empathetic, and flexible policymaking process, aligning with the complex and ever-evolving nature of refugee integration challenges. This chapter, therefore, not only contributes to the academic discourse on refugee policy but also provides practical pathways for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to collaboratively develop more effective and responsive integration strategies.

By adapting Haas et al.'s (2019) model, I realised that a major challenge in UK refugee integration is the focus on measuring effects rather than effectiveness. The mainstreaming of refugee integration and the delegation of its responsibility to local levels in a multi-level governance setting has resulted in a lack of national integration policy objectives. Consequently, two significant gaps have emerged, reflecting miscommunication among stakeholders at various levels. The Implementation Gap illustrates the disconnection between national and local levels, underscoring the need for new communication channels that bring together the perspectives of all stakeholders. Meanwhile, the Efficacy Gap highlights the disparity between policymakers' perceptions of refugee integration and the refugees' experiences (i.e., the end users of the policy), revealing the gap between policy objectives and individual outcomes.

I proposed that design thinking could be a valuable tool in addressing these issues. Using design thinking in refugee integration challenges the traditional linear policy cycle, recasting "policymaking as a more reflexive, uncertain and even ambiguous

process” (Lewis et al., 2019, p.124). Furthermore, I discussed the application of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking, emphasising the importance of initiating this process by bringing all stakeholders together to evaluate the current services, highlight gaps, and provide solutions. This collaborative knowledge sharing is crucial for redefining refugee integration and shaping new objectives for integration policy.

CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the research methodology I utilised for this PhD, focusing on the core methodologies I adopted. My primary philosophical foundation is pragmatic critical realism, which acknowledges multiple subjective realities while accepting an independent real world. This philosophical stance guided my entire research design and process. My positionality as a researcher also played a crucial role. As a Syrian refugee who has experienced integration processes in the UK, my dual identity as an “indigenous outsider” and “external insider” offered both challenges and advantages in conducting the research.

I employed a mixed methods approach, following Creswell and Clark's "Embedded Experimental Model," where quantitative data supports qualitative data. I chose this methodology to deepen the understanding of refugee integration systems in the UK, particularly focusing on Syrian refugees in Birmingham as a case study. I conducted my research in Birmingham, an opportunity identified by my supervisor after COVID-19 and other circumstances disrupted my initial plans. I needed a specific situation for my study, so it wasn't a matter of choice. However, Birmingham provided a good case study due to its significant refugee population and diverse cultural environment.

For primary data collection, I conducted Focus Group Discussions with refugees where I utilised design thinking tools, interviews with policymakers, and pre- and post-FGD questionnaires. I selected these methods to align with my philosophical stance and to provide a comprehensive understanding of refugee integration and experiment with the utilisation of design thinking. Ethical considerations were also identified and addressed. I focused on participants' safety, my own safety as the researcher, and the integrity of the research, especially when dealing with vulnerable groups like refugees.

For data analysis, I followed a thematic approach as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarising myself with the data, coding, identifying themes, and interpreting the results. Since design thinking is abductive, I followed an abductive

approach that utilised elements of deductive and inductive reasoning, allowing themes to emerge from the data and aligning with my pragmatic critical realist stance.

6.2 Research design

As discussed in Chapter 1, the overall aim of this PhD is to examine the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking to generate new knowledge from refugees and bring it to the policymakers' level. The objective is to develop practical refugee integration ideas with refugees and feed them into the policymaking level in a hope that this will support the development of a coordinated and holistic policy for sustainable refugee integration in the UK.

A key decision in this research design was to engage refugee participants and policymaker participants separately, rather than through a joint participatory forum. This decision was shaped by both practical and ethical considerations, as well as theoretical rationale aligned with design thinking principles. This is not a critique of Brown but practical considerations with the particular participants involved in the research. From a practical standpoint, engaging these groups separately created safer, more accessible environments for refugees to speak freely about their experiences without fear of surveillance, judgement, or political consequence; particularly important given their potentially vulnerable immigration status and past trauma. Separating participants helped mitigate power imbalances that often exist between policy actors and those impacted by their decisions (Phillimore, 2012; Dwyer, 2005).

Conceptually, the decision mirrors the staged nature of the design thinking model, where end-user insight is gathered and synthesised first (Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype), followed by iterative engagement with policymakers (Test). This sequencing allowed refugee-generated insights to be refined and organised before presenting them to policymakers, facilitating more focused and impactful discussions around feasibility, policy fit, and implementation potential. Finally, maintaining distinct participant groups enabled more nuanced data collection: refugee FGDs could explore experiential knowledge in-depth, while policymaker interviews could probe institutional and governance-related barriers to implementation.

The focus on the UK was chosen for this PhD as it is one of the leading countries in the refugee integration field (Phillimore, 2019), and has developed an integration framework as part of the “Indicators of Integration (IoI) report” which was first published by the Home Office in 2004 (Ager and Strang, 2004). Since then, these indicators have been used comprehensively by many researchers, have been cited over 6000 times and used in countries ranging from Europe to China (Phillimore, 2019), and have been updated in 2019 (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). Moreover, the UK has been active in creating legal routes through its resettlement schemes, and currently offers five main schemes for relocation: the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Mandate Resettlement Scheme, Community Sponsorship Scheme, Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP), and Afghanistan Citizens’ Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) (GLA, 2023). In total, between 2015 and March 2023, the UK successfully resettled 49,492 individuals through its multiple resettlement schemes (Home Office, 2023a).

6.2.1 Philosophical assumptions: epistemology and ontology

In Chapter 5, I explained the need for integrating the design thinking approach into refugee integration policymaking for the benefits that it can bring to fill the current gaps in policy through passing the perspectives of end-users to the policymakers’ level. Choosing this specific approach emerged from believing that each person experiences things in a unique way which results from the social context from which they come. Pragmatic critical realism (PCR) underpins my philosophical assumptions in this context. PCR asserts that for scientific research to be successful, the subject under study must have genuine, manageable internal mechanisms that can be activated to produce distinct results (Wong and Fui, 2012). This perspective advocates for a methodological approach that continually refines its concepts, methods, and mechanisms to effectively address problems.

Pragmatic-critical realism attempts to establish that for a scientific investigation to take place, the object of that investigation must have real, controllable, internal mechanisms that can be actualised to produce particular outcomes. The implication of this is that science should be understood as an ongoing process which necessitates the persistent improvement of its concepts, methods and mechanisms to provide the best way to solve problems (Wong and Fui, 2012, p.359).

PCR provides a bridge between extremes of Objectivism and Subjectivism by acknowledging the validity of both the objective structure of reality and its subjective

interpretations. While objectivist scholars believe that there is only one true reality and perceive “reality as a concrete structure” (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p.492) that can be investigated through reliable quantitative tools taking positivist epistemologies, subjectivist scholars believe that there are multiple realities and perceive “reality as a projection of human imagination” (ibid) that requires qualitative tools to be investigated taking interpretivist epistemologies (ibid). PCR thus counters the one-dimensional views of both objectivism and subjectivism by integrating their insights into a more nuanced understanding of reality.

Critical realism, a key component of PCR, suggests that while reality exists independently of our understanding, it includes layers that are not merely reducible to empirical observations. Critical realism allows for the acknowledgment of multiple, socially constructed realities that interact with an autonomous, actual world (Fletcher, 2016; Fleetwood, 2014). This ontological stance does not merely describe phenomena but seeks to explain them through causal analysis, challenging the objectivist notion that there is only one true reality (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Critical realism (CR) allows me to abandon the one-dimensional objectivist views without having to take an idealist approach (Fleetwood, 2014). Adopting a CR approach gives the opportunity to believe that reality exists without people’s understanding of its mechanism, thus, the world cannot be reduced to empirical observations (Fletcher, 2016). At the same time, acknowledging that in some cases social construction plays a part in our world gives me a space to construct a subjective interpretation of objective reality. Sayer (2010) argues that we do not possess neutral, objective, or unquestionable knowledge of reality; however, there are other sources of information that can help us comprehend the world better than just stories, including theories, beliefs, ideas, and explanations. These sources of knowledge can help us understand the world more effectively. Accordingly, it guides the researcher to use the right methods to inquire into the world and how to respond to these inquiries. The primary objective of scientific investigation, according to CR-informed research, is not to describe an event, nor produce precise measurements or projections of the future. The CR ontological perspective, in contrast, promotes causal analysis of social events and attempts to explain them.

Pragmatism complements this by focusing on the practical implications of research findings. It emphasises understanding the socially constructed reality through qualitative inquiry, while critically evaluating the utility and impact of research (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020; Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism thus prepares researchers to navigate the complex dynamics of policymaking and governance by promoting adaptable research strategies that consider diverse individual experiences (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). Pragmatism is based on the notion that research should move away from discussing the nature of truth and reality and move onto developing practical understandings of specific, real-world problems (Patton, 2002). Epistemologically, pragmatism usually connects with the interpretivist approach of understanding the socially constructed reality through qualitative enquiry, yet it emphasises challenging the value and meaning of research findings through the evaluation of its practical implications (Morgan, 2014). This is particularly beneficial to my PhD which looks at policymaking and governance settings where practice and methods in which knowledge is created are closely connected.

Although some scholars argue that critical realism competes with pragmatism and that their positions conflict (Baert, 2005; Kemp, 2017; Kivinen and Piironen, 2004; Porpora, 2015), there are some elements where the two positions overlap. For example, they both support an imperfect understanding of knowledge (Elder-Vass, 2022). Furthermore, they both entail many layers that one cannot simply portray as contradictory or complementary (Collins, 1998). For me, both critical realism and pragmatism influenced my way of thinking that research needs to recognise the active role of the researched subjects as they interact with reality, as well as recognising the need for research to be translated into practical actions (Wong and Fui, 2012). This pragmatic-critical realist approach significantly influenced my methodological choices, aligning with the design thinking approach I advocate in Chapter 5 for refugee integration policymaking. This approach acknowledges the unique experiences of individuals shaped by their social contexts, which calls for a mix of deductive and inductive reasoning to grasp the complexity of social phenomena (Myers, 2008). PCR not only supports the use of mixed methods but also emphasises the importance of reflecting on the practical consequences of research to ensure that it contributes effectively to solving real-world problems. The synthesis of critical realism and pragmatism in PCR facilitates a methodological approach where qualitative data

collection is supplemented by quantitative data, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomena under study (sec.6.2.3).

In conclusion, adopting PCR has enabled me to take a holistic approach to understanding refugee integration policymaking. First, it provided me with a framework for understanding the complexity of the social world. It helped me to recognise that the physical and social elements of reality are intertwined, and that knowledge is constructed through the interaction of these elements. This allowed me to take a more comprehensive approach to understanding the world, as opposed to relying on a single theoretical perspective. Second, PCR allowed me to take a more critical approach to my research, by recognising that knowledge is socially constructed. I was more aware of the potential biases and assumptions that may be present in my research. Subsequently, this awareness has helped me to identify potential limitations of my research and to be more critical of the results I obtain. Finally, PCR made me more aware of the need to use mixed methods to be more comprehensive in my approach to understanding how design thinking could be implemented in refugee integration.

6.2.2 Research objectives and questions

Focusing on the UK and following a pragmatic-critical realist paradigm, I started my research design by identifying the objectives, main research questions/sub-questions in order to be able to choose the best data collection tool for each question. Although I follow a design thinking approach, the choice of data collection tools from a variety of design thinking techniques (see Chapter 4) was influenced by my objectives and research questions. I focused my PhD on the following objectives:

- Implementing a design thinking approach with refugees
- Using the design thinking approach to identify refugees' understandings of integration
- Using the design thinking approach to explore refugees' perspectives on the types of policy needed to support refugee integration
- Exploring if design thinking tools would generate collective knowledge
- Identifying ways of sharing refugees' knowledge with policymakers
- Exploring how policymakers engage with refugee knowledge to shape integration policy
- Evaluating a design thinking approach within refugee integration policy processes

These objectives were guided by the main research question: *How can a design thinking approach help generate new knowledge about refugee integration in the UK?* And operationalised through the following six sub-research questions:

1. How can design thinking methods be implemented to ensure refugee co-production in integration policy?
2. What do refugees understand integration to be?
3. What kinds of integration policy do refugees identify as needed to meet their needs?
4. Can design thinking tools facilitate collective knowledge generation amongst refugees?
5. How can knowledge collated using a design thinking approach help policymakers to design and implement new refugee integration interventions?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of a design thinking approach?

6.2.3 The Case Study

My research concentrated on testing whether design thinking can bring insight that can help enhance refugee integration services, rather than understanding the broader workings of refugee integration in the UK. The use of a case study was chosen for this PhD as it involves an “empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon [refugee integration policymaking in this thesis] within its real-life context [of newly arrived Syrian refugees in Birmingham] using multiple sources of evidence [which includes focus group discussions, interviews and questionnaires]” (Robson, 2002, p.146) Case study approaches look at the researched subject as a whole (Yin, 2009), and represent a “choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, 2005, p.443). As Yin (2009) explains, case studies are holistic not only in relation to the subject, but also in the methods that are used for data collection in order to create a rounded research and make findings generalisable to theoretical assumptions (design thinking applicability in my PhD) rather than to a population or a country.

My choice of a case study approach was driven by its potential for an exploration of refugees' experiences and their integration processes to identify gaps and co-produce solutions. This method enables a detailed understanding of the complexities involved in integration, including the challenges refugees face and collaborating with them to devise solutions. Initially, my PhD plan was ambitious, aiming to test the design thinking approach in various contexts across the UK. However, during fieldwork, difficulties in securing partnerships with entities (mainly the Home Office) involved in refugee integration policy and services became apparent. Initially, the plan was to

integrate my research into an existing evaluation of the RTOF programme (see Chapter 2 for more details on the programme). However, after months of planning, the Home Office explained that they don't want any separate research to be part of their evaluation. Consequently, I focused on securing a single case study in the UK and another in the US, with assistance from my university and supervisors. Unfortunately, despite establishing a partnership with a major organisation responsible for refugee integration in the US, visa issues due to Covid restrictions and my Syrian nationality prevented me from proceeding. This led to a refocus on the available UK case study, a decision supported by my supervisors.

The primary data collection for this PhD was conducted in collaboration with Birmingham City Council (BCC) as part of a specific case study focused on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS); see also Chapter 1 for more context on Birmingham. This targeted case study approach was essential to thoroughly explore the real-life context of refugee integration within a defined programme in order to test the applicability of the design thinking approach. The SVPRS represents a contemporary phenomenon embedded in a real-life context - a key characteristic of the case study methodology as outlined earlier. By working within this scheme, my research leveraged the case study approach to examine, in depth, the multifaceted aspects of refugee integration. The SVPRS was a five-year scheme which provided vulnerable Syrian refugees access to resettlement support services. Resettlement support services for Syrian refugees in Birmingham were designed by BCC with overall guidance of the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP), commissioned using the Home Office grant for five years which covered the costs of the refugees during their initial 12 months of resettlement. During the first year, Refugee Action (commissioned provider) focused on meeting basic resettlement needs including accommodation, education, orientation, access to benefits, GP registration, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and access to health (BCC, n.d.). After the first year, the SVPRS was delivered in partnership with a number of commissioned providers in Birmingham who support families on the scheme including: Refugee Action, Spring Housing Association, Restore, Refugee Migration Centre, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Trust, and Birmingham Navigators (BCC, n.d.). The purpose of partnering with BCC was to enable me to access refugees and policymakers and examine the design thinking approach on a real case of integration

programming. Hence, Phase 1 of this PhD (i.e., FGDs) was repurposed to support BCC in evaluating the current services and provide information that could support BCC in the next phase of commissioning, which was to offer services, projects and activities to refugees which would be available as and when needed throughout the four-year period to support each individual journey towards successful integration.

6.2.4 Methodological approach

The research followed abductive reasoning, design thinking process, and utilised mixed methods that follow Creswell and Clark's (2011) "Embedded Experimental Model" in which quantitative data provides a supportive secondary role to qualitative data, especially when some research questions cannot be answered by one research method. This design is commonly used when applying new interventions, which is the case in my PhD testing the design thinking approach. In this research design, I looked at design thinking as an intervention applied in refugee integration policymaking to co-produce knowledge about refugee integration policy and governance in the UK. Following this model, I conducted the research in a sequential process, with refugees and policymakers, as illustrated in Figure 6.1 (please see following sections for more details).

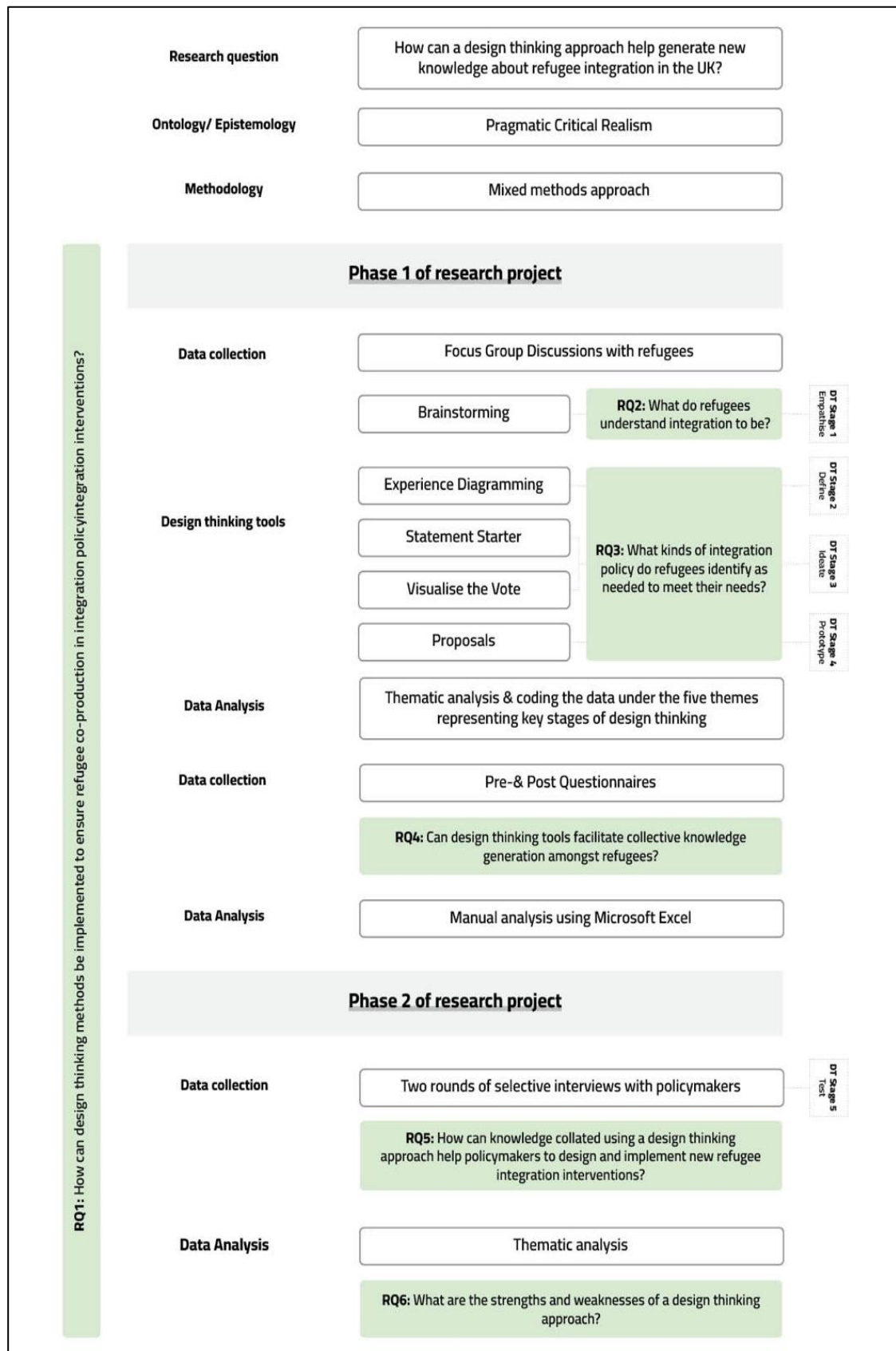


Figure 6.1: Research design (Author)

6.2.5 Abductive Reasoning Approach

Before discussing my data analysis approach, it is crucial to understand my reasoning approach, and why I opted for abductive reasoning integrating a combination of a deductive and inductive elements (see Figure 6.2). Abductive reasoning, as described by Peirce (1955), is a logical process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It begins with an incomplete set of observations and proceeds to the likeliest possible explanation for the group of observations. This approach is invaluable in research contexts where the complexity of the subject matter necessitates a blend of theory testing and theory building. Deductive reasoning, usually associated with theory testing, is a top-down approach that begins with a general theory or hypothesis and then moves towards specific observation (De Vaus, 2001). In this approach, researchers test a theoretical concept against empirical evidence, often involving quantitative methods to confirm or disprove preconceived notions (Trochim, 2007). Conversely, inductive reasoning, usually associated with a theory building approach, is a bottom-up approach where researchers start with specific observations or data and then develop broader generalisations or theories (De Vaus, 2001). Mauldin (2020) highlights that while these methods are often seen as contrasting, they can be complementary in a comprehensive research strategy, offering a more rounded understanding of the research subject. Abductive reasoning combines the strengths of both inductive and deductive approaches to foster a comprehensive analysis of the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration. Abductive reasoning involves formulating the best possible explanations from the available data, allowing for the integration of existing theories and new observations (Peirce, 1955). This approach is particularly effective for exploring complex social phenomena where both theory testing and theory building are necessary.

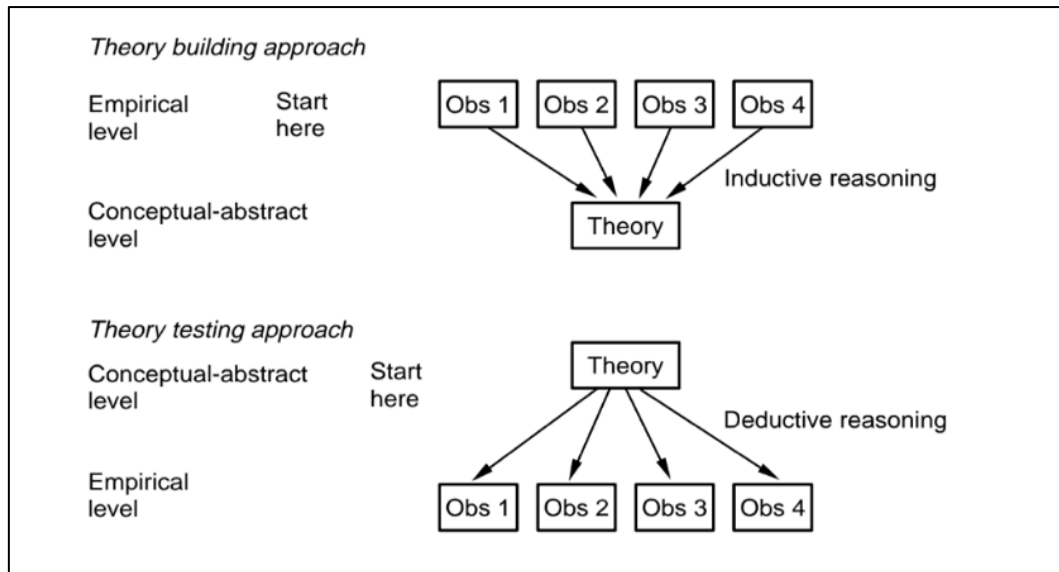


Figure 6.2: Theory building and theory testing approaches to research (De Vaus, 2001, p.6)

In my PhD research, I employed abductive reasoning to leverage the strengths of both deductive and inductive approaches in analysing the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration. Abductive reasoning allows for formulating the best possible explanations from the available data, thus integrating existing theories with new observations. This approach is particularly effective for exploring complex social phenomena where both theory testing and theory building are necessary.

The deductive element of the research is underpinned by existing theoretical frameworks on refugee integration. My choice for this component is influenced by a model proposed by Creswell (2014), who advocates for the utilisation of existing theories as a guide for structuring and analysing research data. In the context of my PhD, existing theories around the domains of refugee integration provide a foundation for interpreting data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), ensuring that the analysis is anchored in established scholarly discourse. Moreover, the deductive approach focuses on the application of design thinking as an innovative tool for understanding and enhancing refugee integration policymaking. This component of the research is exploratory in nature; thus, the significance of the deductive approach is in testing new insights and hypotheses, particularly in areas where existing knowledge is limited or evolving. In this context, design thinking is hypothesised as a potential catalyst for: 1) fostering new collective knowledge among refugee groups; 2) revealing new knowledge of refugee integration that may be overlooked by policymakers; and 3)

ideating creative solutions to fill the gaps in current integration strategies. These assumptions are tested through a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools, including the use of pre-post questionnaires to test the first assumption, interviews to test the second assumption, and focus group discussion to test the third assumption.

Simultaneously, I also utilised an inductive inference approach, which helped me to collate observations about integration services in Birmingham and come up with generalising for whether they are efficient or not. Inductive reasoning starts from gathering evidence about the object under examination (i.e., refugee integration services) and moves towards conclusions about the phenomenon that we are trying to understand. When analysing data from focus group discussions, specifically gaps in current integration services, I took a bottom-up approach and identified themes based on data collected rather than having previous categories in mind (see also section 6.8.1). The inductive approach here is pivotal in allowing for the emergence of unexpected patterns and themes from the data, which could lead to new theoretical developments in the field of refugee integration. These emergent theories and insights, as suggested by Barratt et al. (2011), highlight the value of inductive reasoning in contributing to the expansion and refinement of existing knowledge bases.

Thus, the integration of deductive and inductive approaches through abductive reasoning in this PhD research is not merely a methodological choice but a strategic decision to harness the strengths of both to yield a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding refugee integration. This dual approach, as argued by Mauldin (2020), facilitates a more nuanced and multifaceted exploration of the research topic, enabling a balanced integration of theory testing and theory building. By adopting this integrated reasoning, my research intends to validate and challenge existing theories of refugee integration through the lens of design thinking, while also potentially contributing novel methodological insights to the field. This integrative approach ensures a thorough examination of the subject, bridging the gap between established knowledge and innovative practice in refugee integration.

6.3 Phase 1 of Research

It was crucial for this research and for the design thinking approach that I follow that I accumulate collective views and opinions on refugee integration services and highlight

gaps and discuss solutions among a variety of participants. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with refugees were chosen as the main element of the research, to empower them to express and discuss their views with other participants. The focus of these FGDs was to collect qualitative data that could answer research sub-questions 1, 2 and 3. Design thinking tools were used within these FGDs to generate new knowledge about refugee integration, which in the later stages of the research process was presented to policymakers (please see topic guide for more information in the Appendices). Questionnaires were also administered pre and post FGDs to address sub question 4 (sec 6.3.3). The choice of FGDs with refugees over one-to-one interviewing came from my understanding that FGDs would allow me to create a deeper understanding of the topic by relying on the interaction between participants and generating a collective perspective (Cohen et al., 2007; Morgan, 1996), while interviews will only allow for individual perspectives. Moreover, FGDs provided a shared space where I could apply design thinking tools. The collaborative setting of FGDs is particularly effective in generating diverse insights and fostering creativity, as participants can build on each other's ideas and experiences. According to Blake et al. (2021), the interplay of joint and individual perspectives in group interviews enriches the data collection process, making it possible to capture a wide array of viewpoints and to foster a deeper understanding of shared challenges and opportunities for intervention. Two face-to-face FGDs were conducted with four to six refugees in each group with an aim to establish a contextual understanding of integration services provided to refugees in the case study area. I conducted FGDs in Arabic, allowing for a deeper understanding of the refugees' experiences and giving them greater flexibility in expressing themselves. Being a native Arabic speaker enabled me to comprehend the data from these interviews more effectively and formulate valid conclusions that represent the perspectives of FGD participants.

6.3.1 Sampling and Recruitment

When sampling, I followed Morgan (1996) in his suggestion that FGDs should include between four and twelve participants per group and that researchers should always aim to recruit an extra 20% to overcome the possibility of participants not showing up. Accordingly, participants were selected using purposive sampling, by collaborating with BCC to identify community leaders and contacting Syrian refugees who were

resettled in Birmingham under the SVPRS. Contacts were initially made through formal channels with the assistance of BCC, following which potential participants were contacted directly by the community leader to explain the study's aims and the nature of their involvement. This direct communication was vital to ensure clarity and to address any concerns participants might have had about confidentiality and the use of the information they provided. Once potential participants expressed interest, they were given an information sheet detailing the study further and a consent form. The consent form highlighted their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. Once potential participants agreed to take part in the FGDs, they were informed of the date and place of the FGDs. The recruitment aimed to form groups that were diverse in terms of age, gender, and length of time since resettlement, to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives within the Syrian refugee community in Birmingham (check annex for sample table). This diversity is important in focus group discussions as it can lead to richer data through varied insights and interaction between participants with different viewpoints. The inclusion criteria included the following:

- Participants must be above the age of 18
- Participants must have refugee status (leave to remain in the UK)
- Participants must reside in Birmingham and be resettled under the SVPRS
- Participants must speak either Arabic or English

Recruitment of refugees was limited by a few elements, including lack of trust in me as a researcher due to partnering with BCC, which meant some refugees, who have had negative experiences with Government actors, may have feared that I was representing the government. According to Zolberg (1983) and Zolberg et al. (1993) the restructuring of states as a result of “conflicts over the social order [that] are a struggle between dominant and subordinate classes” is a “refugee-generating process” which forces subordinates to choose between risking exercising their voice or reducing the risks by fleeing (Zolberg et al., 1993, p.246). Within this process, trust breaks down along perceived differences between the subordinates/refugees and dominant group/government and the social contract between them splits. Syria represents a clear example where trust in the government has been lost by those who experienced persecution and were forced to flee. Mistrust is usually transferred to the

place of asylum/safety where refugees arrive, and it is common that we see refugees mistrusting anyone who is associated with governments (ibid). Accordingly, and in order to build trust between myself and refugees, I tried to clarify my research and its purpose to them by sending a message in Syrian dialect introducing myself and my journey as refugee in the UK and why this research is important for me and them as refugees. It was important to explain to refugees that although I was partnering with BCC to collect data, my research was independent, and that the information collected would not harm their refugee status. I also started the session by introducing myself and explaining how I moved to the UK and how I share some of the experiences that they have been through. Sharing my personal biography helped to build trust, addressing the issue of power dynamics (refer to section 6.5), and easing the way to discussing integration.

Another limitation faced while recruiting participants was due to the use of a community leader/gatekeeper. In social research, it is common to use gatekeepers for the significance of their role in accessing hard to reach and over researched communities that have lost trust in research (de Laine, 2000; Eide and Allen, 2005; Knight et al., 2004; Yancey et al., 2006). According to McAreavey and Das (2013, p.116), gatekeepers “have the power to deny access to the researcher and they may also influence whether individuals opt in and out of a process”. In my case, the gatekeeper played a role in making participants see my research as a threat to their refugee status, due to explaining that my research was funded by the government, and that I was working directly with policymakers. The gatekeeper informed me that his explanation of my role made many prospective participants reluctant to participate in research. I attempted to retrieve the situation by asking the gatekeeper to forward to participants a screenshot of a message I wrote explaining my research and assuring its independence.

Despite these recruitment challenges, the data collected from the two FGDs with 11 participants in total (2 males and 9 females) were sufficient to form an understanding of the technicality and practicality of design thinking tools (see also Appendixes for sampling table). This sufficiency was evidenced by the depth and quality of the discussions, which covered a diverse range of perspectives. Additionally, the insights gained aligned closely with the research objectives, indicating that the discussions

effectively addressed the key questions surrounding the use of design thinking tools. This qualitative data was initially analysed as part of Phase 1 of my research, then summarised and thematically organised in a report. This report informed the subsequent stage of qualitative research with policymakers. Ultimately, I was able to distribute a copy of the summary document, which included the insights generated by the refugees, to the group of policymakers (refer to sec. 6.7).

6.3.2 Focus Group Discussions

As discussed in Chapter 4, design thinking has various collections of tools that can be utilised in each stage of its process. For my PhD I chose to employ the following tools (please see next chapter for full analysis, I only included some of the result as an illustration):

1. Brainstorming: At the beginning of the FGDs, I ran a brainstorming session with refugee respondents to explore their various perspectives on integration and how they define it. This activity was centred around the “Empathise” stage of design thinking, which laid the foundations and played an important role in shaping the discussions in the following design thinking activities. In this activity, refugees both expressed their understanding of refugee integration, and collectively defined integration. I designed this activity specifically for the purpose of investigating refugees’ understanding of the multidimensional nature of integration through the words of those directly experiencing integration processes. I asked participants to say words that mean integration to them, and the insights generated from this activity highlighted the complexities of integration as observed and experienced by refugees themselves. I wrote these words on a whiteboard for everyone to see. This activity's purpose was to gather diverse, spontaneous insights into their perceptions of integration, which could differ significantly from academic or policy definitions. In practice, this exercise generated a wide range of words, reflecting the varied experiences and backgrounds of the participants. The discussions produced a rich collection of words and phrases that the refugee respondents commonly used to describe integration. Maintaining identity was mentioned the most (10 times), followed by learning English (seven times), and access to education and employment. Figure 7.1 visually represents the most frequently mentioned terms, providing a preview of the multilayers of integration as perceived by refugees.



Figure 6.3: Most Used Words to Describe Integration by Refugees (Author)

I then discussed with the group the need to collaboratively categorise these words into themes by putting words that were related in groups, and discussed what overarching theme each of these groups can be put under, such as 'employment', 'social acceptance', or 'language proficiency'. This thematic categorisation provided a foundational understanding of integration from the refugees' perspective, which was instrumental for subsequent stages of the research.

2. Experience Diagramming: The second activity in the FGDs was designed to align with the “Define” stage of the design thinking process, which involved defining integration challenges based on the experiences and insights shared by refugees. The activity was centred around experience diagramming, in which refugees used sticky notes to reflect on their interactions with integration services provided by Birmingham City Council as part of the broader integration programme designed for those who came on the VPRS. On a horizontal arrow with two smiley faces, happy smiley to represent positive interaction and sad smiley to represent negative interaction, I placed all the services available under each integration theme (education, employment, health, housing, and social networking) and asked participants to use sticky notes to chart their interactions with these services. The aim was to map out the refugees' experiences in a tangible and visually comprehensible manner. This exercise was intended to uncover the realities of refugees' interactions with services that have an effect on integration experiences, identifying both positive experiences and points of friction. In practice, the refugees used sticky notes to mark significant moments and interactions with the services, creating a visual map of their journey (see figure 6.4).

The resultant diagram illustrated the complexities and challenges faced during their integration processes, providing valuable insights into areas needing improvement.

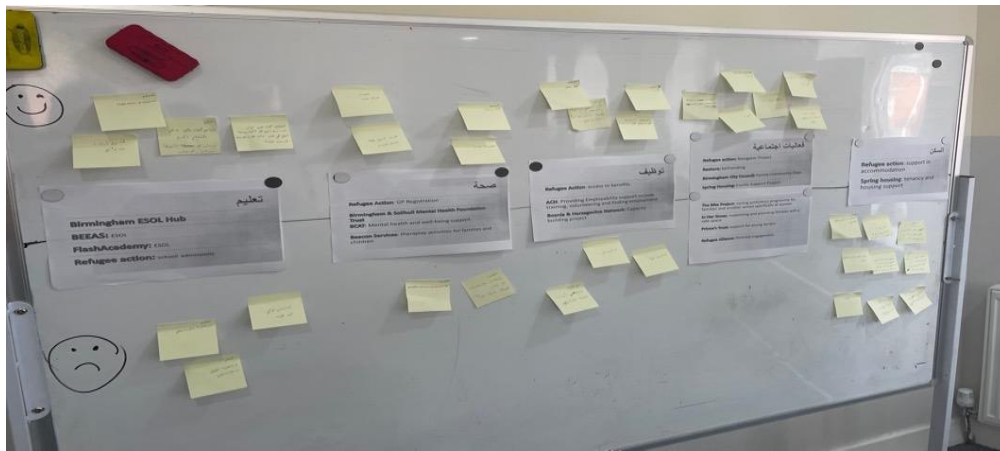


Figure 6.4: Experience diagramming with refugees (Author)

At the end of the exercise, I discussed their reflections with participants and worked with them to identify the key challenges and gaps in current integration services. As we were discussing, I wrote a list of these challenges on another whiteboard to provide a concrete list of challenges that would be used to inform the following activities.

3. Statement Starter: In the “Ideate” stage of design thinking, I used statement starters to brainstorm with refugees some innovative solutions to the integration challenges identified in the previous activity. The exercise was a problem-solving activity. It began with presenting the problems identified in the journey mapping exercise to the participants. I then asked them to propose solutions by completing the statement starter, “How can we solve...?”. This stage marked a key moment in the research process, as it involved collaborative sessions using a combination of sticky notes and discussion with refugees to generate innovative solutions addressing the identified integration challenges within various domains. The objective was to encourage creative thinking and empower refugees to be part of the solution-making process. In practice, this exercise stimulated active participation and engagement, with refugees using post-it notes under each statement starter to propose a range of innovative solutions (see figure 6.5). I then discussed these solutions with them and wrote down a clean list of solutions proposed and discussed. These suggestions were not only indicative of their needs and preferences but also reflected their unique insights into what effective integration looks like.

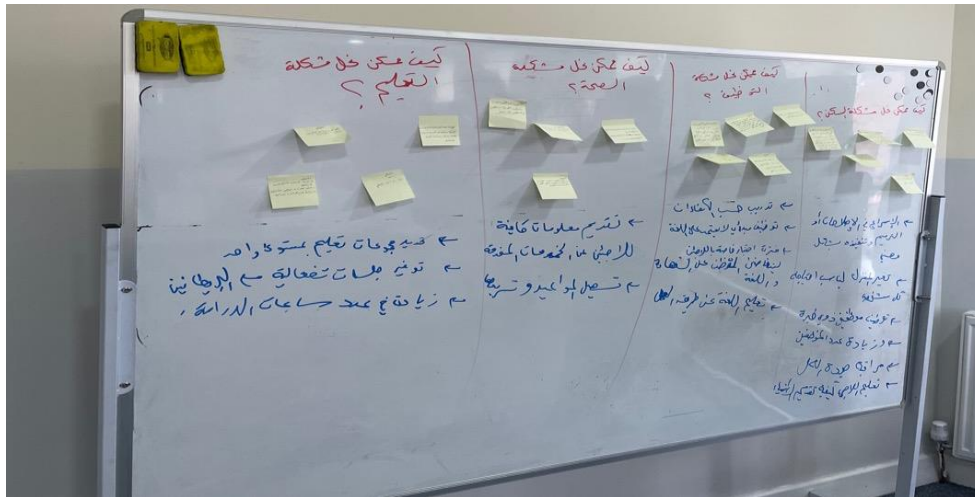


Figure 6.5: Statement starters to brainstorm solutions with refugees (Author)

4. Visualise the vote: moving into the “Prototype” stage of design thinking, I utilised an exercise that allows participants to vote on solutions presented in the previous exercise that they would like to explore further and work on as subgroups. In this exercise, participants were given the opportunity to prioritise the solutions generated in the previous exercise. I gave each participant three index stickers and asked them to post them next to the solutions they wanted to expand on and prepare a proposal for (see Figure 6.6). They voted on the solutions they found most compelling and wanted to explore further. This exercise was intended to democratise the decision-making process, ensuring that the solutions to be developed resonated most with the participants. In practice, this voting process revealed the most pressing issues and preferred solutions from the refugees' perspective, providing a clear direction for the subsequent stage of solution development.

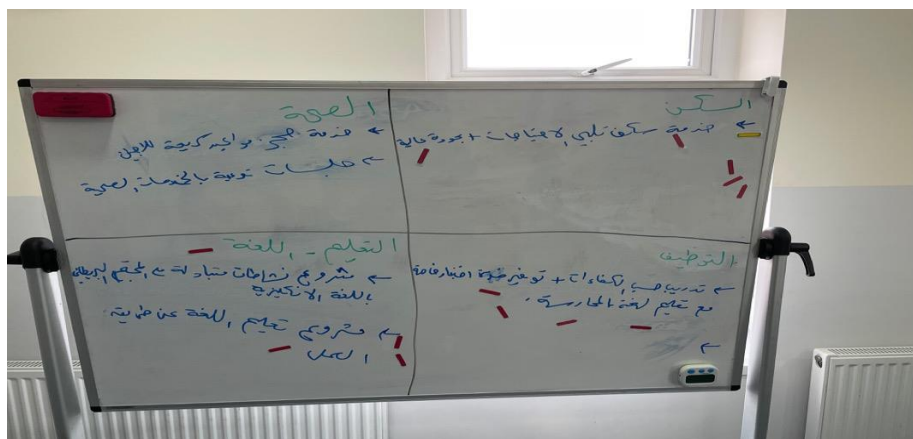


Figure 6.6: Visualising the vote activity (Author)

5. Prototyping/proposals: the final exercise involved participants working in subgroups to develop a proposal for the chosen solution. Each subgroup was tasked with preparing a presentation that provided an overview of their proposed solution. The aim was to transform the abstract ideas generated earlier into concrete, actionable proposals. In practice, this exercise encouraged collaborative work and creativity, as participants pooled their knowledge and experiences to develop practical solutions. The presentations provided a platform for participants to articulate their ideas clearly and convincingly, leading to a set of well-thought-out proposals that could be considered for implementation.

Despite varied experiences with design thinking tools due to literacy barriers among some participants, Chapter 9 provides a detailed evaluation of the tools and how hands-on facilitation ensured inclusivity and adaptability, enabling all voices to be heard and enriching the outcomes of participatory design processes.

6.3.3 Pre- and post-FGD questionnaires

In addition to the focus group discussions (FGDs), pre- and post-FGD questionnaires were employed to gather supplementary data from the participants. The objective was to assess whether design thinking facilitated new knowledge acquisition among the refugees (as detailed in Chapter 7). Although questionnaires are predominantly used in research for collecting quantitative data as part of survey methodologies, their application extends to experimental research or as a component of case study investigations as well (Saunders et al., 2015). Questionnaires can be effective in collecting data from individuals using the same set of questions and appropriate if the researcher is able to develop standardised questions that can be similarly interpreted and understood by all participants (Robson, 2002). Accordingly, pre-intervention questionnaires which have both open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions were distributed as hard copies at the beginning of each FGD to collect information from individual refugees about their previous knowledge on refugee integration and to set a baseline to compare with knowledge they developed about integration after the intervention. Thus, post-intervention questionnaires were also distributed as hard copies to evaluate how knowledge about refugee integration had changed amongst refugees after applying design thinking techniques.

Prior to use in the FGDs, the questionnaires were developed based on themes emerging from the literature and pilot discussions with refugees. I tested it with four refugee volunteers (two male, two female) recruited through a community centre in Birmingham. These individuals were not part of the main study but shared similar demographic and resettlement characteristics. The pilot aimed to assess the clarity of wording, cultural appropriateness, and practical usability of the questionnaires. Following participant feedback, minor changes were made to simplify language. This pilot phase also served to build trust with the wider refugee community and ensured that the instruments were contextually relevant and accessible to individuals with diverse language and literacy backgrounds.

6.4 Phase 2 of Research

To answer research sub-question 5, which examines how design thinking can inform policymakers' decisions in refugee integration planning, I utilised in-depth interviews to gather insights from policymakers. At the beginning of Phase 2, I shared a summary document with the selected policymakers and implementers, laying down main gaps identified by refugee participants. Then, during structured interviews, I discussed the knowledge generated from the FGDs with them to assess the feasibility of applying any refugee-generated ideas or solutions. Six months after the initial interviews, I organised a second round of interviews with the same policymakers and implementers to examine how the ideas from the FGDs were incorporated into their new programming and to discuss if the new knowledge had influenced changes in refugee integration. This second round of interviews aimed to address research sub-question 6.

6.4.1 Selective interviews with policymakers

Interviews are a commonly used tool in qualitative research, known for fostering active collaboration between researcher and interviewee, leading to "negotiated, contextually based results" (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p.698). My choice to interview policymakers and implementers was driven by an interest in their perceptions of refugee integration and to observe their reactions to new ideas generated from the Focus Group Discussions, which can be effectively constructed or deconstructed during interviews (Mason, 2002). The goal of collecting qualitative data at this stage was to determine if

the knowledge generated about integration with refugees was new to the policymakers and to explore how these ideas might be implemented in future local projects. To preserve confidentiality, the specific job titles of participating policymakers are not disclosed in this thesis. However, participants were drawn from local government, public service departments, and third-sector organisations directly involved in the design, delivery, or management of refugee and integration services. Their roles ranged from policy advisers and programme managers to frontline practitioners, ensuring a diversity of perspectives on policy formulation and implementation.

6.4.2 Recruitment

In terms of sampling, I opted for conducting “elite interviews”, which refers to interviews with individuals who have a specialised depth of knowledge or occupy influential positions in a particular field (Harvey, 2011). The choice of opting for elite interviews was essential for gaining in-depth insights from those directly shaping refugee integration policies. As noted by Mikecz (2012), conducting elite interviews requires an understanding of power dynamics and the ability to frame questions to elicit detailed and informative responses. I followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) principle of *informational redundancy*, which suggests ending sampling when no new information can be collected by interviewing more people. Additionally, Morse’s (2000) recommendation to consider the topic’s nature, the study’s scope, and the quality of data collected influenced my planning of the sample size. Vasileiou et al. (2018, p.2) note that “the more useable data are collected from each person, the fewer participants are needed”. Consequently, I conducted eight interviews with policymakers and implementers directly involved in planning and executing refugee integration services in Birmingham. Although this sample size may seem small, it offered substantial *information power*, which, as Malterud et al. (2016) describe, is sufficient to fulfil the research purpose of testing the design thinking approach. The more information power a sample has, the smaller it can be, and vice versa. Recruitment was done collaboratively with BCC, similar to FGDs. BCC made the initial contact with policymakers and implementers and shared information about my research project, and then individuals had the choice of opting in or opting out of research. Once potential participants opted in, they were given an information sheet detailing the study further and a consent form. The consent form highlighted their

rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. I then made direct contact with them to schedule an online interview using Microsoft Teams. The inclusion criteria included the following:

- Participants must be above the age of 18
- Participants must be working on planning and implementing refugee integration services to Syrian refugees who were resettled in Birmingham as part of the SVPRS scheme.
- Participants must speak English

The interviewees selected for this case study were experienced professionals in the field of refugee integration policy and service implementation. They included key decision-makers and influencers within governmental and non-governmental organisations, all of whom played a critical role in the SVPRS scheme in Birmingham. Their roles ranged from policy development and strategic planning to hands-on programme execution and service delivery. The interviewees' list included policymakers from Birmingham City Council as well as the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) and implementers from Refugee Action, Spring Housing Association, and Ashley Community and Housing (ACH). This diversity in their professional backgrounds ensured a comprehensive collection of insights, covering a wide spectrum of perspectives on the challenges and successes in refugee integration.

These interviews presented me with several challenges, such as securing access and navigating the interviewees' busy schedules (Dexter, 1970). Securing an interview was dependent on me spending lots of time (between chasing and scheduling), especially in round two, where I needed to secure support from my supervisors who contacted potential respondents directly to explain the importance of their participation. However, I was eventually successful in securing these interviews and they enabled me to gather expert perspectives that helped me to assess the feasibility and practical implementation of the ideas generated from the FGDs. They provided me with a top-down perspective that complemented the bottom-up views collected from refugee participants. This dual perspective enriched my understanding of refugee integration policy implementation processes (Richards, 1996).

6.5 Data analysis

Methods used to analyse data are considered important aspects of research design, because choosing the appropriate methods could lead to generating good quality results. There are different frameworks for analysing data including grounded theory, thematic analysis, and systematic analysis. I chose to adopt a synergistic application of abductive reasoning to leverage the strengths of both deductive and inductive approaches to enhance the robustness and comprehensiveness of the analysis (see section 6.2.5). Furthermore, I chose to follow a thematic analysis approach to analyse primary data collected from both FGDs and interviews. In doing so, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggested process of: 1) familiarising myself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining themes, 6) producing the report (refer to sec. 6.6.2). Moreover, I chose to follow manual text analyses using Microsoft Excel for data collected from FGDs, interviews, and questionnaires in which I summarised and categorised data following a structured thematic framework that was continuously changing and developing during the analysis. This approach included reading through transcribed interviews, drawing a thematic framework, and highlighting key themes and sub-categories, as well as mapping, charting, and interpretation (Green and Thorogood, 2004).

6.5.1 Thematic Analysis

When analysing data, I followed a thematic analysis approach to analyse primary data collected from both FGDs and interviews, as well as open ended responses from the questionnaires. Thematic analysis offers an approach to undertake thorough analysis of data and provides flexibility for managing the complexities of qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is a widely used method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It organises and describes data set in rich detail and often interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Phase one of thematic analysis involves familiarising oneself with the data. Accordingly, I immersed myself deeply in the data by utilising video and audio recording, a practice that has become increasingly relevant due to the pandemic. This engagement in both the audio and visual aspects of qualitative data, as highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006), ensures a thorough understanding of the nuances presented. By incorporating video recordings alongside written transcripts, I tailored

to various learning styles, thereby enhancing my comprehension of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Furthermore, I opted to transcribe both focus group discussions and interviews manually (using Excel), rather than using transcription software. This manual process allowed me to gain a more intimate familiarity with the data and enhanced transcription accuracy. I then conducted a thorough reading of the transcripts to familiarise myself with the depth and breadth of the content. This initial reading was crucial for identifying patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the detailed data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During this initial engagement, I took thorough notes and highlighted significant quotes from the raw data, which aided me in contextualising and making sense of the information (Rabiee, 2004). This practice directly connects to subsequent phases of the analysis.

Phase two of thematic analysis involves generating initial codes. The coding of the data involves a variety of methods, including annotating notes, using highlighters, and employing sticky notes, as well as physically spreading codes on a large table for better visualisation (Saldaña, 2013). The generation of initial codes is guided by the research questions, design thinking process, and relevant literature (Gibbs, 2007). This coding process is essential for organising the data and applying meaning to the raw information. In thematic analysis, it is crucial to provide equal attention to each transcript and generate codes throughout the entire dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This approach ensures a comprehensive and unbiased analysis of the data, which is vital for maintaining the integrity and validity of the research. For each data set collected from each research method, I generated initial codes from the data. Coding was done systematically across the entire data set, and relevant data extracts were collated under each code. I identified and highlighted elements of the data that stood out and could contribute to the construction of overall themes during subsequent analysis. For FGDs, I opted for coding the transcripts under the five themes representing key stages of design thinking: Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test (Brown, 2008). See below figure 6.7 for an example of the thematic map for phase Empathise. For interviews, I opted for coding the data under the main areas of discussion. For the first round the codes were: refugee integration knowledge, feedback on ideas generated by refugees, the potential of using design thinking. For the second round of interviews the codes were: changes in knowledge around refugee

integration, the utilisation of ideas generated by refugees, and the reason behind opting/not opting to use it.

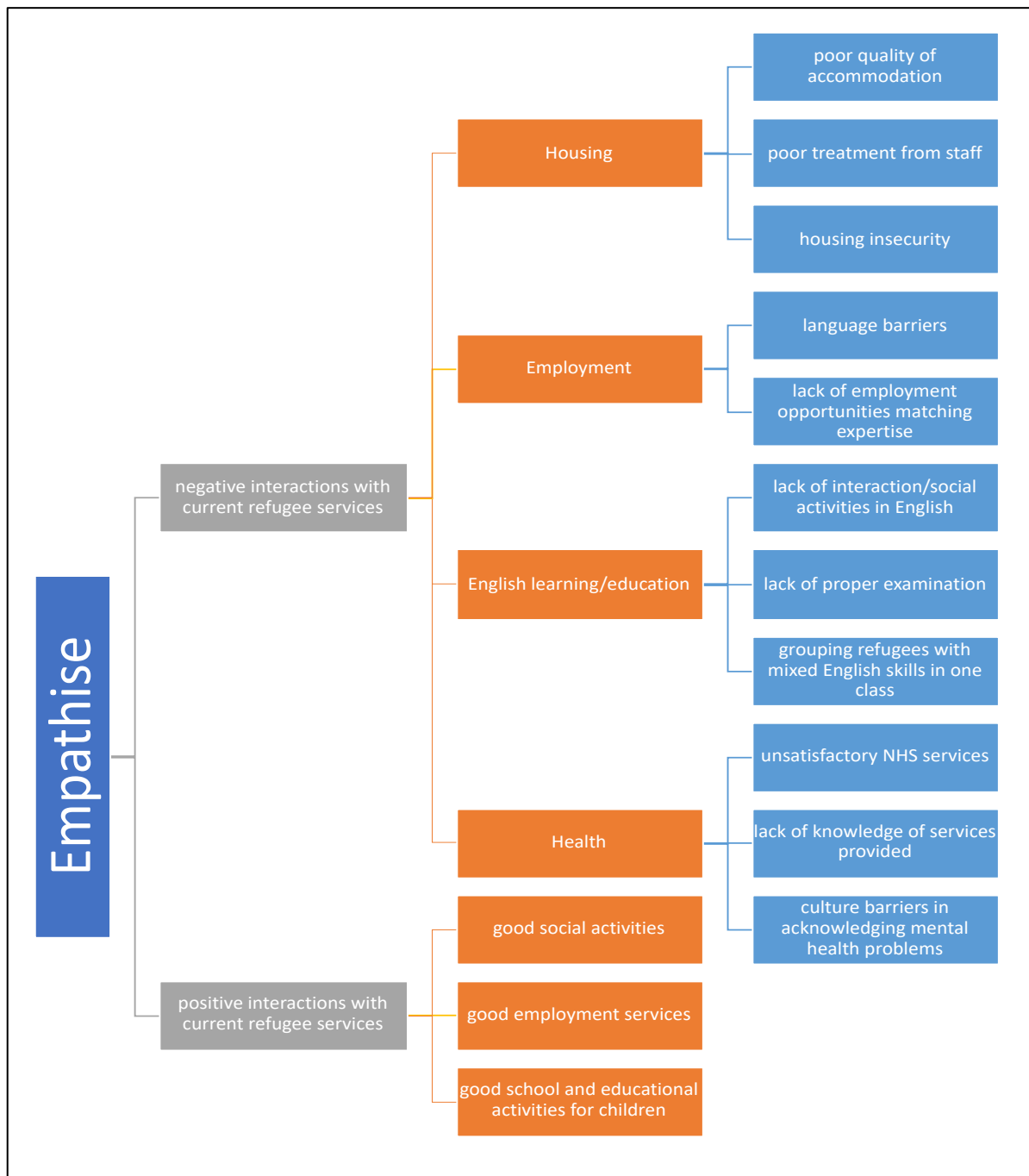


Figure 6.7: Thematic Map of Analysis for Phase Empathise (Author)

In the next step, I actively searched for themes, moving beyond simple data coding to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that researchers create themes through their engagement with the data, rather than themes simply emerging. To generate initial themes, I eliminated duplicate

codes and grouped similar ones. I then carefully reviewed these themes to ensure their relevance to both the coded extracts and the entire data set. This review entailed a back-and-forth process, alternating between the entire data set, coded data extracts, and the set of themes. Reviewing and developing themes included deciding which themes might be weak, merging some themes, and subdividing others into distinct themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2019) explain that researchers must continuously refine and modify themes throughout the analysis process, shaping them to align with the overarching narrative of the research. Sometimes, I revised preliminary theme names to better represent the codes and contribute to my research story. To further organise the content within the main themes, I created sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021). My engagement with the data and analytical approach led me to construct a thematic map of analysis (see Figure 6.7), naming themes in a manner that accurately represented the data, reflected the story of the transcripts, and corresponded with my research questions and aims (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

After the careful refinement of themes, I actively engaged in defining and naming each theme. This vital phase of the analysis process necessitates a dynamic approach to ensure the themes accurately reflect both the data and the overarching narrative of the research. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), this stage involves exploring the core of each theme through brief yet insightful paragraphs. Effective theme naming is crucial. The names should be concise and impactful, immediately conveying the theme's essence to the reader. They must capture both the intriguing aspects of the data and the narrative thread of the research. This step is not just about labelling; it's about distilling the complex data into understandable and meaningful terms that resonate with the overall research objectives. As a researcher, it was imperative for me to recognise and highlight the data's intriguing elements. This recognition was not merely an academic exercise but was also a critical reflection on how these elements contribute significantly to my broader understanding of the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking. Such reflection required a keen eye for detail and a deep understanding of my research context. By identifying these elements, I was able to ensure that the themes developed are not only representative of the data but also add substantial value to the field of study (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021).

The final stage of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework refers to the final product and presentation of the findings and discussions. In this phase, I actively engaged in crafting and presenting the findings and discussions. This crucial phase involved drafting a compelling narrative for my findings, as detailed in the following chapters. My focus was on bringing the analysis to life for the reader, ensuring that the themes were not only presented but also resonated meaningfully with the readers. I took special care to discuss the themes in direct response to my research questions, weaving them into a coherent and insightful narrative. This process was dynamic and iterative; as I drafted, I continuously revisited and refined the themes and their names. This ongoing refinement was not merely about perfecting the language but about ensuring that the themes accurately captured the essence of the data and effectively addressed the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 2021). Throughout this final stage, my aim was to create a clear, engaging, and informative presentation of the findings. By doing so, I intended to not only fulfil the academic requirements but also contribute meaningfully to the body of knowledge in my field.

The thematic analysis approach adopted in this study was instrumental in identifying and understanding the complexities of refugee integration. The themes extracted from the focus group discussions and interviews provided a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by refugees and the potential solutions to address them. This approach was crucial in bridging the gap between refugees' experiences and policymakers' understanding, ultimately contributing to understanding how design thinking could contribute to more effective integration policies.

I also employed a manual analysis approach using Microsoft Excel, considering the manageable number of participants, which totalled eleven. Firstly, I organised the questionnaire responses into a structured Excel spreadsheet. Each row represented a participant, and each column corresponded to a question, with two sheets (one for pre-questionnaire results and one for post-questionnaire results) distinctly categorised to facilitate comparative analysis. I utilised graphical representations such as bar charts and line graphs to visually compare the changes from pre-FGDs to post-FGDs, enhancing the interpretability of the findings (Tufte, 2001). I also followed thematic analysis when looking at open-ended questions. In doing so, I manually reviewed the raw responses and conducted the preliminary data coding using a combination of

deductive codes drawn from the research questions and inductive codes generated by the data mainly to understand the changes in knowledge around refugee integration. Throughout the process, patterns in the data began to take shape, forming the outlines of a story that will add richness to the results. Each identified theme was then colour-coded in Excel to facilitate the aggregation of similar data points across the dataset. This manual method of coding and theme development was suitable given the small sample size and the depth of data required for comprehensive analysis. It enabled me to engage deeply with the data, allowing for nuanced understanding and interpretation (Saldaña, 2015). While coding I made sure to highlight quotations where a difference in perspective had been noticed. This process is inherently dynamic and required organising codes and categories to prepare for different types of visualisations. Evidently, analysing open-ended questions helped me enhance, confirm, and refine the story told through other data collected and add depth and rationale to the narrative.

6.6 Ethical considerations

The data collection for this PhD was carried out within the ethical guidelines' framework of the University of Birmingham. Full ethical approval was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee before starting the field work. I also used the ethical guidelines produced by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth in its *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practices* (ASA, 2011), in which fundamental principles are provided to be used as a code of conduct when doing field research. There are a few ethical considerations associated with this research as a result of dealing with human participants with some vulnerabilities; these are discussed in the next section.

6.6.1 Participants' safety (FGDs and Interviews)

Participants were clearly informed about the aim and objectives of the research and how their data will be used (see Appendices). Before conducting the FGDs and interviews, I shared information sheets that clearly explained the purpose of the research and how data would be collect and sorted. The sheets also clarified that participation is voluntary and explained to participants their rights of withdrawing or choosing not to participate. I also focused on making sure that participants understood

the risks and benefits of participating in this research. When preparing these information sheets, I familiarised myself with the rights of participants and how consent forms can document voluntary and informed exchange between the researcher and participant (ASA, 2011). I sought verbal and written consent to record FGDs and interviews and take notes (Powles, 2004). After obtaining a verbal consent, I also asked participants to sign consent forms that included information about the study and potential risks and benefits from participating in this research.

The right to withdraw was explained to participants (refugees and policymakers) both verbally and through the written consent form. I informed participants that they have the right to withdraw at any time before participating in the interviews or focus group discussions and that they will have a time period of 30 days after the research takes place to withdraw from the project. Should they choose to withdraw, all data related to them will be permanently deleted and all relevant hard copies of interview and FGD notes will be destroyed (excluding refugees' contribution through sticky notes).

I prioritised the confidentiality of participants to protect their personal safety and gain their trust, as some of the participants in FGDs might be concerned that they were risking their legal status by participating and some of the policymakers could be reluctant to participate and speak freely if there was a potential they could be identified (Humphries and Martin, 2000). Given past experiences of persecution and conflict, some refugee respondents might be concerned about surveillance or persecution by individuals from their country of origin who had different political views or were from an opposition group. Accordingly, I made sure that data was anonymised when I saved it on the University of Birmingham's OneDrive. When sorting my FGDs and interview notes and preparing the summary, participants' data was pseudo-anonymised. To do so, I assigned ID codes to each participant and used codes instead of the participant's name and kept a key in order to be able to identify participants' data. When analysing the data collected, I followed confidentiality standards in which I carefully altered any information that could make participants identifiable and used pseudonyms.

There was a need also to consider the potential emotional impact that taking part in this research might have on refugees. Research participation can provide a sense of empowerment and agency (Block et al., 2013), which can be beneficial for refugees' mental health. On the other hand, it can also be a source of stress and anxiety for

refugees (Munro et al., 2017). Accordingly, I looked into how the FGDs could cause some emotional upset and agreed with participants on the possibility of withdrawing in case they feel that discussion is emotionally draining. It was important to make sure that the refugees' participation would not generate secondary trauma and burnout. Luckily, there were no indications of any negative experiences during the FGDs.

6.6.2 Researcher safety

When designing the research, I also considered the impacts that this research might have on me and then tried to mitigate the risks. According to Williamson and Burns (2014, p.198), qualitative research provides an enabling space to share emotions and feelings which can have its own impacts on the researcher “who may encounter emotions inside themselves [...] which may be challenging”.

Having previous experience as a humanitarian worker and dealing with refugees on ground in vulnerable situations, allowed me to develop a range of skills for coping well in circumstances that might arise during research and can be emotionally distressing. This helped me mitigate the potential emotional impact of discussing topics that could be distressing and/or resonated closely with my own experience, and enhanced my resilience through understanding the “safe level of emotional involvement with a participant's distress” (Williamson and Burns, 2014, p.199). Moreover, in order to assure physical safety, I organised FGDs in a public place and shared the location with my supervisors. I also informed them about the timing and dates as well as updating them regularly on my movements.

6.6.3 Research integrity

In academic research, “bias” refers to the inclination or predisposition that skews the objectivity of the researcher, potentially influencing the study's outcomes. As Maxwell (2012) explains, bias can manifest in various forms, including Selection bias, Confirmation bias, Interpretive bias, and Questioning bias. *Selection bias* occurs when a researcher's preferences influence the selection of participants or data points, potentially leading to unrepresentative samples (Maxwell, 2012). On the other hand, *Confirmation bias* occurs when researchers choose data or interpretations that confirm their existing beliefs, overlooking contradicting evidence (Nickerson, 1998). Furthermore, *Interpretive bias* involves the researcher's personal values and

experiences affecting their interpretation of the data (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Finally, *Questioning bias* can occur when the researcher's assumptions shape how questions are framed, thus influencing participants' responses (Fontana and Frey, 2000). These biases, as highlighted by Neuman (2014), can compromise the validity and reliability of research findings, underscoring the importance of recognising and addressing bias to maintain the integrity of the research process.

In my research, I employed strict measures to avoid jeopardising the research and ensured reduction of above-mentioned biases and avoidance of conflicts of interest (see also section 6.4). Coming from the same socio-demographic background, as a former refugee, I took all precautions to ensure that this would not affect the research. The measures included utilising a gatekeeper to avoid selection bias and ensure that I don't influence the selection of participants. I also addressed the confirmation bias by refraining from influencing participant responses (Kezar, 2005) and using 'respondent validation' to improve the accuracy and credibility of the research and validate the accuracy of information provided by participants (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003). Moreover, while analysing data, I acknowledged the inevitability of my own subjectivities stemming from my personal situation. Recognising that complete neutrality is challenging, I strove to critically reflect upon and account for these influences in my analysis to minimise their impact on my objectivity. This involved employing strategies such as respondent validation and engaging in reflexive practice to ensure a more balanced and self-aware approach to data interpretation (Finlay, 1998).

Additionally, part of research integrity is ensuring that intellectual property aims to help improve the lives of those who take part in the research. Accordingly, I took the responsibility of publishing my findings after I pass my viva to assure justice for refugees (Corbin and Morse, 2003). I recognise that only by aiming to help mitigating the suffering of respondents can I justify the purpose of my research (Turton, 2003).

6.7 Positionality of the researcher and research reflexivity

I understand positionality as where I stand in relation to the other, significantly shaping my relationship with my research subjects—the Syrian refugees—and influencing how I conducted my research (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). Being a Syrian myself and

having gone through the integration journey in the UK played a role in my choice to focus on the integration of Syrian refugees. Consequently, I found myself having to question my own assumptions and maintain reflexivity and critical judgment in order to protect the credibility of my research. It was important to start by understanding my positionality, identity, and how I relate to the participants and topic in order to recognise how these can impact my research, and find ways to mitigate the risks. Banks (1998) describes a *typology of cross-cultural researchers* which conceptualises insider/outsider positionality based on the cultural, intellectual, and social distance between the researcher and the researched: the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider, and the external-outsider.

The first two types focus on indigenous researchers that come from the same community being studied but differentiate between the indigenous insiders and outsiders. The former maintain the social, cultural and intellectual values of their community and are “perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member”. The latter have socialised with other communities and developed new social, cultural and intellectual values, and are “perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider” (Banks, 1998, p.8). The other two categories of the typology reflect the same elements but for those who do not come from the same community as that studied, i.e., the external-insider who is “is viewed by the new community as an ‘adopted’ insider” and the external-outsider who “has a partial understanding of and little appreciation for the [studied community] values” (Banks, 1998, p.8).

Within these four typologies, I position myself as indigenous outsider who still shares some cultural, social, and intellectual values with the studied community (i.e., Syrian refugees), but has experienced high levels of adaptation to the new values of the British society that I have lived in. This new “hybrid self” that implies a new combination of multiple socio-cultural characteristics (Marotta, 2008) meant that I was able to maintain distance from the research in order to recognise bias but at the same time balance power differences by relating to the experiences of refugees. Moreover, this positioning enhanced my research by enabling a balance of power dynamics and fostering an environment where understanding rather than measuring and manipulating became the focus, aligning with the view that the subjectivity of the

researcher is critical in the interpretation process (Adams et al., 2008). By acknowledging the interlinked objectives and subjective features that both the researcher and the researched bring to the study, stemming from distinct social structures and power dynamics, I could better assure the reflexivity and credibility of my research (Merriam et al., 2001; Moser, 2008; Bourke, 2014).

So, what do these labels of hybrid self and indigenous outsider mean to my positionality in relation to Syrian refugees? As a secular female who has lived in the UK for more than ten years, a native Arabic speaker with a Syrian dialect, I share many understandings of the Syrian culture with individuals from the Syrian community. When it comes to integrating into British society, my journey may have been similar to that of some Syrians, but I surely had some advantages that helped me navigate my way, including my proficiency in English and having an education from the UK. During the initial stages of my data collection, participants in the Focus Group Discussions initially perceived me as an outsider who did not reflect their experiences. As I interacted with participants and introduced myself as a former Syrian refugee conducting research on the integration challenges faced by Syrian refugees in the UK, I noticed a change in their perception. They began to identify common socio-cultural traits between us, which led to more balanced and open interactions. However, my role as 'the researcher' occasionally made some participants wary, influencing the level of openness in their responses. A few participants tended to present overly positive accounts of their integration experiences, offering responses they thought were ideal or unreflective of their actual situations.

On the other hand, referring back to Banks' typologies, I identified myself as an external-insider when positioning myself in relation to policymakers. As the second part of my data collection involved engaging with policymakers, I found myself also questioning my assumptions and the reflexivity of my study. I considered questions regarding "power," "self," and "intellect" – reflecting on their relevance to policymakers and strategising on how to build trust with them. Building trust with them was essential for effectively communicating the knowledge generated by refugees while maintaining my independence. Nevertheless, the "hybrid-self" personality was instrumental in navigating these challenges. It enabled me to connect with my researcher's identity

and establish a sense of balance, positioning me on an equal footing with the policymakers.

When looking into my positionality in relation to the research itself, it is evident that my choices were significantly influenced by my own position. My research journey began with the decision to focus on refugee integration, stemming from my lived experience in this area. This path ended in the selection of the design thinking approach, influenced by my observations of the disconnection between policymakers and end-users during my tenure in policy research. My experience working with refugees as a humanitarian worker deepened my understanding of the critical need to involve refugees in formulating policies that directly impact their lives. Simultaneously, my former role in policy research within a think-tank environment highlighted the significant role such research plays in effecting change in people's lives. This dual perspective was the driving force behind my decision to explore the use of design thinking in the development of refugee integration policies for my PhD, aiming for a more inclusive approach involving all stakeholders. The importance of this doctoral pursuit stemmed from my idiosyncratic experience of being a refugee. I also believed that there was a need to conduct research that has the potential to transform the response to the refugee emergency in the UK through the institutionalisation of sustainable development schemes.

My journey as both a refugee and a humanitarian/policy researcher, coupled with my positionality, has shaped my relationship with the research subject and topic. It has endowed me with the ability to interpret and identify diverse behavioural patterns and knowledge, which may be unseen by Western researchers who may have an imbalanced power dynamic with refugees due to their dominant societal position. Thus, my standpoint and positionality have not only influenced the research's scope to focus on a topic that aligns with my passion but also brought forward an inherent familiarity with the subject. While this could imply a potential bias (see section 6.3.3), it simultaneously enabled me to gain access to and build trust within the studied community when conducting the FGDs. This trust was instrumental in developing a deeper understanding of their challenges and the gaps in existing refugee integration services. Moreover, it facilitated collaboration with refugees in proposing solutions, thereby enriching the research with insights that might be closer to their needs

By understanding my positionality in relation to Syrian refugees, policymakers, and the topic of my PhD research, I was able to reflect on how my “own aspirations, characters, values, philosophies, experiences, belief systems, political commitments, and social identities have shaped the research” (Palaganas et al., 2017, p.430). Additionally, I was able to consider the impact that conducting this research had on me, reflecting on how it might have transformed me as a researcher/professional. Correspondingly, to maintain reflexivity, I endeavoured to uphold critical judgment and attempted to distance myself from the research (i.e. minimise personal biases, emotions, and preconceived notions from influencing the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes), focusing on understanding the challenges from the perspective of the Syrian refugees rather than allowing my personal emotions and views to influence the research outcomes. Moreover, throughout the research process, I maintained integrity, ensured ethical research practices (as detailed in section 6.3), and focused on including my observations as empirical reflections.

6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that in order to design my research around examining design thinking in refugee integration policymaking I had to take a pragmatic critical realist position in which I utilised research methods to answer my research question. This methodological journey, transcending mere academic exercise, becomes a conduit for uncovering the layered complexities of my methodological approach.

At the heart of this methodological narrative is my philosophical position, pragmatic critical realism, which provided a balanced perspective on refugee integration policymaking. Critical realism allowed for acknowledging the existence of objective realities, while pragmatism guided the application of research findings to practical, real-world problems. This philosophical grounding was pivotal in shaping the research design, data collection, and analysis strategies.

I also explained how I treated applying design thinking in refugee integration as an experiment that can be tested through mixed method research design in order to understand refugees’ experiences of integration services, identifying gaps, and finding solutions with them. The employment of design thinking within this methodological framework represents an innovative step. This approach not only fosters creativity and

empathy but also bridges the gap between theoretical research and practical problem-solving. The nuanced data gathered from focus groups with refugees, coupled with insights from policymakers, create a rich tapestry of perspectives. This methodological approach exceeds traditional research boundaries, offering a more holistic and empathetic understanding of the refugee integration process.

Ethical considerations were key, especially given the vulnerability of the refugee population. Rigorous ethical protocols were adhered to, ensuring participant safety, confidentiality, and integrity of the research process. My unique positionality as a Syrian refugee and an academic provided a nuanced perspective, enriching the research with personal experience and professional acumen.

The choice of Birmingham as the single case study for this PhD, although it came about as result of multiple hurdles, is rooted in its significant population of refugees and asylum seekers, its history of welcoming refugees, and its vibrant and culturally diverse environment. This setting provided a rich context for exploring refugee integration systems at both national and local levels, with an emphasis on developing practical and sustainable integration policies through the application of design thinking.

In terms of data analysis, I employed a thematic approach coupled with a mix of inductive and deductive reasoning which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the collected data. This approach facilitated the identification of key themes and patterns, offering a detailed and nuanced understanding of the intricacies of refugee integration. The themes that emerged from this analysis painted a picture of the refugee experience, highlighting both the challenges and the resilience inherent in integration processes.

In conclusion, this chapter explored my robust and ethically grounded methodological framework. It navigated through complex philosophical landscapes, explored the innovative methodological tools, and upheld the ethical standards. The outcome of this methodological approach is a comprehensive, empathetic, and practical understanding of the refugee integration process that is laid out in the following chapter (see Chapter 7). Furthermore, Chapter 8 explores the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking.

CHAPTER 7: REFUGEE INSIGHTS AND CO-DESIGNED SOLUTIONS FOR HOLISTIC INTEGRATION

7.1 Introduction

As explained in my methodology chapter, I utilised a mixed methods approach to examine the use of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking. In this chapter I focus on the findings from the initial four stages of design thinking which involved conducting collaborative and engaging Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with refugees, to understand their perspectives and actively involve them in co-producing potential solutions to the challenges they face, as well as findings from questionnaires that I integrated in the FGDs to further evaluate the influence and efficacy of the design thinking process. While participant reflections inevitably reveal aspects of their integration experience, the primary purpose of this chapter is not to generate new data on refugee integration per se, but to explore how design thinking functions as a tool for participatory policymaking and idea generation in this context. Please also see Chapter 9 for detailed evaluation of the design thinking approach and tools. I used thematic analysis to extract themes from each of these activities following the design thinking stages, as I explained in Chapter 6. In the following chapter I will move into presenting findings under the Test phase of design thinking, in which I engaged in two rounds of in-depth interviews with policymakers.

I start this chapter by exploring refugees' perceptions and understanding of integration collected in the Empathise stage, identifying their articulations of the most important elements of integration. Their understanding of integration aligned with existing debates around the multidimensionality of integration and the two-way dynamics, but also expanded it to taking a proactive approach in which they actively contribute to change within the new society. I then cluster my findings from the Define, Ideate, Prototype stages under the main domains of integration, housing, employment, English learning, and health (see section 7.3 for more information). For each domain, I draw a journey of realisation starting from identifying the gaps in the current service and ending by proposing solutions. While social networking services received positive feedback, housing services were critiqued for their inadequacy, with concerns raised about the quality of accommodation, the instability of short-term rental agreements, and the professionalism of service providers. Additionally, barriers to employment,

notably low levels of English proficiency and recognition of competencies, were highlighted as significant obstacles. Findings also suggested a need for targeted improvements in English language instruction and employment support services. Furthermore, the feedback indicated that while refugees are navigating their new environment, the mainstream approach to health service provision places them at a disadvantage, highlighting the gap between the needs of the refugee population and the services currently available. Building on these identified gaps I then discuss solutions conceptualised and proposed by refugees. Finally, I examine the findings pre-post FGD questionnaires and review how by engaging refugees in design thinking activities, their knowledge slightly changed, indicating that design thinking tools could produce collective knowledge.

Many critiques of integration hinge on the contention that employing "society" and "community" as normative terms is inherently problematic, given the nonexistence of truly homogenous communities (Anderson, 1983; Taylor, 2004). This critique is not unfounded, as it underscores the diverse and multifaceted nature of social structures. However, it is crucial to emphasise that the respondents in this study themselves utilised the terms "society" and "community" to articulate their perspectives on integration. While acknowledging the conceptual challenges associated with these terms (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996), it remains imperative to represent the findings authentically and accurately, reflecting the language and viewpoints of the participants. Thus, this thesis endeavours to faithfully convey the respondents' narratives, despite the theoretical complexities involved, thereby ensuring that their voices are heard and respected in the discourse on integration and community cohesion.

7.2 Refugees' Understanding of Integration (Empathise)

In this section I answer research question 2 and discuss how refugees defined integration during the FGDs. I will also link to existing debates in the academic literature.

Research Question: What do refugees understand integration to be?

7.2.1 Brainstorming on Refugee Integration

As discussed in the previous chapter, working collaboratively with participants, I identified four main themes during the brainstorming sessions, which demonstrated how refugees interacted with integration services in Birmingham. We clustered words that are linked under one category and then labelled it with an overarching theme. For instance, we grouped the following words (cultural awareness, two dynamics, keeping identity, and having an impact on society) and then discussed how these could be categorised as building mutual respect and social networking. Below, I further discuss each of these four themes starting with the highest priority:

a. Social Networking and Building Mutual Respect

Participants highlighted the importance of social networking and fostering mutual respect between the host community and refugees. They recognised that effective integration relies on building relationships, bridging gaps, overcoming cultural divides, and promoting understanding among different groups. In this context, "social networking" refers to the creation and maintenance of personal relationships between individuals and groups within the host community. It involves the process of establishing connections and interactions within a community to share information, resources, and support. This perspective touches on the social capital theory proposed by Putnam (2000), which emphasises the strength a society gains from the depth of its social connections. Through the lens of social capital, social networking and mutual respect are not mere concepts but connections that fuel trust, cooperation, and collective responsibility, crucial for creating the foundations of an integrated community. Social capital here contributes to maintaining and reproducing social hierarchies by enabling those with extensive networks to access more resources and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986). Refugee participants' emphasis on human connections and respect reflects a profound understanding of the transformative power of social capital on refugees' paths to becoming integral, active contributors to their new home (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). It also suggests that integration, in their opinion, is not just about fitting into the new society, but also about actively participating in and contributing to it (Feinstein et al., 2022). Moreover, the emphasis on promoting mutual respect and building social connections resonates in the "Social connections" domain featured in the new Indicators of Integration (Ndofor-Tah, et al.,

2019). According to the Iol, positive interactions between different groups can build trust, increase understanding, and promote respect, which can create “capital” since it facilitates individuals in leveraging and exchanging resources (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). However, these interactions need to meet certain conditions, including equal status, common goals, and institutional support (Allport, 1954). If these conditions are met, the resulting positive interactions can lead to reduced prejudice and enhanced social cohesion, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). In the context of refugee integration, fostering mutual respect would mean creating spaces and opportunities for impactful interactions between refugees and their host communities (Phillimore et al., 2018), which ultimately can help them to learn from each other and work collectively towards shared objectives.

Ahmad, a Syrian male respondent, reflected on the importance of establishing social bonds. His words shed light on broader aspirations to not only be part of the society but to improve it. Integration for him is about maintaining his own cultural heritage while actively engaging in community life. This perspective challenges the narrow view of integration as mere adaptation to host country culture, instead proposing a mutual exchange of culture and traditions that benefits everyone involved.

"The most important thing [for integration] is to make a positive impact on the new society... it is the opposite of the misconception that refugees should be a mirror to the new society. We have plenty of beautiful traditions that we should be keeping. From experience, the British host community is interested in our traditions and culture, so we should try to introduce our culture to them and maintain it [rather than assimilating to the new society]."

Ahmad (Male)

Ahmad's view on integration asserts refugees' agency in shaping their integration experience. Such perspectives echo contemporary conceptual frameworks, where the active engagement of refugees in community activities is linked to more successful integration outcomes (Ager and Strang, 2008; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). Social activities can facilitate social bonding and highlight refugees' commitment to contributing positively to their new communities. Furthermore, refugees' perspectives clarify the importance of the positive impact of cultural exchange and the preservation of cultural identity on integration processes.

b. Education and Language Learning

Education and language skills were also outlined as key facilitators of integration. Refugee participants stressed the importance of accessing educational opportunities and language courses. They acknowledged that acquiring a good level of English is instrumental in fostering effective communication, enhancing self-reliance, and facilitating a more profound integration within their host communities. This perspective is reinforced by scholarly research, which suggests that language skills are not merely tools for communication but also crucial for cultural understanding, economic participation, and social inclusion (Dustmann and Fabbri, 2003; Kuschel et al., 2023).

Samir, a Syrian male participant, articulated that mastery of the English language serves as a channel to successful integration across various life domains, enabling access to diverse services and opportunities. This view aligns with the broader literature that recognises language proficiency as a cornerstone of successful integration, impacting educational achievements, employment prospects, and social connections (Ager and Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2011). It is argued that better language skills lead to more positive interactions with neighbours and higher levels of well-being (Morrice et al., 2021). As Samir put it:

"[Integration is] to be successful and prove yourself [as an active member] in the new society. It is when you are successful in all aspects of life, you will integrate into the new society; starting from learning the language as the main foundation and throughout the other domains." Samir (Male)

Samir's statement highlights the interrelation of language proficiency with broader integration outcomes. Learning the host country's language is not only about acquiring the ability to communicate but also about understanding societal norms, values, and cultural cues, which are essential for full participation in the host society (Adserà and Pytliková, 2016; Shang et al., 2023). Moreover, language acquisition offers refugees the tools to navigate and contribute to their new environment effectively. The emphasis on education and language skills reflects the broader discourse on integration as a multidimensional process, encompassing economic, social, cultural, and civic participation (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019; Ager and Strang, 2008). Education and language proficiency are thus integral to achieving holistic integration, enabling refugees to become active, contributing members of their host communities and to challenge and reshape the narratives around their roles in these societies (see also section 7.6).

c. Employment (Providing Access to Work and Recognition of Skills)

The significance of employment opportunities and the recognition of professional skills among refugees is evident for their integration and economic empowerment within host societies. Participants highlighted the necessity of gaining access to work opportunities that align with their competencies as a critical step towards achieving self-reliance and contributing positively to the host community. This view is supported by the literature, which suggests that employment is a means of social inclusion, self-esteem enhancement, and cultural integration as well as a source of income (Bloch, 2007; Phillimore and Goodson, 2008; Marbach et al., 2018).

Rana, a Syrian woman, expressed the challenges faced in accessing job opportunities equivalent to her competencies, highlighting the barriers to accessing work imposed by language proficiency and the lack of formal recognition of skills and experiences. Her testimony is echoed in scholarship that identifies language barriers and the non-recognition of foreign qualifications as significant obstacles to employment for refugees, impacting their ability to secure work that is commensurate with their abilities (Ager and Strang, 2008; Cheung and Phillimore, 2014). In Rana's view:

"[integration is about] accessing job opportunities that commensurate with competencies, it is really difficult to access these kinds of opportunities if you don't speak English or don't have some sort of evidence for your past experiences. I believe that they should give us the opportunity to use our skills while learning English by practice." Rana (Female)

Another female participant, Mona, highlighted the issue of exploitation within the labour market, sharing a personal experience of being offered remuneration well below the minimum wage due to her refugee status:

"[it is important] not to be exploited at work; for instance, I once tried to work with a tailor as I have 20 years of experience, they offered me £3 per hour assuming that I am a refugee and in need of any type of work to earn money so whatever they offer me, I would say yes. However, it is known that the minimum wage is £8 per hour, but they think that as refugees it is ok to be underpaid [this is due to lack of recognition of past experiences]." Mona (Female)

Her experience sheds light on the exploitation risks that refugees face, where their vulnerability is exploited, and their rights within the labour market are undermined (Anderson and Rogaly, 2007; Lewis et al., 2014). Mona's account stressed the need

for policies and regulations that facilitate refugees' access to the labour market and protect them from exploitation, advocating for mechanisms that recognise their skills and experiences. Enhancing access to employment opportunities for refugees not only promotes economic self-sufficiency but also fosters social integration, allowing refugees to contribute their skills and talents to the host society (Bloch, 2007; Kuschel et al., 2023). (See also section 7.5)

d. Access

The emphasis on access to essential services is a fundamental aspect underscored by refugees as critical to integration processes. This encompasses the ability to access healthcare, housing, legal protections, and other vital services, positioning these as pivotal for ensuring refugees have the same opportunities as their counterparts in the host community. Such access is not only a marker of integration but a prerequisite for fostering equality and enabling refugees to fully participate in societal life. This perspective aligns with scholarly discourse that recognises the provision of social rights and services as the foundation of integration, facilitating refugees' social inclusion and equal participation (Boccagni, 2015; Phillimore, 2011).

Najwa specifically addressed the importance of gender inclusivity in integration processes and services, advocating for the empowerment to participate in societal activities without restrictions imposed by gender roles:

"[Integration is] to have rights and feel empowered to participate in the new society without being hindered by gender roles; meaning that no one should say I cannot do that because I am a female or shaming me for wanting to take an active role in the new society." Najwa (Female)

This assertion underscores the intersectionality of integration, where gender intersects with migration status to influence individuals' experiences and opportunities in the host society. The emphasis on gender highlights the need for integration policies and practices to be sensitive to the diverse experiences of refugees, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal access to rights and opportunities (Cross and Morris, 2003; Cheung and Phillimore, 2017).

Najwa's statement reflects broader findings in the field of gender and migration, which illustrate the additional barriers faced by women in accessing services and

participating fully in their new communities. These barriers can include discriminatory practices and gendered expectations that limit women's opportunities for employment, education, and social engagement (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019).

The call for gender inclusivity within integration processes is a reminder of the need for comprehensive approaches that address the specific needs and barriers faced by different groups within the refugee population. Ensuring access to rights and essential services for all refugees, and addressing the gender-specific challenges, are crucial steps towards achieving effective integration and fostering inclusive societies (Sansonetti, 2016).

e. External Factors: Time and Waiting Periods

The brainstorming session also allowed for discussion on the external factors that impact refugee integration processes. Refugees' integration into their host societies is further complicated by external factors, among which the challenges of lengthy bureaucratic processes and the temporal dimension of integration are particularly significant. These obstacles, characterised by protracted waiting periods for legal documentation and access to public services, compound the difficulties faced by refugees as they navigate their new environments. This perspective is supported by academic research, which emphasises the detrimental impact of prolonged asylum procedures and the uncertainty they engender on refugees' mental health, social inclusion, and overall integration journey (Phillimore and Cheung, 2021; Hvidtfeldt et al., 2020; Walsh and Sumption, 2023). One man vividly described the impact of these delays, underscoring the multifaceted nature of integration, highlighting how administrative and structural barriers exacerbate the challenges refugees face. The existing scholarship corroborates that prolonged waiting times for obtaining legal status and accessing services not only delay refugees' access to essential services but also affect their ability to plan for the future, establish stability, and contribute to their host communities (Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021; Hynie, 2018). Yara, a female participant, also explained that learning the host country language and building a career from scratch usually take time, but what makes it more difficult is the bureaucracy and the long waiting periods to access services that can support integration:

“It is important to note that it would take us time to integrate as result of needing to learn the language and build new work experience coupled with the long waiting time for everything here, it would take you ages to obtain an official prepare or obtain access to public services”. Yara (Female)

Furthermore, the temporal aspects of integration—such as the time needed to learn a new language, gain local work experience, and navigate complex bureaucratic systems—are crucial yet often overlooked in discussions about integration policies. These factors underscore the importance of viewing integration as a dynamic and prolonged process that requires patience, support, and flexibility from both refugees and host societies. The experiences shared by refugees such as Yara highlight the need for policy interventions that address these temporal and bureaucratic challenges. Reducing waiting times for legal and procedural matters, providing timely access to language and employment training programmes, and ensuring efficient access to public services are critical steps towards facilitating smoother integration processes for refugees.

7.2.2 Definition of integration

The brainstorming activity showed that the majority of participants understand integration as a collaborative/bilateral process. Their definition of integration aligns with arguments debated in the academic literature, yet introducing distinct, nuanced perspectives that add depth and complexity to existing theories. Their views offer a rich, multi-layered perspective of integration that requires adapting to the new societal norms, yet without abandoning one’s unique identity and traditions. Furthermore, integration is not perceived as merely blending in, but as a way to meaningfully contribute and have a lasting positive impact on the host society. A key path to such impact, as highlighted by the participants, is through mastering the English language and gaining meaningful employment. Refugees’ understanding of integration as a platform to be impactful and successful in society presents a more ambitious and proactive conceptualisation. While the academic discourse often discusses integration from the lens of accessing services and developing a sense of belonging, refugees seem to highlight the importance of taking an active role in their new communities, not just as passive recipients but as contributors.

a. Two-way dynamics and multidimensionality of refugee integration

Indeed, participants' perceptions of integration as a two-way dynamic (as discussed in the brainstorming session) are in harmony with scholarly interpretations of the integration processes. Ager and Strang's (2008) foundational work argues that successful integration depends on a mutual accommodation between refugees and their host societies. This mutual interaction requires that both parties engage actively, suggesting that the duties of adaptation and acceptance are shared. In the discourse on integration, mutual respect and cultural understanding are pivotal. Refugee participants emphasised that integration surpasses a simple two-way interaction between refugees and their host societies, highlighting a broader framework of shared responsibilities that involve multiple stakeholders, including the broader community. Amira said:

"Integration isn't just about us blending into their society; it's about both sides learning from each other and growing together. We bring our own experiences and culture, and they share theirs with us." Amira (Female)

This perspective aligns with Ager and Strang's (2008) work, which argues that successful integration depends on mutual accommodation and active engagement from both parties. Amira's perspective put an emphasis on mutual respect, cultural understanding, and the delicate balance between assimilation and preservation of one's identity. Furthermore, Berry's (1994) bi-dimensional model supports this view by illustrating that integration entails both cultural preservation and adaptive mechanisms. Moreover, this aligns with Vertovec's (2022) argument that different types of diversification imply that integration models can vary depending on different dynamics between host communities and migrants and models of transnationalism that have a direct impact on migrant identity preservation. The recent revision of Indicators of Integration also highlighted the critical elements of mutual respect, cultural understanding, and a nuanced approach towards the interplay between adapting to the new community and the preservation of cultural identity among refugees; it underscores the importance of policies and practices that facilitate integration in ways that respect and value cultural diversity (Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). Such approaches are essential for fostering cohesive societies that are built on the principles of mutual respect and understanding, accommodating the complexities of individual and collective identities within the fabric of the host society. The multidimensionality of integration requires a collective effort and responsibility sharing

from all sectors of society (refugees and host) to foster inclusive communities, where the complexities of individual and collective identities are acknowledged and embraced.

Findings from refugees underscore that effective integration is indeed multidimensional, necessitating not just economic and social inclusion but also the recognition and validation of cultural diversity. It involves both refugees adapting to their new environment and the host population evolving to become more inclusive and accommodating. This multifaceted nature of integration implies that policies should not solely focus on what refugees need to do to 'fit in' but also on how societies can adapt to be genuinely inclusive.

b. Proactive conceptualisation of integration

Refugees' understanding of integration aligns with, yet enriches, current policy narratives through its emphasis on an ambitious and proactive conceptualisation. This perspective advances current debates by foregrounding refugees' roles not merely as adaptors, but as active contributors to their new communities. This proactive stance on integration introduces a nuanced layer to the integration, highlighting refugees' potential to initiate positive changes in host societies. It presents a dynamic environment where refugees emerge as pivotal agents in a mutual exchange of social, cultural, and economic capital, thereby enriching the fabric of host societies.

The idea that refugees contribute to their new communities can be better understood through the concept of agency. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices (Çetrez et al., 2020). Refugees exercise agency by bringing diverse experiences and skills, which they leverage to benefit the host communities (Ager and Strang, 2008). Studies have found that the active participation and self-determined efforts of refugees can lead to significant economic, social, and cultural contributions to their new communities (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). This is shown in Cheung and Phillimore's (2014) work on the role of social networks and capital in refugee integration, underscoring the transformative potential that refugees bring to their new social landscapes. Refugees' understanding of integration as a proactive and dynamic process aligns with the idea of agency, as they are able to actively contribute to their new communities and initiate positive

changes. This challenges the traditional notion of refugees as passive recipients of assistance and highlights their potential to play a pivotal role in shaping the social, cultural, and economic landscape of their host societies. This proactive conceptualisation of integration enriches the current policy narratives by emphasising the agency and active participation of refugees in the process of integration (Çetrez et al., 2020). Refugees, through their own narratives and actions, are redefining the essence of integration. They assert it as a multidirectional channel that not only facilitates their incorporation into new societies but also enables them to act as catalysts for community enhancement and development. Moreover, the stress they place on English language proficiency and employment change perspectives of these elements being mere facilitators of integration, highlighting them instead as effective tools for community contribution, stereotype challenging, and status elevation. Refugees' perspectives align with the academic debate that views language proficiency and local experience as critical facilitators for refugees to make substantial contributions to their host societies (Ager and Strang, 2008; Coley et al., 2019; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019).

Refugees' understanding of social relations and being an active part of the community touch also on ideas around reciprocity. Phillimore et al. (2018) argue that reciprocity plays a crucial role in the integration processes of new migrants, as it involves the exchange of resources that can aid in developing social networks and accessing important integration resources. The concept of reciprocity is not just limited to binaries of giving and receiving, but also encompasses other facets of contribution, such as informal and norm-based reciprocity. Refugee participants' call for this proactive role aligns with under-reciprocation, which refers to a situation in which an individual receives fewer resources than they give, where some form of exchange is expected (Nahun-Shani and Bamberger, 2011). This can create a sense of agency, as the individual is able to offer resources to others, but it may also lead to feelings of exploitation and a lack of access to important resources such as belonging and identity. Refugees' ambition to contribute to their new community also aligns with the debate around informal reciprocity which involves the exchange of resources freely given by individuals to strangers, without the expectation of direct repayment (Phillimore et al., 2018). Both forms of reciprocity contribute to the development of

social relationships and the acquisition of essential resources, ultimately aiding in the integration of new migrants into their host societies.

In conclusion, the Empathise stage, with its focus on understanding refugees' perceptions of integration, laid a strong foundation for the subsequent stages of the design thinking process (see Chapter 9 for reflection on the process). While there are overlaps between the refugees' perceptions and established academic understandings of integration, the FGDs have produced new layers of understanding. Integration is far from a linear or one-dimensional process. It is dynamic, complex, and constantly evolving as refugees and host communities interact with and change in response to one another. It is about mutual exchange between the refugees and host community with institutional support that would ensure refugees' rights and access to services to facilitate their integration and inspire them to actively participate in the new society. These nuanced insights highlight the importance of continued dialogue with refugees to develop our comprehension of what integration truly means. In the following sections, I will explore how these themes informed the design thinking process, guided the definition of integration challenges, influenced "ideation", and ultimately developed actionable prototypes to discuss with policymakers and assess the feasibility of these proposed solutions.

7.3 Integration Challenge and Solutions (Define, Ideate, Prototype)

In this section and sections that follow, I answer research question 3 and discuss the types of policies participants identified as necessary and link these to existing debates from the literature.

Research Question: *What kinds of integration policy do refugees identify as needed to meet their needs?*

7.3.1 Define: Framing the Integration Challenge

The feedback on the integration services collected during experience diagramming presented a mixed picture of positive and negative interactions with services (please see sections 7.4 to 7.7 for more detailed analysis). All participants had positive experiences with services provided under the social networking theme, such as the

befriending service and Family Community Days, with no gaps in services highlighted. They explained that all activities organised by BCC and partners had helped them build social connections that were aiding them in their integration journey. The satisfaction with social networking services mirrors the findings of Cheung and Phillimore (2014), who noted the significance of such networks in fostering social ties and easing integration processes. Conversely, all participants had negative experiences with services provided under the housing domain. They were mainly struggling with the poor quality of accommodation and the poor treatment from service providers' staff, as well as housing insecurity as a result of private landlords ending tenancy agreements (see section 7.4). The concerns expressed about housing services are consistent with the findings in refugee studies more generally and reflect a bigger issue that faces the general population in the UK. The issues of inadequate housing, uncertainty tied to short-term rental agreements, and racism in the housing sector have been highlighted by Crawley and Skleparis (2018) as persistent barriers to integration.

In terms of employment, participants had overall good experiences but also highlighted some gaps including language learning provision, lack of opportunities matching expertise, lack of training or apprenticeship opportunities, and lack of information (see section 7.5 for more details). Similarly, in education (English learning), participants had overall good experiences but also highlighted some gaps, including lack of interaction/social activities in English, insufficient time allocated to learning English, gathering refugees with mixed English skills in one level, and lack of proper examination (see section 7.6 for more details). Finally in health, participants had overall good experiences but also highlighted some gaps including the unsatisfactory NHS services, lack of knowledge of services provided, and culture barriers in acknowledging mental health problems (see section 7.7 for more details). The relatively positive experiences with services in other domains like education, employment, and health, with some gaps, are corroborated by broader European and English perspectives. The emphasis on the need for better ESOL learning services, especially conversational and business English, reflects the broader discourse around language as a pivotal integration tool (Sorgen, 2015)

The "Define" stage, enriched by the insights gained from refugees' experiences, allowed me to frame the integration challenges within the domains of housing, employment, education, and health. Since all had positive interactions with the social networking services, and no one highlighted any gaps, I have not discussed this domain in the following activities. The identified challenges within the remaining domains served as the basis for the following stages, guiding the refugees' development of solutions aimed at addressing their complex and multi-layered needs during their integration journey.

7.3.2 Ideate: Generating Innovative Solutions

The "Ideate" stage connected refugees' experiences of integration processes with the development of innovative solutions to the integration challenges they faced. These proposed solutions were further explored in the following stages, including prototyping and testing, where the feasibility and impact of some of these ideas would be assessed and refined in collaboration with policymakers and stakeholders. These solutions, summarised in Table 7.1 below and expanded in the following sections (see sections 7.4 to 7.7), reflected the collective knowledge and creativity of refugees as they attempted to address complex and multi-layered issues.

Housing	☐ Changing the current service provider ☐ Increasing staff responsible for housing and hiring professional employees ☐ Conducting regular quality assurance visits, and enhancing the complaints system ☐ Enhancing repairs for accommodations, and ensuring quality and timeliness ☐ Taking refugees' needs into consideration when allocating accommodation ☐ Changing accommodation upon request to meet individual needs ☐ Ensuring refugees have long-term rents ☐ Providing quick solutions when refugees have been evicted ☐ Teaching refugees how to apply for housing through mainstreamed services.
Employment	☐ Providing training that matches previous expertise ☐ Hiring refugees in matching jobs for an initial period without English requirements of Level 3 ☐ Providing training as a replacement for certificates ☐ Providing probation work opportunities that allow employers to hire refugees without certificates or English requirements to allow refugees to gain UK work experience ☐ Learning English through working; providing work experiences that allow refugees to practice English and learn business English ☐ Make information about work opportunities available to all refugees
Education (English learning)	☐ Putting refugees with the same English skills in a matching level English class ☐ Organising interaction/ social activities with native English speakers to practice English ☐ Increasing weekly hours of English language learning ☐ Allocating a British family to befriend each Syrian family
Health	☐ Making information available to refugees about available refugee mental health services ☐ Providing services to facilitate doctor appointments for refugees and speeding the appointment bookings for those who need special care ☐ Establishing a new organisation to provide health services for refugees

Table 7.1: Main solutions proposed by refugees for the current identified gaps in integration services

7.3.3 Prototype: Developing Solutions

Table 7.2 below outlines the options suggested by refugees for new integration services, which they voted on to develop proposals. I expand on these solutions in the following sections (see sections 7.4 to 7.7)

Services suggested by first FGD	Services suggested by second FGD
1. Housing Service: Provides quality accommodation for refugees. 2. Employment Service: Offers special training and probationary employment with opportunities to practice English at work. 3. Health Service: Assists in securing doctor appointments and speeding up the process. 4. Mental Health Awareness: Sessions to increase awareness of refugees around mental health and support available. 5. Cultural Exchange Activities: Organising activities with British/native English speakers. 6. Business English Learning: Provides business English learning through work experiences.	1. Employment Service: Allows refugees to access jobs without an English language requirement. 2. Business English Learning: Provides business English learning through work experiences. 3. Cultural Exchange Activities: Organises activities with host community families for language exchange. 4. Specialised English Courses: Offers specialised English courses for the elderly. 5. Alternative Housing: Provides alternative accommodation for refugees. 6. Long-term Housing: Offers long-term accommodation considering the needs of refugees. 7. Private Health Service: Registers refugees with private doctors for those receiving benefits. 8. Targeted Health Services: Provides targeted health services for refugees outside mainstream services.

Table 7.2: Solutions suggested by refugees

Refugees voted on six projects in total and worked within groups on a proposal for each of these projects including: a new employment service, two new housing services, new business English learning, new health service project, new English learning service for the elderly (see sections 7.4 to 7.7). The "Prototype" stage demonstrated the collective determination of refugees to develop practical solutions to the integration challenges they faced. These proposed projects served as prototypes for addressing complex issues related to housing, employment, health, and language learning and will be presented in more details in the following section. These projects were also assessed (see Chapter 8), for feasibility, during the "Test" stage

with policymakers, with the ultimate goal of refining and implementing them to enhance the integration experiences of refugees.

7.4 Housing: Identifying Challenges and Solutions

Access to suitable and affordable housing in a safe environment is essential for individuals and families to settle in a new country, especially for refugees who face significant disturbance during their displacement (Brown et al., 2022). Quality housing is vital for their daily life experience in the new country and plays a pivotal role in community cohesion (Brown et al., 2021). Furthermore, stable housing is beneficial for accessing education and employment opportunities, providing a sense of home and refuge from past traumas (Allsopp et al., 2014; Rowley et al., 2020). Findings from FGDs indicate that refugees in Birmingham faced significant challenges in housing. Key issues included poor quality of accommodation, unsatisfactory interactions with housing service providers, and housing insecurity.

7.4.1 Poor quality of accommodation

A substantial proportion of participants voiced significant dissatisfaction with their housing conditions, underscoring the inadequate quality and suitability of the accommodation provided to them. Participants reported that their living spaces were often in a state of disrepair and failed to accommodate their needs, particularly for individuals with specific health concerns. This issue of unsuitable accommodation reflects broader findings in refugee housing research, where the quality of housing has been identified as a pivotal factor affecting refugees' well-being and integration into new communities (Brake et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2024). Basma, a Syrian woman, lamented that her accommodation was in a poor condition and did not meet her needs, while the quality of repairs was poor:

“Accommodation provided is really bad. I am not happy with it as I am struggling with many issues with it; it is a very old flat. Even when we got someone to do the repairs, they delivered bad quality fixes. The heating is central [so we cannot adjust it], I pay a lot of money as I have electrical heating.” Basma (Female)

Furthermore, participants expressed frustration over an ineffective complaint resolution mechanism. One participant, Mona, faced challenges in securing a suitable

living environment for her son, who has a health condition, highlighting a lack of responsiveness to their needs:

“My son has specific health condition, and we complained about the current house that we have. They refused to move us to a new flat, even though we specifically highlighted his health condition.” Mona (Female)

Another Syrian woman, Hiba, described a pervasive sense of being disregarded:

“I am not happy with staff responses to our complaints; they usually ignore our requests. Even when they do get back to us, they say this is what available and we cannot do anything to change your situation.” Hiba (Female)

These testimonies highlight shortcomings in the provision of adequate housing for refugees, emphasising the need for a more tailored and responsive accommodation strategy that takes into account the diverse needs of refugees, including those with health vulnerabilities. These issues reflect the broader experience of the general population in the UK, where the housing market has increasingly failed to provide adequate, affordable, and quality housing. However, refugees face unique vulnerabilities that distinguish their housing needs from the general population. Many refugees arrive with limited financial resources, lack of local knowledge, and may have experienced significant trauma. These factors exacerbate their risk of housing instability and poor living conditions. For example, refugees might not be familiar with their rights as tenants or how to navigate the housing market, making them more susceptible to exploitation and substandard living conditions (Allsopp et al., 2014). The literature on refugee housing suggests that successful integration is heavily dependent on the quality of housing, as it affects physical health, mental well-being, and social integration (Brown et al., 2022; Netto, 2011). Poor housing conditions and the lack of effective mechanisms to address complaints and repairs can significantly hinder integration processes, leading to isolation, increased stress, and a sense of exclusion from the host community (Brown et al., 2022). Moreover, research underscores the impact of factors like a noisy neighbourhood and the broader issues of energy poverty, on the overall satisfaction and health outcomes of refugees, advocating for a holistic approach to housing that considers not just the physical structure but also the liveability and suitability of the environment for its inhabitants (Clark and Kearns, 2012).

The issue of poor-quality accommodation for refugees is not exclusive to Birmingham but reflects a broader systemic issue observed in various urban settings. Studies have shown that refugees often inhabit substandard housing due to multiple barriers, including financial constraints, limited social networks, and discrimination (Powell and Robinson, 2019). This aligns with the broader discourse on housing inequality and social exclusion, suggesting a need for policy interventions aimed at improving housing standards for marginalised groups (Bristow, 2021). Refugees explained that the poor quality of their accommodation resulted in poor wellbeing and mental health, which has been discussed in the literature with specific focus on how poor quality could lead to a sense of dehumanisation (Lietaert et al., 2020). (See also Chapter 8 for more discussion around housing policy). Participants suggested some solutions to this specific issues as follow:

Enhancing Repairs: Improving the quality and timeliness of repairs was another critical area advocated by refugees, aiming to ensure that maintenance issues are promptly and effectively resolved. Participants reported experiences of delayed and inadequate repair. Basma stated:

“We understand that they usually invest in accommodations that are old as it is cheaper for them, but then when you ask them to repair things, they either take a lot of time to fix them or when they do, they do the bare minimum, and you continue to have the same problem.” Basma (Female)

Accommodation Customisation: the customisation of accommodation to meet the specific needs of refugees was proposed, suggesting a more personalised approach to housing allocation. This recommendation reflects the need for a flexible housing allocation policy that considers individual circumstances, as supported by literature on housing solutions for vulnerable populations (Clapham, 2005). Layla explained:

“If the decision was my own, I would have tried my best to provide each refugee with a house that meets their needs, or give them the option to choose the houses themselves and I provide financial support.” Layla (Female)

7.4.2 Unsatisfactory Interactions with Housing Providers

Many participants highlighted the poor treatment from service providers' staff. Participants reported a general dissatisfaction with the professionalism and communication skills of the staff, citing instances of disrespect and use of racially

insensitive language. This reflects a broader concern within the literature regarding the quality of service provision to refugees and the need for culturally sensitive practices within such services (Lau and Rodgers, 2021). Najwa reported an explicit instance of insensitivity underscoring the critical issue of inadequate service provision and highlighting the necessity for a more empathetic and responsive approach to refugee needs:

“When we complained about the poor quality of the accommodation provided explaining that we are used to have certain standards of living, the employee told us this is not your country you should be happy with anything we provide you with.” Najwa (Female)

The reported lack of professionalism and instances of discriminatory language point to a significant gap in the training and oversight of staff working within refugee services. Studies emphasise the importance of culturally competent practices and the need for service providers to possess not only an understanding of refugees' backgrounds and experiences but also the skills to communicate effectively and respectfully (Lau and Rodgers, 2021). The negative impact of such interactions on refugees' sense of belonging and overall integration process is well-documented, with research suggesting that positive service experiences are crucial for fostering a supportive environment conducive to successful integration (Ziersch et al., 2023). Furthermore, the unsatisfactory interactions between refugees and housing service providers could be indicative of a deeper problem related to the institutional approach towards refugees. Research has often pointed to the lack of cultural sensitivity and the bureaucratic complexities within services provided to refugees as significant barriers to integration (Lau and Rodgers, 2021). This underlines the importance of fostering an inclusive approach in public service provision, one that is considerate of the cultural and linguistic diversity of service users (Ager and Strang, 2008).

Housing insecurity stands out also as a primary concern impacting the daily lives of refugees in Birmingham. This issue is characterised by a lack of control over their housing situation, misalignment with their needs, and the risky nature of short-term rental agreements, leading to feelings of insecurity, fear, and unpredictability. Participants explained that usually the accommodation is not owned by the service provider, which can affect the length of the tenancy and put refugees at risk of being evicted by landlords at any time. This uncertainty further destabilises the refugees'

living conditions. Samir, a Syrian man, described this vulnerability including the potential for homelessness and the disruption of the painstaking process of settling into a new environment:

“The worst thing of all is the fact that accommodations are usually owned by private landlord, so even after you settle down the owner has the right to evict you. I am now struggling from this situation; they might need to move me into a hostel as result until they find me a replacement. I didn’t come here to become a homeless.” Samir (Male)

The issues of housing insecurity and the risk of eviction faced by refugees are well documented in the literature, highlighting the need for comprehensive housing policies that prioritise stability and security for vulnerable populations (Carnemolla and Skinner, 2021). The risky housing situations described by refugees point to a systemic failure to provide adequate, stable housing solutions that cater to their needs. Research suggests that secure and stable housing is foundational to the successful integration and overall well-being of refugees, impacting their ability to access employment, education, and social services (Murdie, 2008; Ziersch et al., 2023; Ager and Strang, 2008; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). Participants suggested some solutions to this specific issues as follow:

Changing the Current Service Provider: A notable suggestion was the consideration of an alternative housing service provider by BCC to avoid the issues associated with the current provider. This idea was predicated on the experiences of unprofessionalism noted by Hiba:

“I think it is only logical to think of either changing the current service provider who proved to be unprofessional or even have another service provider to divide the workload between them.” Hiba (Female)

Increasing Staff and Hiring Professionals: Participants also highlighted the need for an increase in the number of staff dedicated to housing services and the employment of professionals who adhere to a higher standard of service provision. This approach would include regular quality assurance checks and improvements to the complaint resolution system, addressing concerns such as staff overload and neglect of requests. Ahmad explained the problem:

“They have allocated many families to one employee, so it is really difficult for them to manage requests in a timely fashion, and they end up either losing track of things or ignoring requests.” Ahmad (Male)

7.4.3 Housing Insecurity

The pathway to secure housing in the UK is difficult for many people, but it is a particularly hard for refugees who tend to be less aware of their rights and are often directed towards mainstream services without adequate support (Murdie, 2008). Frontline workers, including those in the public and voluntary sectors, play a crucial role in assisting refugees to navigate these systems, yet their ability to effect structural change remains limited, often focusing on temporary solutions rather than long-term improvements (Strang et al., 2018). Some participants voiced that there was a lack of information provided about available accommodation, worsening the challenges they faced. As Rana explained:

“There is not enough information provided on the available accommodations and the criteria that they use to allocate families into houses. They told us that our financial situation is good and that this is all what they can do for us, but they didn’t provide us with information on where we can find accommodation or how to look for replacements.” Rana (Female)

Participants suggested some solutions to this specific issues as follow:

Ensuring Long-Term Rents: Ensuring access to long-term rental agreements was identified as essential for providing stability to refugees, mitigating the risks associated with short-term leases and potential evictions. Amira expressed the insecurity refugees faced:

“Due to lack of Council owned accommodation, they end up renting flats from private landlords and then allocate it to refugees. But the method is problematic as landlords usually end up asking for their houses and give us a notice to leave. When this happens, you end up feeling lost and fearful of becoming homeless. Even if you try to find a place yourself, no landlord will accept us as we are on benefits. So, they should try to agree a long-term rental with breaking clause of a year or two.” Amira (Female)

Teaching refugees how to apply for housing: Finally, participants suggested that empowering refugees with the knowledge to apply for housing through mainstreamed services could alleviate some of the challenges they face. This approach emphasises

the importance of capacity building and self-sufficiency, which are crucial for the empowerment and integration of refugees. As Yara put it:

“Let me add something, those who are supposed to help us can reduce the burden on themselves by teaching us how to apply for things on the Internet. Why aren’t they interested in teaching us, if this could also help them? They always want to fix and apply for things without thinking of asking me to seat next to them and learn how to do things myself” Yara (Female)

7.4.4 Solutions prototyped by refugees for housing

After participants voted on the solutions they were most interested in prototyping, I allocated time for them to collaborate in pairs to develop a detailed proposal or pitch for new solutions/services that centred on one of the chosen solutions. Within this collaborative framework, two housing projects were conceptualised by the respondents. The first project aimed at initiating a new service provider, staffed with professional personnel dedicated to offering high-quality accommodation along with prompt repair services. The second project was designed to supply long-term housing solutions to refugees by introducing a new business model. This approach not only facilitated the creation of practical solutions but also encouraged partnership and creativity among the participants, leading to the development of proposals that were both innovative and directly responsive to the needs of refugees.

1. New Housing Service: The first proposed service focused on housing, aiming to provide quality accommodation that meets the specific needs of refugees (see Text box 1). The project proposal for the service outlined a multi-layered approach towards the improvement of accommodation facilities for refugees in Birmingham. This service is not merely a provision of housing, but a comprehensive support system designed to facilitate the integration of refugees into their new community while addressing their mental health concerns. It presents a strategic framework that includes preparation of accommodation prior to the arrival of refugees, thereby ensuring immediate availability of habitable spaces. The proposal emphasises the necessity of providing a range of housing options, enabling refugees to exercise agency in selecting an environment conducive to their needs and preferences. Furthermore, the proposal underscored the criticality of professional and empathetic service provision. By advocating for staff that are not only skilled but also genuinely committed to the welfare of refugees, the

initiative recognised the dual importance of professional competence and the human element in fostering a sense of safety and stability. This approach promises to create an environment where refugees can thrive, not just survive, setting a foundation for holistic integration into society.

Text Box 1: Proposal by Group 2- FGD 1

“Many of the Syrian refugees living in Birmingham are struggling from the current housing services which affecting their integration into other domains and have a great impact on their mental health, as a result we propose the following:

- *Establish a new service to ensure preparing good quality accommodation for refugees before their arrival to the UK.*
- *When refugees arrive to the UK, they should be given multiple options that match their needs and then have the right to choose.*
- *Once the refugee moves into the chosen accommodation the service provider should provide a timely and professional repair services. This would include allocating timeslots to families on when to expect their visit to their home.*
- *The service providers are expected to employ professional staff and teach refugees to do things themselves rather than requesting help from staff members*

Creating a new housing service is pivotal as it has a lot of benefits and positive impacts on other aspects of life. Having good accommodation would have a positive impact on our mental health and would encourage us to learn/ work”

In response to my inquiries about the uniqueness of the proposed service compared to existing ones, participants articulated the importance of anticipatory preparation of homes, the offering of choices, and the nurturing of self-sufficiency. These principles not only respond to immediate accommodation needs but also reflect a commitment to the dignity and agency of the individuals it aims to serve. The group also added that providers could achieve this by renting a few properties and keeping them vacant, to utilise as bridging accommodation to those who are evicted, as well as serving as a pool of options for refugees to choose from.

The anticipatory preparation of homes is a proactive measure that signifies a shift from reactive to strategic housing support. By ensuring that accommodation is ready prior to refugees' arrival in the UK, especially in the case of those arriving on resettlement schemes, the service aims to eliminate the initial period of instability that often

exacerbates the challenges faced by displaced individuals. This level of preparation requires a well-orchestrated collaboration among housing agencies, government departments, and resettlement programmes, possibly drawing on predictive analytics to forecast housing needs accurately and in a timely manner. Offering a choice in housing goes beyond the traditional one-size-fits-all approach. It acknowledges the diverse needs and preferences of refugees, allowing them to select homes that align with their cultural practices, family size, and proximity to community support networks. This empowerment is instrumental in fostering a sense of ownership and belonging, which are crucial for successful integration. Moreover, the emphasis on teaching refugees to manage domestic tasks themselves is a forward-thinking approach that promotes independence. This aspect of the service is not just about imparting practical skills but also about reinforcing confidence and self-efficacy. Such an approach has the potential to serve as a model for broader housing services, addressing systemic issues by equipping all tenants with the skills and knowledge to maintain their homes, thereby reducing long-term maintenance costs and fostering a more responsible tenant base.

2. Sustainable Long-Term Accommodation Service: This initiative proposes the development of sustainable long-term accommodation options tailored to the needs of refugees (see Text box 2). The strategy includes the acquisition of cheap and unused old properties by the local council for extended durations, refurbishing these properties, and the construction of new units specifically to be allotted to refugees. A key element of this programme is the assurance that each family is provided with accommodation that adequately addresses their individual requirements, thus facilitating extended and stable settlement.

Text Box 2: Proposal by Group 3- FGD 2

“Since we moved to Birmingham, we are struggling in the current housing market, as we are in continuous fear of being evicted, this is coupled with bad quality of services provided by the current service provider. All this has a direct impact on our integration, that’s why we propose the following:

- *Establish a new service that provides long-term accommodation and takes into consideration the needs of refugees.*
- *Renting old accommodation by the council for the long term and renovate them and then allocate them to refugees*
- *Building new accommodation and letting them to refugees with reduced prices and long-term.*
- *Ensuring that each family is allocated accommodation that meets their needs and ensures they stay long-term.*

Creating a new housing service is necessary as it has direct impacts on other aspects of life. Having a long-term accommodation would give refugees stability and allow them to focus on their education or employment”

Addressing the concerns I raised regarding the financial viability of such a programme, given the potential constraints on government and council budgets, refugees suggested a social enterprise model. This model would involve the acquisition and renovation of houses in need of repair by the social enterprise, with refugees actively participating in the refurbishment process. The renovated properties could then be sold at a profit, which would be reinvested into the scheme to assist refugees in securing housing. This self-sustaining business approach not only generates funds to support the programme but also encourages the economic integration of refugees through skill development and employment opportunities.

The participatory aspect of this model, where refugees contribute to the renovation efforts, is particularly innovative and has seen success in other regions within the UK. It provides refugees with practical training and skill acquisition, which facilitates their economic integration into the community. Additionally, this hands-on involvement is anticipated to foster a sense of ownership and pride in the refugees, as they directly contribute to the creation of their future homes and communities. The enterprise model is anticipated to have several benefits. Firstly, it creates a revenue stream independent of the fluctuating financial aid from public funds. Secondly, it encourages the development of marketable skills among refugees, which may lead to employment

opportunities within the construction industry and beyond. Thirdly, by actively involving refugees in the renovation process, the model promotes community cohesion and personal empowerment.

7.5 Employment: Identifying Challenges and Solutions

Securing gainful employment is a keystone for the economic and social integration of refugees into their new host societies. It provides not only a source of income but also a sense of purpose, dignity, and the opportunity to establish social connections within the community (Ager and Strang, 2004; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). For refugees, who have often experienced considerable disruption in their professional paths, the challenge of entering the job market in a new country is compounded by systemic barriers, such as low levels of language proficiency, lack of recognition of qualifications, and cultural differences (Cheung and Phillimore, 2014). Employment facilitates self-reliance and is a critical step towards rebuilding lives disrupted by forced displacement, making it a crucial element in the integration processes (Toivonen, 2023). Findings from FGDs indicate that refugees in Birmingham faced significant challenges in accessing labour market. Key issues included language barriers, lack of recognition of past qualifications and experiences, lack of training or apprenticeship opportunities, and lack of information about employment opportunities.

7.5.1 Language Barriers

Language barriers are indeed one of the most highlighted obstacles to employment among participants. As the participants indicated, the lack of English proficiency can significantly restrict their job opportunities, even when they possess relevant skills and experience (Bloch, 2002). They stated that the lack of English language skills hindered their access to employment opportunities, despite having skills and expertise in their respective fields. The frustration resonates with the findings of Phillimore and Goodson (2006), who observed that despite a willingness to work, language proficiency is a key determinant in the employability of refugees. The perception that refugees prefer to remain on benefits is a misinterpretation that fails to acknowledge the structural barriers they face. Tarek lamented:

“The woman at the job centre said that I am lying about not being able to speak English to remain on benefits, I told her I don’t mind working but whenever I go into job interviews, they say we need better English, so

please find me a job that doesn't require being fluent in English and I will start tomorrow. She said, go to the Arab owned businesses, they would be happy to employ you, is that all what she can do to support me?" Tarek (Male)

Tarek highlights the many-sided challenges refugees face when seeking employment, which cannot be simplistically attributed to language barriers alone. The response from the job centre representative is indicative of a systemic issue where policies or practices in state institutions contribute to unequal outcomes for minority ethnic groups (Heath and Cheung, 2006). This calls for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach from employment services, one that acknowledges and addresses the complex barriers to refugee employment and integration. Moreover, employment services often operate under assumptions that disadvantage refugees. For instance, suggesting that refugees should seek employment only within their ethnic communities, as indicated in Tarek's experience, underscores a lack of support and understanding of the refugees' broader employment potential and aspirations. This approach overlooks the diverse skills and qualifications that refugees bring and pigeonholes them into a narrow segment of the job market, often characterised by low wages and limited opportunities for advancement. It also undermines longer-term integration as it denies them access to the English speaking environment and will prevent social mobility and network building. Participants suggested a solution to this specific issues as follow

Initial Employment Without English Requirements: it was suggested that refugees could be employed in roles that align with their qualifications without the immediate necessity for English language proficiency. This approach, coupled with on-the-job English language training, would enable refugees to simultaneously gain work experience and improve their language skills, enhancing their employability. Ahmad gave the following example:

"There is a good solution for this, IKEA already did that. Their programme, allow refugees to gain work experience while learning English by practice and at the end of the 8 week you get a certificate to help you in future job applications. So, it should be possible to replicate this with other employers to all refugees to learn business English in their area of expertise" Ahmad (Male)

7.5.2 Lack of recognition of past qualifications and experiences

Due to a lack of recognition of past qualifications and experiences, many participants reported a lack of access to employment opportunities in their fields of expertise. The issue of the non-recognition of foreign qualifications and experience is a substantial barrier to employment for refugees and migrants in general (Phillimore and Goodson 2006). Despite having relevant qualifications, many refugees find themselves underemployed or in jobs for which they are overqualified (Kosyakova and Kogan, 2022). This lack of recognition not only hampers the employment prospects of skilled refugees but also contributes to a waste of valuable human capital (Risberg and Romani, 2022). This approach overlooks the diverse skills and qualifications that refugees bring and pigeonholes them into a narrow segment of the job market, often characterised by low wages and limited opportunities for advancement. Consequently, refugees with high qualifications are frequently forced into low-skilled jobs, leading to underemployment and a significant loss of human capital. Yara gave an example:

“My relative is a lawyer who had a great experience back in Syria, he cannot work in his field although he speaks good English. The job centre employee told him that it would be difficult for him to obtain recognition of his law degree here and he should take it off his CV and try applying for jobs at Macdonald.” Yara (Female)

Participants suggested a solution to this specific issues as follow:

Probationary Work Opportunities: The concept of probationary work placements was put forward as a means to overcome the barriers posed by certification and language requirements. Such placements refer to temporary employment opportunities designed to evaluate an employee's performance before offering them a permanent position. In the context of the proposed solutions for improving employment opportunities for refugees, probationary work placements serve as a practical approach to integrate refugees into the workforce. These placements allow employers to assess the skills, capabilities, and work ethic of refugee employees without immediately requiring formal certifications or full proficiency in the English language. This approach provides refugees with valuable work experience in the UK, helping them to demonstrate their abilities and potential to employers, while also offering a pathway to secure more stable and long-term employment. As Tarek said:

“Any job you apply to ask us to provide level 3 certification before they even consider interviewing us. As for the other proposed solution, I think

employers should give refugees a chance to gain some sort of UK experience through providing a special probation period” Tarek (Male)

7.5.3 Lack of training or apprenticeship opportunities

Other participants expressed that there were not enough options for them to practice and learn how to transfer their skills to access the UK labour market. The importance of such programmes comes from their ability to facilitate the transfer of refugees' skills into the local job market (OECD, 2006). These programmes not only provide practical experience but also serve as a bridge for refugees to understand the nuances of the employment landscape within the host country (Jørgensen et al., 2021). Rana said:

“Sometimes all what you need is an opportunity to prove yourself and your skills. I feel if they give me the opportunity through some sort of training or probation period, I will be able to show them what I can do” Rana (Female)

Participants suggested a solution to this specific issues as follow:

Matching Training to Expertise: Addressing the mismatch between refugees' existing skills and the demands of the UK job market, participants called for specialised training programmes. These programmes would not only align with the refugees' previous professional experiences but also culminate in certification, thereby validating their skills and facilitating their entry into the job market.

“If they really want to help us in accessing the labour market, they should create specialised trainings where refugees with specific skills could enrol in and take a step towards familiarising themselves in the UK market. We all have skills from back home, so it is about learning the new market and get a chance to prove ourselves and obtain some sort of certificate saying we really have these skills.” Yara (Female)

7.5.4 Lack of information about employment opportunities

Bloch (2007) stresses that refugees often do not have access to information about jobs that match their skill sets. This can lead to prolonged unemployment or underemployment, further compounding the difficulties refugees face in achieving economic independence (Bloch, 2002). Participants explained that other than the Jobcentre they did not know where they can find information on opportunities that match their skills. The ineffectiveness of the Jobcentre in supporting refugees is a reflection of a broader systemic issue. Jobcentres are often the first point of contact for refugees seeking employment, yet the support provided is frequently criticised for being generic and not tailored to the complex needs of this group. The lack of

specialised services for refugees, who may require additional assistance with language acquisition, recognition of qualifications, and understanding of the local labour market, is a significant barrier to employment (Cheung and Phillimore, 2014). Participants suggested a solution to this specific issues as follow:

Access to Work Opportunities: One suggestion was the development of an online platform that aggregates employment-related resources specifically for refugees. This platform would serve as a central hub for training opportunities, job vacancies, specialised employability programmes for refugees, and support services, thereby streamlining the search process and making these opportunities more accessible, as described by Mona:

“They should create some sort of online website where all these opportunities are available, i.e., training opportunities, vacancies, special refugee employability programmes, support services, etc.” Mona (Female)

7.5.5 Solutions prototyped by refugees for employment

Within their pairs, participants pitched new solutions/services and prototyped two new employment initiatives. The first initiative aimed at addressing the barriers that refugees face in accessing employment by offering specialised training and probationary work opportunities. This initiative bypasses the conventional requirements for formal qualifications and English language proficiency at a Level 3 standard, thereby widening access to employment for refugees based on their skills and capabilities. The second initiative was crafted to enhance the linguistic and professional integration of refugees into the UK job market through specialised business English programmes. This approach combines practical work experience with networking workshops, designed to both improve English language proficiency in a business context and to foster valuable connections within the professional community.

These proposals represent a significant departure from traditional employment pathways, focusing instead on creating more inclusive and accessible routes into employment for refugees. By addressing the specific challenges that refugees encounter, such as certification recognition and language barriers, these initiatives aim to improve immediate employment outcomes and to lay a foundation for long-term career development and integration into the UK labour market.

1. Labour Integration Service (Practical Language and Employment Programme): The participants of the first Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conceptualised a novel employment service that aims to bridge the gap between refugees and the UK labour market (see Text Box 3). This service is structured to facilitate refugees in acquiring job-specific skills and practical English language proficiency through actual work experience. The service strategically partners with employers who are willing to provide probationary work placements, potentially culminating in formal employment, or at the very least, issuing a certificate of work experience along with a professional reference. The main aim of the initiative is to provide refugees with the chance to learn English through practical work experience.

Text Box 3: Proposal by Group 1- FGD 1

"Many of the refugees have great work experiences and skills that they cannot wait to show to employers and could use in a UK workplace. So as government has all the information about refugees' past experiences, work preferences, and their expectations, and because refugees don't know much about how to access work opportunities or build experience in the UK, we propose the following:

- *To facilitate refugee access to the labour market a new service should be provided by either the BCC or its partner service provider to allow refugees to access work placement/ work experience for a short time.*
- *Establish an agreement with employers to have a special work programme for refugees that allows them to work for 2-3 months with no evidence of previous experience and language level.*
- *Build a system where refugees' profiles are created and then distributed to employers who match that profile*
- *The employer would then offer them a place in their programme where they can learn about the work culture and practice their English*
- *The employer has the right to either offer the refugee a job or give them some sort of certificate acknowledging that they have participated in this programme.*

The benefits from such a programme could be endless as it provides a solution to some of the main problems that refugees face when accessing the labour market including the lack of skills recognition and the long-time wait to achieve the required level of English."

Addressing my question regarding language barriers, particularly when refugees cannot speak English, the group suggested that numerous employment opportunities do not demand extensive language skills for the execution of tasks. They advocated

for a system wherein refugees can incorporate essential English phrases and terminologies relevant to their roles within a few months, giving the example of a mechanic who, despite literacy limitations in his native language, successfully learned task-specific English by engaging in a work environment and even mastered online procurement of automobile parts. Group 1's model is grounded in the belief that practical engagement in a work setting can significantly accelerate language acquisition (Kuschel et al., 2023). By immersing refugees in an English-speaking workplace and focusing on the essential communication required for specific tasks, they can effectively learn on the job. This model not only serves to equip refugees with the necessary language skills but also gives a sense of confidence, allowing them to progressively overcome grammatical errors and communicate effectively.

This employment service, therefore, offers a dual advantage: it provides refugees with the means to become economically self-sufficient and integrates them into the local community through language and cultural immersion. The practical approach to learning, predicated on the understanding that language is best acquired through use, can be particularly empowering for refugees, as it underscores the value of their existing skills while simultaneously fostering new competencies. (See also Chapter 8 where I discuss the feasibility of this solution with policymakers.)

2. Business English Programme (Targeted Learning and Integration Service):

The second service proposed by participants is a specialised Business English programme designed to blend language learning with practical vocational experiences (See Text Box 4). This innovative initiative aims to liaise with various professional sectors to offer tailored workshops that enable refugees to acquire English vocabulary relevant to their occupational expertise. Furthermore, the programme includes organised visits to suppliers and markets, providing refugees with tangible experiences in resource acquisition and business communications. Integral to this service are networking and skill-sharing events, which are envisioned to nurture reciprocal education between refugees and the local community.

Text Box 4: Proposal by Group 3- FGD 1

“Many of us adults find it difficult to go to English courses and learn grammar, especially those who have been working in vocational jobs and would like to learn only the business English that would allow us to swiftly access the labour market. Accordingly, we propose the following:

- *Establish a new service that provides specialised business English workshops in a variety of professions, where they learn English words and terms used in their field (e.g., for tailors teaching them the names of materials and tools in English)*
- *The service would also provide field trips designed for those professions that deal with suppliers, e.g., tailors. The field trips should provide them with opportunity to understand the supplier market and the names of materials in English.*
- *The service would also organise networking events for members from both the host community and refugee groups. The idea to allow refugees to build connections in order to learn business English directly from their English peers.*

There are a lot of benefits that could be seen as a result of providing this service, especially for refugees that would like to have their own small business, and this would help the economy through generating income and providing opportunities for other refugees.”

In addressing concerns I raised about the feasibility of this service for refugees with limited English proficiency, refugees suggested that immersive environments prompt accelerated language acquisition, similar to how children learn to communicate. They emphasised the efficacy of contextual learning, where language skills are developed through necessity and practice, rather than formal education alone. This was demonstrated by a refugee who cited gaining substantial practical knowledge from a neighbour within the same profession, a learning experience that proved to be more profound than what could be obtained in a traditional academic setting.

The principle behind this approach is that necessity produces innovation and learning. By immersing refugees in workshops where English is the medium of communication, the programme leverages the natural human capacity for language acquisition through direct engagement and social interaction. The emphasis on real-world application and peer-to-peer learning is also projected to foster community integration, thereby aligning with the overarching goal of empowering refugees to become independent,

contributing members of society. (See also Chapter 8 where I discuss the feasibility of this solution with policymakers.)

7.6 Education (Language Learning): Identifying Challenges and Solutions

Access to effective English language learning services is crucial for refugees to integrate successfully into their new society, particularly as language proficiency is a key determinant of social and economic integration (Morrice et al., 2021). The ability to communicate in the local language significantly impacts refugees' access to education, employment opportunities, and social networks, contributing to a sense of belonging and community cohesion (Ager and Strang, 2008; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). Findings revealed considerable gaps in current English language services, highlighting challenges such as the lack of interaction with native speakers, insufficient learning hours, and inappropriate skill-level placement.

7.6.1 Lack of interaction with native speakers

A majority of participants highlighted the lack of interaction/social activities in English as the main obstacle to improving their language skills. They raised concerns that most of their interactions were with other Syrians, limiting their opportunities to practice English. The necessity for interaction with native speakers to enhance language proficiency has been strongly emphasised in the literature. According to studies, social interaction with native speakers plays a pivotal role in the language acquisition process, as it not only improves linguistic skills but also aids in the cultural integration of refugees (Sorgen, 2015). These interactions provide meaningful contexts for language use, which is critical for developing fluency and confidence. Rana explained that practicing English with native speakers would boost her confidence, and called for more activities with native speakers:

“I am happy with English courses provided; however, I feel sometimes I cannot express myself because of not being able to practice my English with native speakers. It is always good to learn grammar, but I do believe that this should be coupled with activities that allow us to practice.... Most of our activities are with other Syrian refugees, how are you expecting me to be confident in English when I am not practicing it?” Rana (Female)

The participants' call for organising social activities aligns with the concept of "language socialisation," where learners acquire a language through engaging in

social practices within the target language community (García-Sánchez and Nazimova, 2017). Implementing regular social gatherings or language cafes could offer refugees more opportunities to practice English in a relaxed and supportive environment, fostering both language development and social bonds (Stella and Kay, 2023). Participants suggested some solutions to this specific issues as follow:

Organising Interaction/Social Activities: To promote language practice, participants proposed organising interaction and social activities with native English speakers, providing opportunities to practice English in real-life settings. Organising regular social gatherings and interaction activities with native English speakers can significantly enhance language practice in a natural setting. Such initiatives not only improve linguistic skills but also help refugees to understand cultural nuances, build social networks, and reduce feelings of isolation. Hiba said:

“Although they do allocate a native speaker to each family, but they only see you every 15 days for 1-1.5 hours and it is not enough to actually practice English. I think they should host some social gatherings every week to practice English with British. If it is too much, we are ok to host it in our houses.” Hiba (Female)

Befriending Service: Introducing a befriending service that pairs British families with Syrian families was proposed as a way to facilitate language and cultural exchange. The proposal is an innovative approach to language learning and cultural exchange. Such programmes can facilitate mutual understanding and support integration processes by providing a platform for cultural exchange and practical language use. Such a programme could be valuable in promoting the social inclusion of refugees, offering emotional support, and enhancing language skills through informal, everyday communication. Rana explained:

“A good solution to learning and practicing English is to allocate a British Family to a peer Syrian family. First it would help understanding each other culture, and ultimately it would help us learn the everyday English rather than learning grammar” Rana (Female)

7.6.2 Insufficient learning hours

Some participants expressed concerns about having insufficient time allocated for learning English by BCC, which reflects the general problems faced in ESOL provision. They explained that the hours dedicated to English instruction were inadequate for effectively improving their speaking skills. The issue of insufficient time allocated to

English learning highlights a gap in current language learning services' ability to meet the intensive learning needs of adult refugees. Research indicates that adult language learners, particularly those with responsibilities such as work and family care, require flexible and intensive language programmes that can adapt to their complex schedules (Pennacchia et al., 2018). This suggests a need for expanding language learning programme hours or adopting blended learning models that combine traditional classroom instruction with online resources, enabling learners to practice at their own pace outside the classroom. Amira explained:

“Also, there is a time barrier. For example, we have been allocated 3 hours of English learning in the college, half an hour would be lost between breaks, student being late and questions. Then when we go home, we speak Arabic, and we don't have time to focus on practicing English as we need to take care of our family” Amira (Female)

Participants suggested a solution to this specific issues as follow:

Increasing Learning Hours: Refugees suggested increasing the number of hours of ESOL classes per week, allowing for more intensive language acquisition. Increasing the intensity and frequency of English classes can accelerate language acquisition, enabling refugees to navigate their new environment more effectively and with greater confidence. Intensive language programmes could be associated with rapid improvements in language proficiency, which is crucial for accessing education, employment, and social services. Basma argued:

“If they have the budget and the capacity they should increase the English learning hours, so we can speed our learning process” Basma (Female)

7.6.3 Inappropriate skill-level placement

Participants expressed frustration over being placed in English classes alongside students with more advanced English skills, which they felt hindered their progress. They voiced concerns about the issue of mixing refugees with varying levels of English proficiency in the same class. Mixing refugee learners with different proficiency levels might cause language anxiety especially for those with lower levels (Liu, 2006). Moreover, it is important to differentiate instruction in language learning, as grouping learners by proficiency level allows for targeted instruction that can more effectively address individual learning needs and pace (Tomlinson, 2001). This approach can reduce the anxiety and frustration associated with competing with more advanced

learners, thereby enhancing participation and confidence among beginners. Hiba described the problem:

“It is not fair to be put in the same level with others who are more confident than you in English, this will stop me from speaking or participating as I fear making mistakes and being shamed [by those who have higher level of English] of not speaking good or correct English.” Hiba (Female)

Furthermore, the lack of proper examination and advancement criteria can lead to misplaced level advancement, undermining learners' confidence and skill development. Formative assessments that provide ongoing feedback and accurately reflect learners' abilities are crucial for effective language learning progression (Schildkamp et al., 2020). These assessments should inform not just advancement decisions but also instructional strategies, ensuring that learners receive the support they need to build on their language skills effectively. Layla mentioned the lack of proper examination; explaining that they were moved to higher-level English classes without reaching the necessary levels, even when they were not confident in their previous English level.

“The teacher that I have [moved me to the next level without proper examination]. I was in the previous semester, or the past four months, in the Entry 1 and then for the second semester I was moved automatically to Entry 2, and we don't know how to even construct a sentence.” Layla (Female)

Participants suggested a solution to this specific issues as follow:

Matching English Skill Levels: Participants recommended placing refugees with similar English language skills in matching-level English classes to optimise their learning experience. Tailoring English classes to accommodate refugees at similar language proficiency levels is fundamental for effective learning. This strategy ensures that teaching is appropriately paced, maximising individual learning potential and promoting a more cohesive and supportive learning environment. Najwa thought this should be simple:

“Is it really difficult to create many classrooms with refugees from the same English level, I think it should be a straightforward solution”
Najwa (Female)

7.6.4 Solutions prototyped by refugees for English learning

In addition to the two new employment initiatives, which also emphasised English acquisition through work, a new English learning programme was proposed by refugees. This project aimed to offer specialised English courses tailored specifically for older adults. The idea came up as particular to a few participants as they explained that the main issue for them is that they need to be able to communicate with grandchildren, rather than perfecting English grammar.

1. Practical English Engagement Programme for Elderly Refugees: This new initiative is specifically designed to cater to the linguistic needs of elderly refugees (aged 65 and above), with a focus on the acquisition of conversational English skills helpful for everyday communication (see Text Box 5). The proposal included the creation of English classes exclusively for the elderly, the use of a simplified curriculum and allocation of private tutors for those facing difficulties in learning English. The programme is characterised by its bespoke curriculum, which is crafted to avoid the complexities of grammatical instruction in favour of practical language usage.

Text Box 5: Proposal by Group 2- FGD 2

“Many of the elderly are not interested in going to the college and learning grammar, but would rather learn conversational English that would allow us to communicate with our grandchildren, accordingly we propose the following:

- *Establishing a new service that provides specialised English learning courses for the elderly.*
- *Using simplified curriculum and tools that focus more on everyday English rather than teaching grammar*
- *Allocating private tutors to those who have difficulties in learning English (especially those who are illiterate in their mother tongue).*
- *Organising activities that focus on conversation, to enhance skills by practice.*

There are a lot of benefits of such initiative, it would allow us elderly continue to feel connected to our grandchildren and it would also allow us to feel we belong to this new community. Especially those of us who cannot write in Arabic let alone learning a new language and its grammar”

In response to my inquiries regarding the nature of 'simplified tools and curriculum', refugees clarified that the curriculum would integrate visual aids and practical conversational contexts. This approach is deemed vital for facilitating language learning amongst those who may not have foundational literacy skills, even in their

native languages. The visual aids serve as guides to understanding and using English in typical settings, such as shopping, visiting a doctor, or conversing with family members. The envisioned outcomes of such a service extend beyond mere language learning; they contribute to the social and emotional well-being of elderly refugees. By enabling them to effectively communicate in their new environment, the programme aims to mitigate feelings of isolation and help them forge meaningful connections within their communities. This, in turn, supports their integration process and allows them to maintain close relationships with younger family members, including grandchildren, fostering intergenerational bonds and cultural continuity. (See also Chapter 8 where I discuss the feasibility of this solution with policymakers)

7.7 Health: Identifying Challenges and Solutions

Securing access to healthcare is important for refugees seeking to establish their lives in a new country, where the right to health is fundamental for achieving social inclusion and well-being. The complexity of navigating the healthcare system in the host country often presents a significant barrier to this vulnerable group, impacting their physical and mental health outcomes (Phillimore, 2011). The experiences of Syrian refugees in Birmingham underscore the complex challenges they face, from understanding healthcare bureaucracy to accessing specialised services that cater to their specific needs. These barriers not only exacerbate existing health issues but also hinder refugees' ability to fully participate in and contribute to their new communities. As such, identifying and addressing the obstacles within the healthcare system is critical for facilitating refugees' health and social integration, thereby enriching the fabric of the host society (Ager and Strang, 2008; Ndofo-Tah, et al., 2019).

7.7.1 Barriers to Access and Navigation

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the services provided by the NHS, indicating a gap in the accessibility of health services. Participants highlighted the systemic barriers encountered when attempting to navigate the UK healthcare system, a challenge that disproportionately affects those unfamiliar with it. According to Phillimore (2011), migrants, including refugees, often face significant obstacles in accessing healthcare services, including lack of specialist services, appropriate language support, and information. These challenges are attributed to language barriers and a lack of understanding of how the healthcare system operates. As a

result, refugees often struggle to secure the medical treatment they need, especially if they are unemployed or receiving benefits. Najwa described the disadvantages refugees face when accessing health services through the mainstream route. She explained that she encountered difficulties in navigating the healthcare system.

“I am not happy, as I don’t get the proper medical treatment for my conditions. This is because I don’t work and on benefits. You see, us who are on benefit and have access to general service struggle to obtain health services. First, we need to learn the new system and how to register with GP and obtain documentations, then it is not easy to obtain referrals to continue the same medical treatment that we used to have, and finally the long waiting time for every appointment”
Najwa (Female)

The complexities faced by refugees when trying to access vital health care, including charging regulations, refusal to register patients at GP practices without proof of ID, language barriers, and difficulties navigating the healthcare system, have been discussed in the literature (Asif and Kienzler, 2022). These structural barriers underscore the need for developing inclusive social policy and creating an empathetic health system that allows equitable access to health and social services for refugees (Asif and Kienzler, 2022; Phillimore, 2011). Participants suggested a solution to this specific issues as follow:

Dissemination of Mental Health Resources: The necessity of making mental health service information readily accessible to all refugees was highlighted by participants, underscoring the need for comprehensive online platforms that consolidate resources and services tailored for refugees. Mona explained:

“Again, they really should think of creating some sort of website where all information is available to refugees rather counting on employees to distribute this information” Mona (Female)

7.7.2 Awareness and Cultural Barriers to Specialised Services

FGDs indicated a notable gap in awareness among refugees regarding the availability of specialised health services beyond those provided by the NHS. Services offered by Birmingham City Council (BCC) and its partners, including targeted mental health support, remain underutilised due to a lack of knowledge. For instance, many participants explained that they were not aware of the specialised mental health support provided by BCC and partners. They also mentioned the cultural barriers to

acknowledging mental health issues. Amira pointed out the cultural stigma attached to mental health within their community:

“We are not used to talk about mental health, it is not in our culture. Back home, if you say I want to see a therapist, they will call you crazy. We learned to suffer alone and never ask for help” Amira (Female)

Participants suggested some solutions to this specific issues as follow:

Enhancement of Specialised Access: The provision of specialised services to streamline medical appointment processes for refugees was suggested, aiming to expedite access to necessary healthcare for those requiring specific attention. As Layla said:

“My GP is really good, but it is not easy to book an appointment with him. So, I really believe they should have a special line, or a special employee dedicated only for refugees to accommodate their needs and speed the process. Same for the hospitals” Layla (Female)

Creation of a Dedicated Refugee Health Entity: Proposing an innovative approach, the establishment of an organisation focused solely on delivering health services to refugees was discussed, aimed at addressing the distinct health needs of this population. Tarek proposed:

“Not sure if this solution can be done on the city level, or it would need a national level solution... but I do think the government should establish an entity or an organisation that provide health services only for refugees” Tarek (Male)

Bridging the Healthcare Gap for Refugees on Benefits: Addressing the pivotal need for unhindered access to health services, participants advocated for the establishment of a dedicated service designed to facilitate barrier-free healthcare for refugees reliant on benefits. This initiative, as suggested by the refugees, aims to reduce obstacles faced by individuals on benefits, ensuring they receive the necessary medical attention and care. Although access to health services is the same for all refugees, some participants felt that refugees who had a good income were able to go to private doctors, a practice which was available to everyone in their country of origin. Yara agreed with the need for support:

“Yes, I agree with him. I think if not only for refugees; they should consider a service for those who are on benefits, to make sure they receive the needed care and medical treatment” Yara (Female)

7.7.3 Solutions prototyped by refugees for Health

A new health initiative was conceptualised and prototyped by refugees, aimed at delivering specialised health services to their community. This approach involves either the allocation of funds to NHS units specifically for refugee health services or the commissioning of new service providers dedicated to addressing the unique health needs of refugees.

1. Targeted Refugee Health Assistance Programme: In the discussions of the second FGDs, there was a consensus on the need for an innovative health service tailored for refugees (see Text Box 6), one that works in parallel to the mainstream National Health Service (NHS). This service is envisioned to streamline the medical care process for refugees by facilitating direct access to private healthcare providers and encouraging the uptake of private health insurance through various incentives. It also included the allocation of specific staff members to handle medical cases efficiently, whether through the NHS or private doctors. Furthermore, there was a suggestion to raise funding for specific units in the NHS to provide ad hoc medical treatment tailored to the needs of refugees.

Text Box 6: Proposal by Group 1- FGD 2

“Since arriving to the UK, we have been struggling to secure medical attention to problems that we already had or even new ones. Accessing health treatments via the publicly available service is putting us in a disadvantaged position which is affecting our integration into other domains, as a result we propose the following:

- *A new service should be provided by either the BCC or its partner service providers to allow refugees to access health outside mainstreamed services.*
- *Providing incentives to refugees to purchase private health insurance*
- *Allocating families with specific medical cases to a staff member that will work quickly on either having the case looked at by the NHS, or securing funding to guarantee the case will be looked at by private doctors*
- *Fund specific units in the NHS to provide ad hoc medical treatment that targets refugees and reduces waiting hours.*

Creating such a service will allow refugees to receive the much-needed medical attention especially for conditions already known and existing before coming to the UK. as it has a lot of benefits and positive impacts on other aspect of life.”

In response to concerns I raised about the existing pressures on the NHS and its capacity to serve the broader public, participants acknowledged these systemic challenges. However, they explained that refugees face intensified difficulties due to barriers in understanding and navigating the healthcare system in the UK. They cited examples from other countries where the voluntary sector receives funding to offer such specialised services to refugees and suggested that a similar model could be beneficially implemented in the UK. By establishing a dedicated service, they argued that not only would it ease some of the pressures on the NHS by diverting and managing cases that may otherwise add to the mainstream burden, but it would also provide refugees with culturally sensitive support that takes into consideration their specific circumstances, experiences, and needs. This could potentially lead to better health outcomes for refugees and contribute positively to their integration into UK society. (See also Chapter 8 where I discuss the feasibility of this solution with policymakers.)

7.8 Design thinking as a facilitator to collective knowledge amongst refugees

In this final section, I present the findings from the questionnaire administered before and after the FGDs. This step is an addition to the standard design thinking framework but aimed at examining how refugees' understanding of integration had evolved following their participation in the FGDs. For this section I use the questions asked to provide a comprehensive overview of the findings. For both pre and post FGD questionnaires I used the same questions, in order to measure the change in knowledge (See Appendix). This section answers research question 4.

Research Question: Can design thinking tools facilitate collective knowledge generation amongst refugees?

7.8.1 Understanding of Refugee Integration

One of the questions I am attempting to answer in my research is whether design thinking could help producing collective knowledge amongst refugees, so I started by asking them "What does the term refugee integration mean to you?". Before engaging

in the FGDs, participants' responses to the questionnaires reflected individualised perspectives on integration, while responses after FGDs demonstrated a more comprehensive and collective understanding of integration. Overall, the post-FGD responses appear to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive view of refugee integration, possibly influenced by the collaborative and reflective nature of the focus group discussions. However, it is worth mentioning that due to the small sample, I cannot positively say that design thinking has a direct role in the creation of change in refugees' understanding of integration discussed here or other changes discussed the following subsections.

c. Similarities

Both pre-FGD and post-FGD responses emphasised the importance of coexistence and mutual respect between refugees and the host community. Refugees also highlighted in both responses the need to adapt to their new environment, whether it's adapting to new laws, cultural norms, or language. Learning and gaining experiences in the host society are seen as integral components of integration. Responses in both sets also mentioned the importance of building connections, whether it's with the host community or with other cultures, and reflected a desire for social integration and engagement. Ahmad's response was typical:

“Integration is the ability to coexist and being stable in the new society, as well as being able to learn and gain experiences and have positive impact on the new society” Ahmad (Male)

d. Differences

Post-FGD responses included elements such as stability and the right to practice one's religion freely, which were not featured as prominently in the pre-FGD responses. This could be an indicator of the shift in their understanding of integration and its various dimensions, and provide an example of the knowledge exchange that happened during the FGDs.

“Integration is to be comfortable in the hosting country, to be stable, to not face racism as result of being Muslim, and to have the right to practice my religion freely”	“Integration is to be able to coexist in the hosting country, to be stable, to be able to speak the language and build connections with the host community”
Basma (Female) Pre and Post FGD	

Post-FGD responses mentioned the importance of intercultural dialogues, indicating a desire for meaningful exchanges and interactions between different cultural groups. Moreover, while both sets of responses mention access to education and language learning as components of integration, post-FGDs responses specifically highlight the ability to learn English as a fundamental aspect of integration which reflects the knowledge generated collectively in the FGDs.

7.8.2 Integration Challenges

When asking about challenges faced while integrating into British society, I also noticed a slight shift in the post-FGD responses towards a more collective perspective on these challenges. Overall, both sets of responses share common themes such as language, employment, and accommodation as major challenges; however, the pre-FGD responses tend to emphasise a broader range of challenges, including legal and administrative procedures, social integration, and education, which could indicate that the FGDs may have helped participants gain a deeper understanding of their challenges and potentially refine their perspectives.

a. Similarities

Both the pre-FGD and post-FGD responses emphasise language as a significant and persistent challenge, explaining that language proficiency is essential for various aspects of integration, including securing employment, accessing education, and building connections within the host community. They also highlight the issue of employment as a challenge in both pre-FGD and post-FGD responses, as well as challenges related to finding suitable accommodation, particularly accommodation that meets specific health needs. Samir expressed his feelings of insecurity:

“Language is the main challenge that we face as it is the foundation for integration. The pressure to secure a job without speaking the language is making me feel uncomfortable” Samir (Male)

While mentioned to a lesser extent in the post-FGD responses, cultural adaptation is also a common theme in both sets of responses, where there was an acknowledgment of the need to adapt to new societal norms, behaviours, and customs.

e. Differences

In the pre-FGD responses, dealing with legal and administrative procedures, including understanding new laws and regulations, is explicitly mentioned as a challenge. This theme is not as prominent in the post-FGD responses, which might be related to the lack of information theme which came out in many of the integration domains during the FGDs. This might suggest that design thinking and discussions during FGDs have helped refugees to clarify some elements that were hindering their integration at the individual level and start to look at the challenges at community level. Moreover, pre-FGD responses touched on the challenges of social integration, including interactions with teachers, students, and the host community. In contrast, the post-FGD responses focused more on language as the primary barrier to making new connections and building relationships within the host community, and expressed difficulties in adapting to new teaching and learning methods.

7.8.3 Key Facilitators of Integration

When comparing the pre-FGD responses with the post-FGD responses regarding the most important factors for facilitating integration among refugees, several key points and shifts can be observed. These shifts indicate that the FGDs may have contributed to a deeper understanding of certain aspects of integration, such as culture awareness, digital skills, safety, and the potential role of leisure activities. This reflects the evolving perspectives and priorities of refugees as they engaged in discussions and knowledge-sharing during the FGDs. Responses in all choices increased in the post-FGD responses; particularly, leisure increased by 80%, having rights and responsibilities increased by 60%, and building social networks increased by 60% (See Figure 7.1). These changes in emphasis indicate a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of integration among the refugee participants.

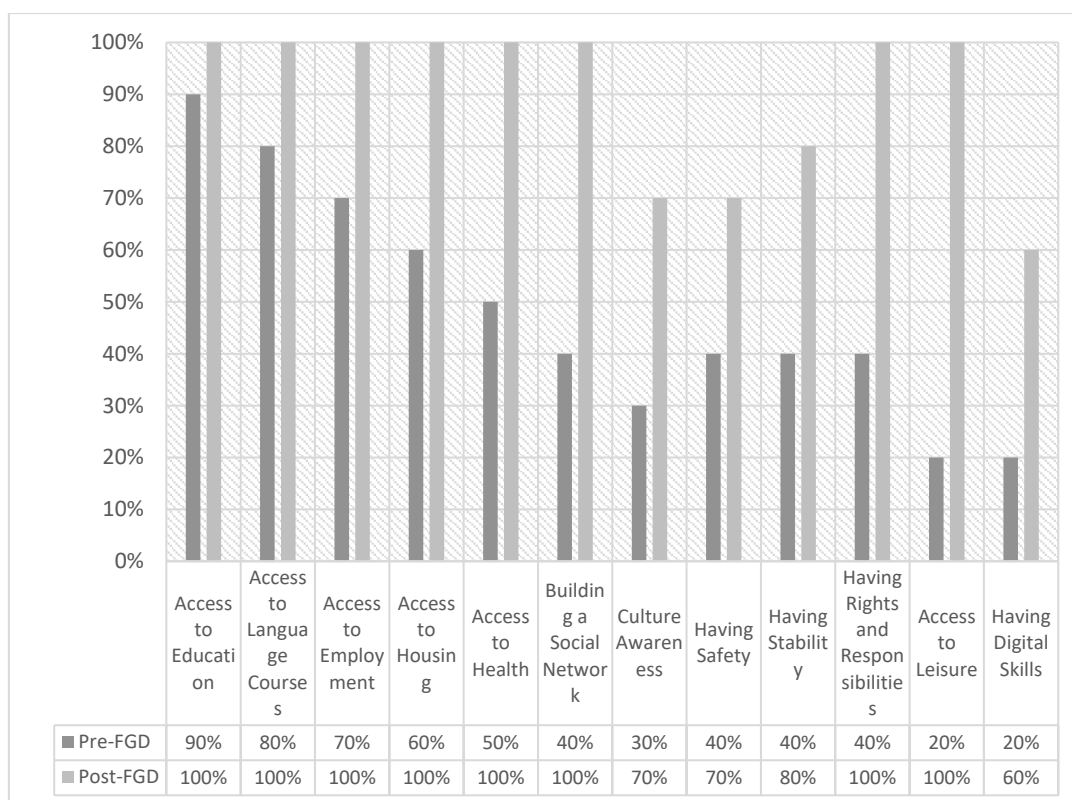


Figure 7.1: Comparison between pre-FGD and post-FGD responses regarding Integration facilitators (Author)

7.8.4 Stakeholders' Involvement

The FGDs had influenced refugees' understanding of who should be involved in planning refugees' integration. Figure 7.6 below demonstrates an increase in the emphasis on government and voluntary sector involvement in integration planning, a slight increase in the emphasis on host community involvement, and an unchanged emphasis on refugee involvement. The shift in response also indicates a change in the perspective on stakeholder involvement, emphasising inclusivity.

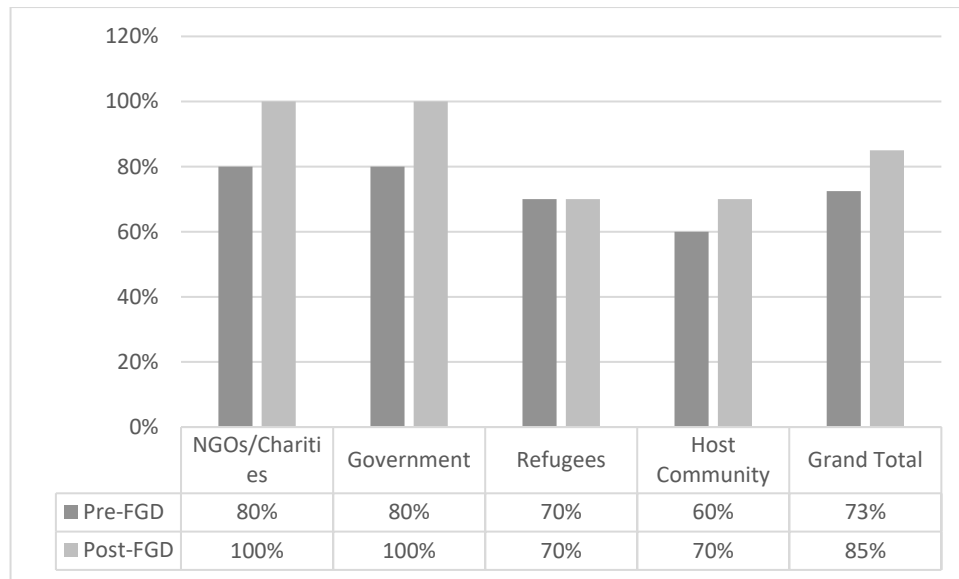


Figure 7.2: Comparison between pre-FGD and post-FGD responses to the question of who should be involved in refugee integration planning- 12 respondents (Author)

The most notable change is the increase in the emphasis on government's and NGOs/Charities' involvement, from 80% in pre-FGD responses to 100% in post-FGD responses, which indicates that participants in the FGDs recognised the pivotal role they both play in refugee integration planning. The role of the host community increased slightly to 70% after the FGDs, which reflects some of the solutions suggested by refugees that include befriending a British family. The only view that remained the same after the FGDs is refugees' involvement in the planning (70%), which reflects how refugees feel about being involved in the decision-making processes that directly impact their lives. This is also reflected in the following section.

7.8.5 Self-Awareness of Needs

The analysis of the pre-FGD responses to the question, "Do you feel that you know better your needs as a refugee and what can facilitate your integration in the UK?" reveals a strong sense of self-awareness and a clear perception of the challenges and requirements they face as refugees seeking integration in the UK. In the pre-FGDs, all participants responded with "yes". This unanimity not only reflects how confident they are in providing practical solutions to challenges faced when integrating, but also could imply that the participants had a shared understanding of their needs and potential facilitators for integration. However, it's worth noting that three respondents in the post-FGD questionnaire answered "no." This could be due to various reasons, such as

individual differences in the perception of the FGDs' effectiveness, the specific topics discussed during the FGDs, or personal experiences that may not have been fully addressed in the FGDs. It might also be as a result of their increased understanding of the actual integration process and how it may involve more complex and nuanced challenges that can only be fully addressed through collaborative efforts and support from various stakeholders, as highlighted in other parts of the study.

7.8.6 Shared Knowledge and Perspectives

When asked “Do you feel that you share the same knowledge or view on integration with other refugees?” in the pre-FGD questionnaires, refugees tended to think that they have individual knowledge or view on integration (64% said no). However, following the FGDs, responses shifted to reflect a more favourable view of shared knowledge and perspectives among refugees (72% said yes). This suggests that design thinking and FGDs may have led to some participants feeling more aligned in their views on integration, which reflects the importance of ongoing dialogue and communication among refugees and information-sharing which can contribute to better mutual understanding.

7.8.7 Reflections on the FGD Experience

In the post-FGD questionnaire I added the following question "What is the most important thing that you learned today? What information will be the most useful to you as a refugee?". This additional question allowed participants to reflect on the FGD and design thinking experience, highlighting the value of collective learning, community support, and newfound knowledge. Participants' responses showed some evolved understanding of how to approach challenges faced when integrating, how to identify and implement solutions for them, and how design thinking broadened their perspectives and enhanced their confidence in navigating unfamiliar areas. Participants also highlighted the necessity of seeking assistance from organisations and individuals dedicated to supporting refugees and the importance of feeling empowered to voice their opinions, emphasising the role of personal agency in their journey. The discussions also shed light on the importance of communal knowledge-sharing and how discussing challenges with peers can pave the way for more innovative and collective problem-solving approaches.

In summary, the analysis of the pre-post questionnaire data uncovers a shift in the refugees' understanding of integration towards a more collective perspective after participating in the FGDs. Their responses evolved from individualised and fragmented views to a more comprehensive understanding of integration challenges, facilitators, and the importance of community and shared knowledge.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of data collected during the focus group discussions that I organised with refugees in Birmingham, following a design thinking framework and incorporating creative interactive tools. Each activity and research tool has generated data that not only informs other activities but also answers a specific research question. Mainly the FGDs helped address integration challenges and opportunities and allowed me to test how design thinking could be implemented in refugee integration.

I have learned that refugees understand integration as a reciprocal process involving the development of mutual respect between themselves and the host community, alongside an enhanced awareness of cultural distinctions. This understanding encompasses the necessity for adaptation to new circumstances while preserving one's identity and cultural traditions. Refugees also associate successful integration with the ability to make a meaningful contribution to society, achievable through language acquisition, specifically English, and gaining employment opportunities.

The findings identify some of main gaps in current refugee integration services. While all of the refugees were happy with the social networking services provided to them, they were unsatisfied with the housing services and felt that there were plenty of gaps that needed to be addressed. On the other hand, refugees had positive experiences when interacting with services provided in relation to other areas (education, employment, and health) and highlighted some gaps that can be addressed to enhance these services.

In the following discussion chapter, I will present the findings from the two rounds of in-depth interviews with policymakers which helped test ideas generated by refugees, and assess the role that design thinking can play in bringing refugees' knowledge to the policymaking level.

CHAPTER 8: TESTING SOLUTIONS PROPOSED WITH POLICYMAKERS

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed findings from FGDs with refugees which were centred around the first four phases of design thinking that helped to identify the gaps in current refugee integration services provided for VPRS refugees in Birmingham and generate solutions. While the previous chapter highlighted the insights gathered from the earlier four stages (Empathise, Define, Ideate, and Prototype) by actively engaging refugees through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), this chapter continues to explore these ideas but with a special focus on the 'Test' phase of design thinking through analysis of data collected from two rounds of interviews with policymakers. In the Test stage of design thinking, I conducted two rounds of interviews with 12 policymakers; to discuss the knowledge generated by refugees in the first round and after six months to explore whether they have used any of the refugees' ideas in the second round. The objective was to assess the feasibility of incorporating innovative solutions and knowledge generated by refugees into policy related to refugee integration in Birmingham. I utilised semi-structured interviews for data collection and thematic analysis for exploring the findings (see Chapter 6). The chapter responds to research question 5.

Research Question: *How can knowledge collated using a design thinking approach help policymakers to design and implement new refugee integration interventions?*

I start the chapter with analysis of data from the first round of interviews, which aimed at bridging the gap in perspectives between refugees and policymakers. I discuss policymakers' views on refugee integration, the importance of stakeholder involvement, and assessing whether the ideas from refugees had added to their knowledge and the way they plan future integration services. I then move to the second round of interviews, analysing shifts in policymakers' perspectives, assessing whether they have implemented any of the refugee-suggested solutions, and evaluating the overarching role of design thinking in the dynamic landscape of refugee integration.

8.2 Policymakers' reflection on refugee integration

In the first part of the first-round interviews, I focused on understanding policymakers' perceptions of refugee integration and integrated communities. I also examined their views on who should be involved in planning refugee integration services

8.2.1 Understanding of refugee integration

Policymaker Participants conceptualised refugee integration as a dynamic, multidimensional, and reciprocal process—one that involves both the agency of refugees and the responsibility of the host society. This framing closely mirrors the Home Office Indicators of Integration (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019), which highlight the interaction between individual markers (e.g., employment, education) and enabling means (e.g., safety, rights, and social connections).

A. Integration as a Reciprocal and Cooperative Process

Several participants described integration as a cooperative effort, rather than a one-sided expectation placed on refugee. A West Midlands policy officer highlighted that integration is a two-way dynamic, requiring both individual agency and systemic support to foster a sense of belonging and active participation in society:

“it's a cooperative process, I'd say, in one part where a person has the agency to engage with society or the environment, but also where that environment in turn, is supportive of their individual needs. So, I see that where those needs are addressed and supported, it encourages the desire to then engage and be in as part of a wider society” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP.

The emphasis on integration as a cooperative process is in alignment with the larger literature on refugee integration. Scholars have argued that integration should be inclusive, and take into account both the needs of refugees and the ability of the host community to accept and assist newcomers (Phillimore, 2020; Korac, 2003; Ager and Strang, 2008).

B. Belonging and Positive Cohesion

Another dominant theme among policymakers was the emphasis on social cohesion and the psychological dimensions of integration. Policymakers participants linked integration to the positive and cohesive establishment of a newly arrived community

within a host community and building refugees' confidence to fully participate in the new society. A policy officer from BCC emphasised this view of integration:

"It is the process through which a newly arrived community establishes itself within the host community. It's not just about establishment; it's about doing so positively and cohesively, where they become an integral part of the community fabric" Policy officer-BCC

Cheung and Phillimore (2014) also refer to building confidence and sense of belonging as facilitators for refugees' participation in the new society. Putnam (2000) notes that these components are necessary for the establishment of social capital, which is necessary for the cohesiveness and well-being of society.

A. Integration as Long-Term Inclusion and Future Orientation

Policymaker participants also acknowledged the significance of fostering a sense of belonging and future aspirations among refugees as a foundation for integration. Their perspective emphasises the shift from perceiving integration as a mere transitional phase to a long-term, sustainable process of inclusion and participation. A sense of belonging is crucial for the psychological well-being of refugees and their socio-economic stability and contribution to their new communities. Ndofor-Tah et al. (2019) identify "social connections" and "safety and stability" as among the key indicators of integration. These elements are essential for refugees to feel part of their new communities and to start planning their futures within them. Furthermore, Phillimore (2012) emphasises the role of local integration policies in providing a welcoming environment that fosters a sense of belonging and recognition of identity by all stakeholders, including refugees and local people. Similarly, an officer working in housing services for VPRS refugees highlighted that integration is about refugees developing a sense of belonging to the host country and the ability to start envisioning a future in it:

"It is how you feel about where you are and your future. Feeling fully integrated into the community makes future planning much easier. It's not just a temporary fix; it should feel like a lifelong opportunity or experience" Operational officer- Spring Housing.

C. Inclusive Societies and Mutual Respect

Policymaker participants perceived an integrated society as one that is inclusive, accepting, communicative, and mutually respectful. For them, integration can only be

achieved once everyone, regardless of background, feels valued, understood, and included in wider society. Such an inclusive society can be reached by fostering shared environments and community collaboration. These characteristics echo debates that integration is a dynamic and two-way process involving both the adaptation of immigrants and the willingness of the host society to incorporate diverse cultural, religious, and social practices into its fabric (Ager and Strang, 2008; Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). A policy officer described an integrated society as a cohesive community where every individual, irrespective of their background, feels valued, understood, and actively included in wider societal processes. They explained that policies should go beyond mere coexistence and promote an environment of shared values:

“An integrated society is one where people can collectively engage in a common environment or social structure. It's not about isolated pockets but rather a shared environment that meets the needs of everyone within it” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP

An officer working on integration services also agreed with the need for fostering a welcoming society that put the accountability for integration on both refugees and host community:

“An integrated society shouldn't place the entire responsibility of integration on refugees. It's not solely about refugees adapting to the UK's existing practices, but it's also about the UK recognising and respecting the different cultural, religious, and social practices refugees bring” Operational Officer- Refugee Action

D. Bridging Gaps and Encouraging Refugee Participation

Policymakers Participants emphasised the importance of enabling refugees to contribute to their communities. A policy officer at BCC highlighted the need to give refugees opportunities to contribute to their communities, reflecting the broader discourse on social capital and its importance for integration. They explained the need to bridge the gap between refugees and host communities in order to facilitate integration:

“It's about giving refugees the opportunity to contribute and be part of the communities they live in. Bridging that gap, that exists when they first arrive, is pivotal to achieving genuine integration” Policy officer- BCC

This idea resonates with Putnam's (2000) emphasis on the development of social capital and the idea that participation leads to inclusion. It also supports the notion that integration is a process of mutual accommodation, requiring platforms for interaction and shared responsibility.

E. Communication, Understanding, and Rights

Policymaker participants explained that communication is vital to enable coexistence. It's not just about language but also about understanding diversity within the society. Effective communication goes beyond language acquisition and involves understanding and navigating the social and cultural landscapes of the host society, which is pivotal for achieving a sense of belonging and active participation in society (Morrice et al., 2021). The role of education, community engagement, and the provision of platforms for refugees to express their opinions and make decisions were also identified by participants as key elements in fostering a sense of belonging and full citizenship (Phillimore, 2012). Participants also mentioned the need to give a voice to refugees to enable them to take an active role in the society; they emphasised the significance of participatory rights and citizenship in integration processes (Ager and Strang, 2008; Ndofor-Tah, et al., 2019). Effective communication, beyond language, was repeatedly identified as essential. One operational officer explained:

“Integration involves being able to communicate effectively, not just in terms of language but also in understanding how things work. Schools play a significant role in early integration, and having friends and understanding the community helps” Operational Officer- Spring Housing

Participants also stressed that refugees must be empowered to take part in decision-making processes. As one officer argued:

“It's about giving them a voice, choice, and full citizenship rights. They should have the ability to make decisions and be heard in society” Operational Officer- Spring Housing

F. Comprehensive Services and Building Confidence

Finally, policymaker participants also explained that access to support services is necessary to build refugees' self-sufficiency, enabling them to overcome barriers to integration such as isolation, lack of information, and understanding of the host society's systems and expectations. An officer working in an employment service for

VPRS refugees argued that confidence comes once refugees can access all the support they need:

“Integration, in my view, involves providing a comprehensive service that addresses various components. For many refugees we work with, who have gone through the asylum process, key aspects include tackling isolation, promoting independent living, and helping individuals understand and achieve their potential. It's about community inclusion as well” Operational officer- ACH

In summary, the collective insights from policymakers, working directly with VPRS refugees, underscore the multidimensional and mutual nature of refugee integration, highlighting the imperative of an approach that combines the agency of refugees with systemic support from the host society. The discussion illuminates the significance of creating an enabling environment that not only supports refugees' active participation in areas such as employment, housing, education, and health but also fosters social connections, safety, stability, and a profound sense of belonging. This environment is pivotal for refugees to confidently contribute to and become integral parts of their new communities, thereby enhancing their social capital. By bridging the gap between refugees and host societies, and providing comprehensive support services, respondents believed that policymakers and practitioners can lay the foundation for a more integrated, cohesive, and resilient society.

8.2.2 Stakeholders' involvement in planning refugee integration

When asked who should be involved in refugee integration, policymaker respondents noted that effective refugee integration interventions and policies require involvement from multiple stakeholders. They clarified that active participation by refugees, the host community, local government, non-profit organisations, statutory bodies, and academia contributes to the development of comprehensive, effective, and evidence-based policies. They emphasised the multidirectional nature of refugee integration, pointing out the critical importance of a collaborative and multi-stakeholder approach for effective policy and service implementation. This perspective is consistent with existing frameworks that advocate for the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders to ensure policies are comprehensive, evidence-based, and responsive to the dynamic nature of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008; Ndofo-Tah et al., 2019).

A. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration as Essential for Integration

Policymaker participants stressed that collaboration, continuous feedback mechanisms, and adapting to changing dynamics are essential for the successful integration of refugees. They pointed to the need for flexible and responsive integration policies that can accommodate the evolving needs and circumstances of refugees and host communities alike. A regional lead in ESOL learning highlighted the importance of collaboration between stakeholders at various levels, ensuring policies are versatile and address different aspects of refugee integration in order to break out of siloed operations and focusing on evidence-based policy development:

“In the West Midlands, for instance, there's a priority working group I convene specifically for local authority offices. It allows them to discuss cases openly without any external influences. While this is beneficial, it isn't consistent. The local authority might engage with their providers, who in turn engage with refugees. The feedback then trickles into our meetings. However, it's not a formalised process, and I admit that isn't ideal for policy development. While the interests of refugees may be considered, it's not guaranteed that they will be properly represented” ESOL lead policy officer- West Midlands SMP

B. The “Local Turn” in Integration Policy

Respondents highlighted that integration usually happens at the local level, explaining that it is important to give some space to the local authorities where actual service delivery and integration implementation happens. The notion of the “local turn” in integration policy, as identified by the participants, reflects a growing recognition of the significance of local authorities and communities in integration processes (Scholten et al., 2017). Scholars argue that while national policies provide the overarching framework for integration, it is at the local level that policies are operationalised and their impacts most directly felt (Losi and Strang, 2008b; Crisp, 2004). This underscores the importance of empowering local actors and ensuring their active involvement in policy design and implementation, facilitating a more tailored approach to meet specific local needs and opportunities (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017; Scholten and Penninx, 2016). As a policy officer pointed out:

“While we don't create policies – that's the government's role – when planning services for local delivery, it's essential to involve both stakeholders responsible for service delivery and the refugees who will access these services” Policy officer- BCC

C. The Voluntary Sector Role

Respondents stressed the fundamental role that the voluntary sector plays in facilitating integration, as they have direct engagement with refugees and provide complementary support to the main integration services provided by statutory bodies including health, education, employment, and their quick emergency response, such as setting up temporary accommodation. The multilevel governance setting in the UK and the shift to mainstream integration services has devolved responsibility for integration to the local authorities (Galandini et al., 2019; Scholten, 2016). Consequently, local authorities often collaborate with the voluntary sector for its responsiveness and capacity to offer targeted refugee integration interventions, which usually complement the more structured services provided by statutory bodies (Calò et al., 2022). Voluntary sector organisations' direct engagement with refugees positions them well to advocate for refugees' needs and relay their experiences to broader integration stakeholders, ensuring that services are responsive and sensitive to refugees' diverse backgrounds and needs. As one policy officer explained:

“The voluntary sector is another crucial stakeholder. While they relay the experiences of refugees, they also have ingrained engagement with them. They support a broad range of refugees from various backgrounds, from Syrians to Afghans. This sector often provides responsive interventions when temporary accommodations are set up, drawing on their experience in such scenarios” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP

D. The Case for Refugee Involvement in Policy Development

Participants also acknowledged the need to shift from the top-down approach of policymaking to a more bottom-up approach that would allow for refugee involvement in integration planning. They said that it was becoming clear there is need to hear refugees' voices by asking them to feed back on the current services and involving them in the design and planning of these services. They claimed that involving refugees in policy design not only leverages their unique insights and experiences but also promotes empowerment and ensures that policies are more aligned with the needs and priorities of refugees:

“First and foremost, refugees should be involved in integration policy development. They possess a unique perspective on how well support is functioning. Including them can help everyone understand their priorities moving forward. However, this isn't always achieved. Policies might sometimes develop in ways that refugees aren't always consulted, even if not intentionally” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP

E. Changing Refugee Profiles and the Need for Policy Adaptability

Additionally, policymaker participants recognised the changing demographics and needs of refugees and emphasised the necessity for policies to adapt accordingly, stressing the dynamic nature of migration and the importance of flexibility and responsiveness in policy frameworks (OECD, 2020). They called for strategic conversations and information sharing among key partners, emphasising the need to ensure collaboration and foster a holistic, integrated approach to refugee integration that is informed by a deep understanding of changing trends and needs. As one housing officer explained:

“The term ‘refugee’ has evolved over the years. Ten years ago, many refugees coming to the UK were from countries with high unemployment rates, often from farming backgrounds. Now, we’re seeing refugees with professional backgrounds. Our policies should align with this shift. Policymakers need to recognise that the world has changed, and the needs of refugees today are different from what they were 10 years ago.... Key partners should have strategic conversations, not just at the top level. We should focus on sharing information and avoiding working in silos” Operational officer- Spring Housing

Due to the dynamic nature of migration, policymaking frameworks must be both implicitly flexible and able to adjust to new facts and evolving conditions of migrants and their needs. Such adaptability goes beyond simply adjusting already-provided services; it may also entail rethinking strategies to respond to the new demographics of migrants and refugees (OECD, 2020). For instance, integration policies that were created primarily with an emphasis on language learning and early access to employment may need to change to accommodate the acceptance of foreign credentials, assistance with additional professional training, and provision of mental health services that deal with the complex traumas connected to forced migration from areas devastated by conflict.

In conclusion, stakeholders acknowledged that refugee integration is a shared responsibility. They reflected on the multidirectional nature of integration as a result of devolving its responsibility to the local level and mainstreaming its services. Accordingly, successful integration of refugees demands a comprehensive, collaborative, and adaptive approach that values the contributions of all stakeholders, empowers local communities, includes refugees in decision-making processes, and

remains flexible in the face of changing circumstances of migration flows. Such an approach not only enhances the effectiveness of integration policies but also contributes to the creation of more cohesive, resilient, and inclusive societies.

8.2.3 Pros and Cons of Current Practices in Refugee Integration

During the policymaker interviews we discussed examples of good practice and challenges faced in planning refugee integration. Policymakers reflected on practices available in other areas within the West Midlands and discussed opportunities for future refugee integration planning.

A. Examples of good practice in refugee integration

Participants highlighted some existing good practices which included providing specialised integration programmes, notably the Specialist Training and Employment Programme (STEP) facilitated by organisations like World Jewish Relief, targeting resettled Ukrainians. They explained that this initiative has been instrumental in aiding a considerable number of refugees to secure employment opportunities within the UK, particularly in the West Midlands area. The STEP program's strategy of arranging placement opportunities in collaboration with employers, where trial placements frequently transition into permanent employment, exemplifies a successful model of integration through employment. As one policy officer explained:

“They have significantly assisted, possibly hundreds or even thousands of refugees, in securing employment after their arrival in the UK, including the West Midlands region. Their model involves providing placement opportunities for refugees in participating organisations. For example, they have agreements with companies like Marks and Spencer's, where they offer trial placements that often lead to full-time employment.” Policy Officer- West Midlands- SMP

Furthermore, local council initiatives, such as Coventry Council's comprehensive range of services, including the "Welcome to Coventry" course, were said to exemplify localised efforts to ease integration processes for refugees. This 10-week programme, designed to provide a nuanced introduction to life in the UK, encompasses basic English lessons and essential information about local services, representing a tailored approach to integration.

“This bespoke programme is important because it helps newcomers get used to their new place instead of suddenly having to sign up kids

for school, look for jobs, and other things, they get a basic introduction to the city. The programme teaches them about life in the UK and also gives basic English lessons, helping refugees when they first arrive”
ESOL lead policy officer- West Midlands SMP

Cultural and community engagement programs were identified for their role in promoting community bonding and cultural understanding. A policymaker gave an example of such initiatives, the "In Her Shoes" program, which is run by BCC and other NGOs, and involves women from both refugee and host communities in singing and dancing activities to foster cultural exchange. They also offer regular community day events to provide a platform for direct feedbacks about integration services, facilitating the development of new integration programmes. Participants also gave some good examples of effective partnership with organisations like the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Refugee Action, where refugees are offered placements at work. Such partnerships can contribute to a holistic support system for refugees, emphasising the value of social integration alongside economic and structural integration.

B. Challenges in the current refugee integration practices

While such good practices exist, policymaker participants also discussed some of the challenges they face when planning refugee integration. Funding limitations and the decreasing amount allocated to services over the years was a key concern. This is coupled with the challenge of managing expectations as many refugees, especially those with professional backgrounds, expect a rapid return to their former fields and to live in the high-quality accommodation they had in their country of origin. Funding constraints and the diminishing allocations for certain services, compounded by the housing challenges across the UK and especially in areas like Birmingham, where the demand for social housing far exceeds the supply, have made integration challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, as some landlords have subsequently decided to sell their properties. Stakeholders stressed the need for adaptive housing strategies:

“Initially, we settled for houses we wouldn't now, requiring considerable work before housing people in them. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many landlords have been selling their properties, which affects stability in the private rental market. Most of these challenges are unique to the private rented sector and a result of the current housing situation in Birmingham, and a significant part of our

work is balancing them out to support families” Operational officer-Spring Housing

The inconsistency in regional housing markets’ practices across the West Midlands further complicates integration processes, with refugees’ experiences varying significantly across different locales. Practice in regions like Liverpool, Birmingham, and East Anglia might differ, so managing expectations of refugees becomes challenging, because refugees often compare their experiences with their peers elsewhere. This disparity underscores the importance of a more standardised collaboration of refugee integration efforts across regions to manage expectations effectively.

C. Potential opportunities in refugee integration planning

Opportunities for improvement were identified in leveraging the skills and talents of refugees, expanding educational provisions, enhancing the quality and consistency of pre-arrival information, and establishing a consistent refugee voice in integration activities. These areas offer potential pathways to address the current challenges and also to harness refugees’ contributions towards community improvement.

Policymaker participants spoke about the possibilities of leveraging refugees’ skills, as many of them have valuable skills and talents, and explained that with tailored support and programmes, their potential can benefit the community. Policymakers also explained that there is a need to expand educational provisions where initiatives can be designed to address needs, such as family learning sessions or ESOL sessions tailored for mothers and babies. Moreover, they highlighted that improving the quality and consistency of pre-arrival information about life in the UK can help in setting realistic expectations. They also proposed that a peer guidance system, where a settled refugee guides a prospective refugee, could help in setting realistic expectations. One respondent stated that consulting refugees in planning integration activities was essential because it ensures their accurate and effective representation:

“What does consultation look like? It’s about making genuine promises and fulfilling them. It’s about ensuring the refugee voice is represented accurately and effectively” Policy Officer- BCC

In conclusion, while there are commendable practices in place for refugee integration, the persistence of challenges related to availability of funding and housing, and the

management of expectations, necessitate a collaborative approach to refugee integration. Leveraging existing opportunities and addressing the identified gaps can significantly enhance integration processes, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees.

8.3 Policymakers' Insights on Refugee-Generated Knowledge and Solutions

In the second half of discussion with policymakers in the first-round interviews, I focused on testing whether design thinking helped generate new knowledge and discussing the viability of the solutions proposed by refugees. We also examined whether they would consider, or were able, to apply design thinking and coproduction activities in the planning of future policies.

8.3.1 Reflections on knowledge generated by refugees

Policymaker participants acknowledged that although most of the knowledge was already known to them, the knowledge generated offered new insight on the practicalities of refugee integration and brought new perspectives on some of the challenges.

A regional lead policymaker articulated how insights gained from refugees reshaped his conception of integration. The knowledge shared with him shifted his perspective from viewing integration primarily as achieving financial independence and effective societal communication to recognising the importance of tangible success and progress in critical areas such as education and employment.

“I think what I’m seeing is a different lens on the same topic. The specifics they mentioned, like education, employment, and being successful in those areas and the emphasis on “success” might be the fresh perspective for me. Previously, I perceived integration as achieving a level of financial independence and the ability to communicate effectively in society. But the idea of wanting more than just to exist, of wanting to feel progress and success, isn’t always taken into account when we talk about integration” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP

Participants said that the findings shared with them offered new depth and nuance about known challenges. This acknowledgment by participants shows how the design thinking approach has the potential to deepen policymakers' comprehension of known

gaps in refugee integration processes, prompting a re-evaluation and adaptation of existing strategies to address these issues more effectively (Brown, 2008; Liedtka, 2015). As one ESOL policy officer commented:

"It's evident that these are the perceptions of the refugees. While some of these concerns are not entirely new to me, they reinforce the challenges faced by many students, especially in the realms of ESOL and employability." ESOL lead policy officer- West Midlands SMP

Participants also highlighted how findings provided fresh perspectives on known challenges, such as language acquisition preferences and employment expectations. For instance, the revelation that some refugees prefer practical language engagement with the host community over segregated learning environments with fellow nationals indicates a nuanced understanding of integration needs that goes beyond basic language acquisition. A BCC officer explained this was new information:

"We'd been told they wanted to learn with fellow Syrians. But now, [based on knowledge generated] some don't want that. They want practical English. That aspect of wanting to practice with the host community was new for me" Policy officer- BCC

Meanwhile an officer with Refugee Action had heard similar things in the past:

"The suggestions around employment and business English are familiar and echo my beliefs. The housing project resonates with the high expectations we often encounter from refugees" Operational officer- Refugee Action

These insights highlight the importance of including refugees in the conversation about their own integration and the need to bridging the gap between the lived experiences of refugees and the policy frameworks designed to support them.

8.3.2 Reflections on solutions proposed by refugees (Test stage of DT)

As part of the design thinking methodology utilised, I discussed solutions proposed by refugees with policymakers to assess its feasibility. These proposals met with interest from policymakers and stakeholders, who recognised the value of incorporating refugees' first-hand experiences and insights into the development of future integration services. However, alongside the acknowledgment of these proposed solutions, there were considerations regarding their feasibility, potential challenges, and the broader implications for community cohesion and policy implementation. Table 8.1 provides a

summary of the feedback and considerations discussed by policymaker participants regarding each proposed solution. It shows the constructive dialogue between refugees and policymakers, aiming to identify sustainable and effective integration strategies while navigating the complexities of practical implementation and societal impact. This engagement underscores the need for a collaborative approach in refining and realising these solutions, ensuring they are both impactful and feasible within the current socio-political and economic landscape.

Solution Proposed	Feedback and Considerations	Potential Challenges	Policymakers Involved
Practical Language and Employment Programme	Highly valued for its practical approach to solving real-world problems.	Requires national coordination; language barriers.	Policy Officer-BCC, Operational Officer-ACH
Bespoke English Courses for the Elderly	Recognised as important for age-specific learning needs.	Feasibility of implementation; resource allocation.	ESOL Lead Policy Officer-West Midlands SMP
Befriending scheme with host community	Seen as innovative for combining social integration with language learning.	Replicability in other regions; funding.	Policy Officer-BCC
Employment Service and Partnership with Employers	Acknowledged need but highlighted scale and coordination challenges.	Scope of professions covered; national policy changes required.	Operational Officer-ACH, Policy Officer-West Midlands SMP
Specific Medical Services for Refugees through NHS	Valued for the potential to tailor healthcare but concerned about public reception.	Funding, public perception, integration into mainstream services.	Policy Officer-West Midlands SMP, Policy Officer-BCC
New Housing Service including educational workshops on navigating the UK housing system	Supported for managing expectations and quality housing options; emphasises teaching skills like DIY and understanding the private rental market.	Political and financial feasibility.	Operational Officer-Spring Housing
Sustainable Long-Term Accommodation Service	Consider utilising private rentals and renovating Council-owned accommodation for refugees. Highlights the importance of financial planning and potential impacts on scheme sustainability.	Financial viability of renovating Council accommodation; managing expectations; potential negative impact on community cohesion if social housing is prioritised for refugees.	Policy Officer-West Midlands SMP

Table 8.1: Policymakers' feedback on solutions proposed by refugees

A. English Language and Employment Solutions: Welcomed Ideas, Implementation Concerns

The discussion with policymaker participants revealed an interest in the solutions proposed by refugees, particularly concerning English language acquisition. The enthusiasm for practical learning methods, such as traineeship schemes, bespoke courses for the elderly, and befriending schemes aimed at fostering conversational

English skills, were applauded for their potential in taking effective approaches to language learning within the refugee integration context. A policy officer from BCC expressed admiration for the practicality of learning English through traineeship schemes, highlighting the value of solving real problems through innovative solutions:

“I love the idea of learning English by practice through a traineeship scheme, for me the part I love about my job is to try to find solutions to real problems. And for me this is something that we can work on”
Policy officer-BCC

Similarly, an ESOL lead policy officer from West Midlands SMP noted the significance of creating bespoke English courses for the elderly and praised its recognition of the importance of age-specific learning interventions:

“The one thing that I thought is interesting, is their suggestion about English courses for the elderly, they wanted a bespoke course. And it is interesting how they sort of focused on that, and it is an interesting project, and it should be feasible to implement” ESOL lead policy officer- West Midlands SMP

Another policy officer from BCC found inspiration in the idea of a befriending scheme paired with conversational English, suggesting the potential for a buddy system that could replicate similar initiatives existing in different regions, such as a scheme previously run nationally called “Time Together”:

“One of the suggestions that I really liked is the befriending scheme with the host community, and it kind of gave me fruit for thoughts on how to look at some sort of buddy scheme teamed with conversational English, because I know these schemes happen in other part of the country” Policy officer-BCC

Despite the enthusiasm for these proposals, concerns were raised about their feasibility, particularly regarding the need for national-level changes. For instance, a policy officer in West Midlands SMP highlighted the complexities of integrating refugees into the labour market, and that implementing such wide-reaching employment services that cater to various professional backgrounds would require national and regional coordination that could not be easily achieved in the absence of a national UK framework:

“When it comes to the new employment service, I think the partnership with employers is pivotal. There's a clear need for such an initiative... However, when providing such an employment service you would

need a vast scope to cater to various professionals, such as engineers, accountants, and lawyers. A project at this scale would require regional or national coordination, however the language requirement could be a limiting factor” Policy Officer- West Midlands SMP

An operational officer echoed the need for national policy changes, explaining the limitation of voluntary organisations' and local authorities' roles in creating such a large-scale programme without support at national level to avoid replication and facilitate collaboration:

“We've discussed some of these ideas and some sound very interesting. However, it would require collaboration between national and local governments. We're a subcontractor to the local authority, so it would need national policy changes. Collaboration is key to making these ideas work. For example, working with employers to provide training or internships for refugees is a great idea. But it needs policy changes and better communication among partners to avoid clashes and help individuals transition to employment smoothly” Operational officer- ACH

B. Health Service Solutions: Sensitivity, Feasibility, and Funding Concerns

Discussions with policymakers on health services identified the potential challenges of providing specific medical services for refugees through the NHS, with concerns about public perceptions and the practicality of implementing tailored services within the existing healthcare framework. A policy officer explained that there is a need to find the balance between specialised services for vulnerable populations and the integration of such services into mainstream healthcare provision. He clarified that with the current push in the media to blame everything on migrants, such specialised services would worsen the situation even further:

“While funding specific units for the NHS to provide medical treatment, specifically to refugees would go down to where I can imagine publicly, very badly. I do see a role though for tailored services within the scope of mainstream, not private. But what I would say is that but with Coventry for example, they have a GP surgery that actually specialises in supporting individual refugees and individuals from migrant backgrounds, but they're special because Coventry has quite a large migrant community” Policy Officer- West Midlands SMP

At local authority level, concerns regarding funding were raised. A BCC policy officer explained that funds allocated to local councils do not include healthcare, hinting that discussions regarding specialised units within the NHS might be challenging:

“Regarding ad hoc health services, our funding isn’t for healthcare. Primary care trusts handle that. Conversations about this with NHS colleagues might be challenging” Policy officer- BCC

C. Housing Solutions: Support for Skills-Based Solutions, But Political and Financial Constraints

In housing, participants emphasised the need to manage refugees' expectations about the UK housing system, agreeing with refugees' suggestion regarding running educational initiatives on navigating the private rental market and DIY skills as potential solutions. However, a housing officer pointed out that the political and financial implications of renovating old council accommodation for refugee housing were significant barriers:

“We always aim to provide quality accommodation. As for giving multiple options to families instead of just one, we try to explain our process and why certain decisions are made. One idea that we can implement is teaching refugees skills, such as DIY and navigating the private rental system. However, the idea of renovating old council accommodations is political, and we need to manage expectations.... some decisions, especially political ones, are beyond our control”
Operational Officer- Spring Housing

Policymaker participants stressed the substantial costs associated with renovating old accommodation and adapting private rentals for refugee housing. These include the direct costs of physical renovations and also the administrative and ongoing maintenance expenses. One policy officer mentioned the possible negative perceptions of such an initiative. He explained that renovating and allocating council houses specifically for refugees could lead to accusations of unfairness among the local population, especially among those waiting for social housing. Such perceptions could aggravate tensions and undermine the social cohesion essential for refugee integration and the overall well-being of the community:

“If the strategy involves utilising private rentals, old accommodations owned by the Council, and renovating them, then there are financial considerations. Renting old accommodations from the Council might potentially undermine the scheme. If social housing is introduced into the equation, there could be issues with wider cohesion. Imagine if people are waiting for a Council property, and then all the available council houses are allocated specifically for refugees. I question whether this would be a wise decision on a broader scale”
Policy Officer- West Midlands SMP

The discussion with policymakers provided a valuable assessment of the feasibility of solutions provided by refugees and discussed potentials for taking some of these ideas into consideration when planning future refugee integration services. However, the discussion highlighted the importance of accounting for the needs of refugees without undermining community cohesion. It also shed a light on the need for collaboration between various stakeholders, including national and local governments, service providers, and employers.

8.4 Assessing the Influence of Refugee Contributions and the Potential for Co-Production

In the second round of interviews with policymakers, conducted approximately six months after the first round, I focused on understanding the changes in perspectives, evaluating the implementation and impact of solutions provided by refugees, checking the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking, and testing whether policymakers would co-produce solutions with refugees in the future.

8.4.1 Changes in Knowledge and Perception

Several policymakers emphasised the importance of continuous learning in the field of refugee integration. One stated, “We’re constantly learning”, acknowledging the need to seek new knowledge about refugee integration and adapt to the changing needs of refugee communities. They highlighted the collaborative nature of integration efforts and the importance of ongoing communication and knowledge sharing among stakeholders. A key insight from the policymakers was the recognition of the diversity within refugee communities. They noted that each refugee is unique, highlighting the diversity of skills and qualifications among refugees. Understanding the unique cultural backgrounds, skills, and experiences of different refugee groups is essential for shaping effective integration efforts. This understanding challenges stereotypes and enriches the policy discourse with a nuanced appreciation of refugees’ potential contributions to the host community. As an operational officer for ACH expressed:

“The key lesson is that each person is unique. Initially, I had my own preconceived notions about refugees in the UK, assuming that many lacked qualifications. But working closely with individuals from diverse backgrounds has challenged and changed my perceptions.... The key

takeaway is that continuous learning is essential, and you never stop learning in this field” Operational Officer- ACH

Policymaker participants stressed the importance of an ongoing learning process in understanding refugee integration dynamics. This learning is not static but evolves with the arrival of new refugee groups, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities for integration efforts. The influx of refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan, for example, has highlighted the necessity for flexibility in programme design to cater to individual needs effectively. This adaptability is crucial in developing integration strategies that are sensitive to the diverse experiences and unique backgrounds of refugees. A BCC Policy Officer said:

“What's changed, notably, is our increasing awareness of differences between refugee communities, ..., the difference is in their views culture, but also striking similarities with the host community here in the UK. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for shaping integration efforts and anticipating their impact.” Policy Officer- BCC

The collaborative nature of integration efforts is another theme highlighted by policymakers. They clarified that successful integration relies on the continuous exchange of information and experiences among various stakeholders, including policymakers, service providers, and the refugee communities themselves. This collaborative approach ensures that integration policies are informed by a broad range of perspectives and grounded in the realities of those they aim to support. Policymakers acknowledged the importance of engaging directly with refugees to understand their expectations and manage them where necessary. This engagement is vital in preventing the erosion of trust in integration programmes and services. As a West Midlands policy officer explained:

“I've come to understand that integration suffers when individuals perceive that the existing structures don't serve their interests. This can create a vicious cycle where such perceptions are shared within peer networks. I observed this while working in asylum and temporary housing. Over time, as people felt their needs weren't being met, they began seeking alternatives and lost trust in advice or guidance from us. This, in turn, hindered engagement. So, it highlights the importance of a supportive environment in promoting integration” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP

Policymakers explained that knowledge shared with them in the first round of interviews encouraged them to focus on improving the quality of interactions with

refugees. This included conducting staff briefings, aligning approaches with insights from reports, and engaging more actively with refugee communities to gather feedback. They explained that the knowledge generated by refugees helped them understand hidden gaps in the current services and helped focus their efforts to enhance the effectiveness of integration services by ensuring they are responsive to refugees' needs and expectations, particularly in critical transition periods such as after the five-year support period. A Housing Officer clarified:

“We haven't necessarily learned something new, but your report opened our eyes to areas where we could improve. We realised we needed to enhance the quality of our interactions with customers. We conducted staff briefings and focused on aligning our approach with the report's findings. We also engaged more with our customers, gathering their feedback through open consultation days. This feedback helped us make improvements, such as providing more information about what happens after the five-year support period”
Operational Officer- Spring Housing

In conclusion, the second round of discussions with policymakers revealed that knowledge generated by refugees had added an extra layer to their understanding of the current needs and that effective refugee integration requires a dynamic, informed, and collaborative approach. The response to the knowledge I shared with them showed awareness of the benefit that refugees' perspectives can bring to the table. The second round of interviews showed that continuous learning, adaptability, and direct engagement with refugee communities are essential components of the design thinking approach, enabling policymakers and service providers to design and implement integration programmes that are both effective and sensitive to the diverse needs of refugees.

8.4.2 Using Knowledge Generated by Refugees

All participants re-interviewed confirmed that they had used knowledge generated by refugees to a certain level, if not directly implementing their solutions. They said they had been inspired to consult refugees directly when planning new activities, by organising consultation days. The feedback featured a shift towards more understanding of the important role that inclusive and participatory approaches play in policymaking and service design, which was directly influenced by the insights and solutions generated through the design thinking process that I implemented.

One of the policymakers working in West Midlands SMP explained that the knowledge generated by refugees helped him to understand some of the gaps that exist in the current integration services and highlighted the need to involve refugees in planning these services at early stages to avoid falling into a “vicious cycle” of providing services that don’t meet refugees’ expectations and needs. Accordingly, as they are planning new integration programmes, they are considering integrating design thinking activities in future planning and asked if I could replicate the method with newly resettled Afghani refugees at the regional level.

“To some extent, yes [I used knowledge generated by refugees]. My role has shifted more towards asylum and temporary housing, and I've been involved in developing an integration strategy for the West Midlands region. While it's still in the early stages, we're exploring co-production as a way to ensure various considerations are incorporated. I've also been discussing using your methods with a colleague involved in refugee employability work. I also believe co-production can enhance the functionality of temporary accommodation environments, fostering better communication and understanding among residents” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP

A policymaker in Birmingham City Council confirmed that they have already integrated some of the solutions suggested by refugees in their new integration programming. They said that although they already knew about some of the problems that refugees had raised, however, the knowledge I shared helped them understand the importance of community engagement and empowerment:

“We did use some of the ideas from your research. Whilst I said we knew some of it [i.e., the knowledge produced by refugees], I think what you helped us realise is that.....we really need to focus on engaging and empowering them to build that capacity within themselves; so in the long term, they're not wholly reliant on statutory sector supporting them, and that's how we want to be with any community. We're now introducing refugee engagement and participation as part of our services. That wasn't in there a few weeks ago, and that's something that I've made sure that we've introduced a bit later on, but we've built with that.... I've made sure that they are maintained within our commissioned services going forward.” Policy Officer- BCC

The acknowledgment by policymakers in the West Midlands and Birmingham City Council of the utility of knowledge generated by refugees and the interest in co-production with refugees highlights a crucial aspect of design thinking: empathy and user-centricity. By facilitating direct engagement with refugees, the design thinking

process exposed gaps in integration services that were previously unaddressed or misunderstood. This revelation has not only inspired a re-evaluation of current services but has also catalysed the involvement of refugees in the planning stages of new integration programmes. This approach aligns with the principles of co-production, advocating for a mutual and equal relationship between service users and providers, ensuring that solutions are not only relevant but also sustainable (Bovaird, 2007; Sanders and Stappers, 2008). Likewise, Birmingham City Council's integration of solutions provided by refugees into new programming (such as practical/bespoke English courses and refugee engagement and participation days, see also below examples) underscores the practical applicability and influence of research findings on policy formulation and service design.

Another BCC policy officer expressed an appreciation for the methodologies employed, particularly noting the innovative tools used for gathering insights and facilitating discussions with refugees. However, she said that she would have liked to see more refugees participating in my FGDs. She explained that although the knowledge generated was really helpful, she felt that broader participation would have enriched the understanding further:

“One aspect that could have been improved was the level of community participation in your research. Having more community members involved would have been valuable. As for the tools used, they were interesting, but their utility for future projects is yet to be decided. However, the information and the report provided were useful for us to read” Policy Officer- BCC

On the operational level, one of the staff working with an employment service provider explained that they used knowledge generated by refugees to start a conversation with Birmingham City Council regarding taking a holistic approach to refugee integration, emphasising not only skill development but also complete integration into the community and the labour market. This has resulted in initiatives such as an “English for employment” course and collaboration with employers to establish work placements that target refugees:

“The key aspect for us is individuals. What we learned looking at the report, is there's a lot of the first two years was about skills, but in addition to skills, it was about integration, the pieces of the conversation you started with.... The big push that we've done because we really want to have a real impact is that we've actually

quantified and started to do more English for employment courses, more digital courses. And also, as a consequence of some of the conversations we're having, we've got a couple of key employees that we're directly working with, and also the NHS to look at the professional sector while the non-medical professional roles.”
Operational Officer- ACH

The organisation is also integrating user voice in the planning of new services and to develop an understanding of the challenges faced by refugees. The participant explained how knowledge generated by refugees specifically about ESOL qualifications helped them shape a new intervention that focuses on learning English by practice:

“Since we last spoke, we’ve been bringing employers into the room, talking to service users, and also changing some of the attitudes and negative stereotypes that employers have about refugees.... What we've started to do is actually put more attention, focus on, I'm gonna call it ‘Voice of the Customer’... we had also a consultation meeting the other week with Birmingham City Council, and we spoke about your report and were talking about certain aspects of how the design of future service could look.... One of my biggest challenges in terms of providing an effective service, I feel is that the system needs to go through some sort of gated system approach..... if someone wants to get from ESOL level one to ESOL level two, it can take up to six or seven years. The reality is, under the new approach [based on solution provided by refugees], we prefer somebody actually continues to develop their knowledge and language skills in the workplace.” Operational Officer- ACH

A policymaker leading ESOL learning in the West Midlands region, however, explained that they were unable to implement some of the solutions provided by refugees. They faced challenges offering tailored language courses for specific groups. These challenges resulted from constraints in capacity and funding, showing the practical limitations faced by organisations tasked with providing language education services:

“I mean, [providing classes just for the elderly or business English] it's a tricky one because of the lack of capacity, lack of funding, and very specific groups like that is not always possible. But you have it in some areas; for example, in quite a few areas they'll have community groups who have more informal conversation classes, so you might have some sort of ESOL for craft work like sewing that kind of thing, where there's not a pressure. So, for like the ones who don't want to go through college and get their accreditation, it's just a way of getting them in to practise their English to talk to other people so those initiatives are happening in different areas, but it's very

difficult to cater just for a group of people when you don't have capacity." ESOL lead policy officer- West Midlands SMP

On the other hand, a housing association representative mentioned the implementation of practical measures, such as improving communication with refugees and organising specialised training about how to search for accommodation and other DIY foundation. They were working on enhancing their responsiveness to refugees' accommodation needs:

"We have held some DIY training [as suggested by refugees] ... We started to have more regular conversation with them. And we would find accommodation for them not only because their current accommodation unsuitable, but for people who just don't like their current accommodation." Operational officer- Spring Housing

In summary, the knowledge and solutions generated from FGDs had some influence on policymakers and service providers, demonstrating the value of integrating lived experience in policymaking. The positive reception and willingness to incorporate co-production methodologies in future planning demonstrate the potential of bridging the gap between policy intentions and real-world implications, developing solutions that are more accommodating to refugees' needs, and facilitating more inclusive, empathetic, and effective policymaking and service design processes.

8.4.3 Using design thinking and co-production in future activities

At the end of the second round of interviews, I asked policymakers whether they would consider utilising design thinking approach and co-creation in their future planning of refugee integration, and they expressed some enthusiasm for the approach and its tools. The analysis of their responses presents a nuanced understanding of its application and potential benefits. Through the second round of interviews, a consensus emerged on the value of incorporating design thinking and co-creation methodologies into future planning efforts. The enthusiasm expressed by participants for these approaches showed a recognition of their capacity to foster more effective and inclusive interventions.

The integration of co-production is seen needed to create policies that are genuinely responsive to the needs of resettled refugees. An ESOL lead policy officer from West Midlands SMP underscores the significance of engaging local authorities and

stakeholders in this process, highlighting a critical gap in traditional service design—namely, the lack of refugee input:

“Co-production would be valuable [for our work]. Your approach could be useful for our local authorities and other stakeholders who support resettled refugees. I think it would be beneficial to share your research and engage with them to get insights and feedback. Often, services are designed without much input from the refugees themselves, and their feedback is crucial for improving integration efforts” ESOL lead policy officer- West Midlands SMP

The call for a shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches in policymaking reflects a growing acknowledgment of the limitations inherent in non-participatory designs. Such designs often lead to a disengagement and a "vicious cycle" where services fail to align with the interests and needs of the people they are intended to serve. Participants highlighted the importance of co-designing services with refugees and involving them at early stages of integration planning. This approach is seen as a means to prevent disengagement. A policy officer from West Midlands SMP emphasised the importance of co-designing structures, systems, and processes with all stakeholders to foster engagement and avoid the pitfalls of perceived irrelevance. His acknowledgement reflects an understanding of the negative consequences of top-down, non-participatory design, and promote shifting to bottom-up approaches of policymaking:

“I recognise the value of it, as I've seen the outcomes of where individuals aren't viewing a structural process as in their interest. That's why I'm saying that I would be looking to work in everybody's interest if structures and systems and processes and projects are co-designed in the first place, because otherwise, you reach this perception, or you reach issues where you realise that people might view the process or structure as not in their interest, and then thus lack of engagement and then at least this vicious cycle as well. While the current environment poses challenges, we are actively considering co-production in policy development for broader integration strategies” Policy officer- West Midlands SMP

The proactive efforts of a policy officer from BCC to incorporate community engagement and co-production into their planning demonstrate a willingness to adapt practices for continuous improvement:

“It's a practice we're looking to sustain and expand. We've been exploring opportunities to collaborate with external organisations that can lead community engagement efforts on our behalf. So, they would then be holding those monthly engagement sessions...and having

community days. We had one in December for the Afghan community and planning to host more for Syrian and Ukrainian communities”
Policy Officer- BCC

Design thinking and its elements of co-production was seen as a means of gathering diverse perspectives and ensuring that all voices are heard. This aligns with the idea that involving refugees and stakeholders in the design and decision-making processes is crucial for improving integration efforts. An operational officer from Spring Housing explained that the use co-production has been instrumental in prioritising refugee voices within the larger framework of policy development and service improvement:

“Co-production is essential for gathering diverse perspectives. We used various tools during the consultation day to accommodate different communication preferences. We'd continue to use such methods in the future to engage and learn from our customers effectively.” Operational officer- Spring Housing

Participants also explained that using such tools has helped them prioritise refugee voices within a larger framework of policy development and service improvement. They appreciated the use of these tools and stressed their commitment to ensuring that the perspectives of vulnerable groups, like women, are actively included and heard. An operational officer from ACH highlighted the importance of not only collecting feedback but analysing and disseminating it to ensure that it represents the views of the majority, especially when addressing the needs of vulnerable groups like women:

“We've recently adopted a policy focusing on customer feedback. However, we recognise that simply gathering feedback is not enough; we need to analyse and share it with a wider audience. Your tools would help us ensuring that the feedback represents the majority's views, specifically when dealing with vulnerable groups. For example, we might use it in women's focus groups to ensure that everyone feels comfortable sharing their perspectives” Operational Officer- ACH

These insights collected from policymakers concluded my experiment and enabled me to respond to my research question assessing if design thinking could be applied in refugee integration policymaking (see also Chapter 9).

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of data collected during in-depth interviews with policymakers. The two rounds of interviews with policymakers helped explore the feasibility of ideas generated by refugees and assess the role that design thinking can play in bringing refugees' knowledge to the policymaking level (Brown, 2008). The engagement with policymakers marked a conclusion of the design thinking cycle, giving me a chance to explore the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking.

The interviews suggested the potentials of adopting some of the refugee-suggested solutions in the planning of future integration services and emphasised the need for a centralised integration policy that acknowledges the distinctive needs of refugees, integrating them into the policymaking process. The discussion also highlighted the significance of collaboration between all stakeholders, encompassing national and local governments, service providers, host communities, and refugees. However, it also discussed some of the barriers to implementing solutions suggested by refugees. The feasibility of implementing solutions co-produced with refugees warrants careful consideration, particularly when addressing issues that resonate across the broader UK population. Tailoring specific solutions to refugees may inadvertently generate tensions between communities, as these bespoke approaches could be perceived as preferential treatment. This is especially pertinent in contexts where resources are limited, and the needs of the entire population are pressing. Effective policy must therefore strive to balance the unique requirements of refugees with the overarching challenges faced by the wider society, fostering inclusivity and mutual understanding. Engaging in transparent dialogues and fostering partnerships between all stakeholders, as advocated by Bason (2010), can mitigate potential conflicts and promote harmonious coexistence. Thus, while refugee-centric solutions are vital, they must be integrated within a holistic framework that considers the collective welfare, ensuring equity and social cohesion across diverse communities.

In recognising the value of design thinking and co-production methodologies, policymakers highlighted the significance of collaboration between all stakeholders, encompassing national and local governments, service providers, host communities, and refugees. Moreover, they underscored the importance of shifting from traditional top-down approaches to more inclusive, bottom-up strategies in policy development.

This ensures that policies are more responsive and effective, echoing the participants' emphasis on involving refugees in the planning stages and highlighting the detrimental effects of excluding them from the design process. Bason (2010) argues that the adoption of design thinking in public sector innovation leads to policies that are more adaptable to changing circumstances. This flexibility is crucial in the context of refugee integration, where policies must navigate the complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors.

These perceptions have given rich insight into the applicability of the design thinking approach in refugee integration policy and service design, which I discuss further in the final chapter, where I explore the implications of the design thinking approach in refugee integration, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, I will provide recommendations for future research and explore the potential implications of these findings for policy development in the context of refugee integration. The commitment to integrating design thinking and co-production into future planning, despite operational constraints, indicates a growing recognition of their importance in policy development (Kimbell, 2011).

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION: INSIGHTS FROM UTILISING DESIGN THINKING IN REFUGEE INTEGRATION

9.1 Introduction

In this thesis I embarked on an exploratory journey, examining the complex landscape of refugee integration within the UK, with a spotlight on the potential of using design thinking to facilitate its policymaking and service design. The main aim was to explore the applicability of design thinking in refugees integration policymaking. Through an examination spanning theoretical discourse, policy analysis, and empirical research, I endeavoured to bridge the gap between conventional policy development practices and innovative, human-centred design methodologies. As I approach the end of this academic endeavour, I reflect upon the insights gathered, the implications of these findings, and discuss the paths they pave for future research. In this concluding chapter, I outline the contributions made to the scholarly discourse on refugee integration and public policy design through the application of design thinking methods. Moreover, I reflect on the limitations encountered throughout the research process, providing an assessment of the challenges faced and the lessons learned.

This conclusion serves as a call for embracing complexity, diversity, and human centricity in the realm of public policy and governance. It is a testament to the potential of design thinking as a catalyst to provide knowledge to enable transformative change. I urge policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to reconceptualise refugee integration through the lens of empathy, innovation, and collaborative design.

9.2 Contribution to knowledge

The earlier chapters of this thesis revealed the complex nature of refugee integration, starting from an analysis of terminologies and policies, navigating through the governance and policymaking processes in Chapter 2, where I was able to map integration policy efforts in the UK since 2000, with special focus on England from 2010 when this policy was devolved to the constituent countries of the UK. I created a timeline to collate the main refugee integration policy documents, which could be used as a reference in future research into the refugee integration context in the UK and its policy development.

In Chapter 3, I created a framework to help understand the key elements that influence integration policymaking and governance, including the multidimensionality of integration, the local turn, agenda dynamics, the multilevel government setting, and mainstreaming through policy and governance. This framework used the policy cycle to demonstrate how each of these elements influences each stage of integration policymaking. This framework provides an overview of what exists in academic literature around integration policymaking and governance and will be useful in future research for those who are interested in developing an overall understanding of what has been done in this field and how these elements interact and influence each other and each stage in the refugee integration policy cycle.

In Chapter 4, I explored the history of design thinking, its tools, and its application to develop solutions that resonate with the needs and aspirations of refugees and host communities alike. The chapter will be particularly useful for those who are interested in quickly understanding the evolution of design thinking and its tools and are interested in its relevance to policymaking and refugee integration field.

In Chapter 5, I provided a conceptual framework on which I based my methodology and research design. This framework could be used in future research aiming to test and understand the applicability of the design thinking approach in refugee integration policymaking. The framework links the previous framework provided in Chapter 3 around the refugee integration policy cycle to the design thinking process, by highlighting the gaps in current integration policy and where design thinking can play a role in filling these gaps.

Chapter 6 built on the conceptual framework and provided a practical demonstration of how to apply design thinking in refugee integration policymaking. I discussed how taking a pragmatic critical realist view influenced my choice of a mixed methods approach. I provided a detailed overview of the phases of my research, how to integrate the design thinking approach and its tools to redefine refugee integration problems and co-produce solutions with refugees, and then test their feasibility with policymakers. This methodology would be particularly useful for those interested in exploring the applicability of design thinking in refugee integration, as it is easy to replicate and provide new tools to collect data and knowledge from refugees and co-produce new integration services with them.

The later chapters discussed the findings of the data collected from my case study. Chapter 7 presented the empirical findings from focus group discussions, detailing the lived experiences of refugees in Birmingham and their co-designed ideas for holistic integration solutions. This chapter answered three main research sub-questions (2, 3, and 4) and corresponded to the first four stages of the design thinking approach (Empathise, Define, Ideate, and Prototype).

In the Empathise stage, I used brainstorming to generate an understanding of refugee integration from refugees' perspectives in order to answer research question 2 (What do refugees understand integration to be?). Refugee participants viewed integration as a collaborative and bilateral process. They perceived integration as adapting to new societal norms while maintaining their unique identity and traditions. Integration for them did not just mean blending in, but contributing meaningfully and making a lasting positive impact on the host society. Key paths to this impact included mastering the English language and gaining meaningful employment. While academic discussions often focus on accessing services and developing a sense of belonging, refugees offered a more ambitious and proactive view, emphasising the importance of taking an active role in their new communities, not merely as passive recipients but as contributors.

In the Define, Ideate, and Prototype stages, I answered research question 3 (What kinds of integration policy do refugees identify as necessary to meet their needs?). Refugee participants identified gaps in housing, employment, education, and the health service. They highlighted how housing instability and poor quality of services in this area had a direct impact on their integration. They proposed solutions that included creating new housing services that integrate DIY training and support in navigating the rental market, as well as providing a space for them to renovate old houses and contribute to their new community. In employment, they highlighted English language and recognition of qualifications as both barriers and facilitators of their access to the labour market. They proposed solutions that would allow them access to traineeships where they can learn practical English and build their professional experience in the UK, as well as providing platforms to network with British peers from the same profession. In education, they highlighted the lack of practical English courses and the need for more tailored and bespoke English courses.

They proposed solutions that would integrate English learning into employment and social interactions as well as providing simplified English learning for the elderly. In health, they identified the need for a specialised offer of health services for refugees, rather than accessing the mainstream health services. They proposed creating new services that allow special access to private health services or a specialised unit within the NHS to provide quick health care to refugees.

The solutions provided by refugee participants, although showing ownership, lacked understanding of the UK context and issues faced by the general UK population, especially in housing and health services. The data collected through the FGDs contributed to existing knowledge on refugee integration in the UK and added an extra layer through identifying gaps and proposing solutions. Knowledge generated in each integration domain could be used as a starting point to explore further the barriers and facilitators to produce new services. Finally, in that chapter, I answered research question 4 (Can design thinking tools facilitate collective knowledge generation amongst refugees?). The findings from the pre-post FGD questionnaires demonstrated the design thinking potentials of facilitating collective knowledge as a shift in knowledge about integration and who should be involved, which was noticed in some of the participants. However, due to the low number of participants involved, these findings cannot be generalised, but can be used as a starting point for those interested in exploring the influence of design thinking tools on knowledge sharing.

Subsequently, Chapter 8 examined the practicality of these solutions, offering a critical lens on the role of design thinking in providing the knowledge and insight needed to enhance the design and implementation of integration services. The chapter answered research question 5 (How can knowledge collated using a design thinking approach help policymakers to design and implement new refugee integration interventions?). Ahead of interviews with policymaker participants, I shared a report summarising the solutions proposed by refugee participants and focused my discussion with them on testing their feasibility. Policymaker participants showed an interest in the solutions proposed, but pointed out the unfeasibility of some of these solutions due to lack of consideration of the UK context. They explained how some of the problems highlighted were also faced by the overall UK population and that creating specialised services for refugees as proposed would create backlashes and animosity between

communities. However, they emphasised the usefulness of the knowledge generated by the refugees and expressed interest in integrating some of the ideas proposed in future planning as well as leaning towards utilising design thinking and co-production in future design of refugee integration services and policies.

Lastly, the core contribution of this research lies in its potential to extend the application of the five-stage model of design thinking beyond policy formulation to the often-neglected evaluation stage of the policy cycle. Traditionally, policy evaluation is conducted post-implementation, using top-down, bureaucratic measures that may not fully reflect the lived experiences of those affected. This thesis proposes that embedding five-stage model of design thinking enables a participatory model of assessment rooted in real-time feedback and experiential data. Policymakers engaged with refugee-generated solutions, not merely as consultation feedback but as evaluative products. The Test phase offers a dynamic feedback mechanism embedded within the policy design itself. Design thinking, therefore, becomes a continuous evaluative lens, enabling reflection on what policies mean in practice and how they can be iteratively adjusted (Bason, 2014; Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016).

In the following sections I respond to the two main research questions not yet answered, specifically research question 1 in relation to the application of design thinking in refugee integration policymaking and service design, and research question 6 highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of design thinking. In doing so, I set the foundation for future scholarly inquiry, advocating for a shift towards more inclusive, adaptive, and human-centred policy development frameworks.

9.3 Implementation of a Design Thinking Approach with Refugees

In this section I will answer research question 1 and discuss how design thinking was implemented with refugees, explaining the implications of using creative tools to co-produce new knowledge about refugee integration and link it to existing debates from the literature. I will also touch on the effectiveness of this approach in generating new insights and implications for policy practice.

Research Question: *How can design thinking methods be implemented to ensure refugee co-production in integration policy?*

9.3.1 Methodological Application

As explained in the previous chapters, I followed a design thinking approach when designing my methodology to adhere to its five key stages: Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test (Brown, 2008). The approach facilitated a multilayer examination of refugee integration in policymaking, allowing for an exploration of participants' experiences, considerations, and ideas, as well as sharing this knowledge between them.

In the first four stages of design thinking (Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype), the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) played a fundamental part. They were designed to be collaborative and engaging, fostering an environment where refugees could openly share their perspectives. The purpose of these FGDs was not only to understand refugees' perspectives but actively involve them in co-producing potential solutions to challenges they face when accessing integration services (IDEO, 2015). According to Bovaird (2007), co-production implies an equal and mutual relationship between service users (i.e., refugees) and providers (i.e., policymakers), enabling the development of solutions that are deeply rooted in the real-world experiences and needs of the users. By facilitating co-production, the design thinking process ensures that the solutions created are contextually relevant and user-centric, increasing the likelihood of their acceptance and success (Voorberg et al., 2015). Furthermore, Sanders and Stappers (2008) have advocated for such participatory design and co-production, emphasising its transformative potential of driving user-centred innovation. They explained that co-production is not only about solving problems but also about learning and discovering (ibid). In this context, the FGDs served as platforms for mutual learning, where both the refugees and I gained insights, discovered new possibilities, and collaboratively proposed solutions that address the challenges faced by refugees.

In the Test phase I utilised in-depth interviews with policymakers. Carried out in two consecutive rounds, these interviews were not only essential in examining the feasibility of the solutions proposed by refugees but also facilitated an invaluable bridge of understanding between the end users' experiences and the policymakers' decision-making frameworks (Kimbell, 2011b). The decision to speak to policymakers in this phase aligns with the principles of co-production, which emphasise the

collaborative development of solutions and knowledge sharing between service users and service providers or policymakers (Bovaird, 2007). By involving refugees in the solution development process and then exploring these solutions through interviews with policymakers, a design thinking cycle was completed. This allowed for reciprocal exchange of knowledge, ensuring that solutions were aligned with policy frameworks and feasibility considerations (Voorberg et al., 2015). It also helped me address one of the major challenges in policy development, which is the potential disconnect between policy intentions and the real-world implications for end users (i.e. the implementation gap discussed in chapter 5) (Osborne et al., 2018), which aligns with Kimbel's (2012) argument regarding the Test phase as a key to overcome such challenges. It provides a feedback loop that ensures proposed solutions are supported by all stakeholders. Furthermore, the interviews helped me to bring forward refugees' knowledge and position it at the forefront of policy considerations (Carstensen and Bason, 2012). This is essential for refugees, whose voices and experiences can often be marginalised or overlooked in policymaking processes. By facilitating these interviews, the solutions co-produced by refugees gained legitimacy and were more likely to be considered and integrated into future policy frameworks.

Moreover, the questionnaires that I integrated into the FGDs allowed me to evaluate shifts in refugees' understanding of integration and measure the influence and efficacy of the design thinking process in generating collective knowledge (Bailey et al., 2019). This aligns with the essence of design thinking which emphasises incorporating diverse perspectives and fostering collective knowledge among end users (Brown, 2008). As explained by van Heijst et al. (2019), when trying to build new knowledge, participants should adapt a "design thinking mindset" in which they no longer blindly accept established knowledge, but collaboratively challenge it, remain open to fresh concepts, and achieve deep knowledge through evolving dialogue. The decision to integrate pre-post questionnaires enabled me to attempt to assess shifts in understanding and measure the influence of the design thinking process. I could also ensure that the solutions developed were not only innovative but also reflective of the shared new knowledge that was collectively created by refugees (Björgvinsson et al., 2012).

9.3.2 Utilising Creative Design Thinking Tools

The essence of co-creation and participatory design revolves around the use of suitable tools that pave the way for reflection, imagination, and the articulation of visions, ideas, and concepts (Sanders and Stappers, 2014). Accordingly, I employed a series of creative design thinking tools during the FGDs to foster an open and engaging environment, including brainstorming, experience diagramming, statement starters, visualising the vote, and prototyping. These tools served as a medium to convert hypothetical questions into concrete forms, thereby assisting in communication, reflection, and sense-making (Björgvinsson et al., 2012; Schoffelen et al., 2015). These design thinking tools were tailored to match the aim of each FGD's activity, while at the same time encouraging an empathetic and creative mindset within the refugee groups (Vaajakallio and Mattelmäki, 2014). The use of these tools facilitated an exploration of refugees' experiences, challenges, and potential solutions related to integration.

The use of experience diagramming allowed me to map refugees' journeys through the integration services provided by BCC, enabling the identification of both positive experiences and challenges in various domains, such as education, employment, health, social networks, and housing. This was in line with the principles of interaction design, which stresses the importance of understanding users' experiences and journeys to design better services and solutions (Cooper et al., 2007). This tool places the user at the centre of the design process, emphasising the significance of empathy and a deep understanding of the user's world and their feeling for each touch point (Liedtka, 2011). Stickdorn and Schneider (2021) argue that service design, especially in complex environments like refugee integration, requires a holistic understanding of the user journey. Hence the use of experience diagramming enriched the discussions, providing a visual representation of refugees' journeys through integration services across various domains, helping to identify the main issues which needed to be considered under each indicator/domain and fostering an understanding of refugees' experiences.

Sanders and Stappers (2008) emphasise the significance of co-creation techniques, arguing that they not only lead to a broader range of solutions but also increase the sense of ownership and commitment among participants. The use of statement starters was crucial for collating diverse ideas and preparing a list of potential solutions

for challenges refugees faced on their integration journeys. This method facilitated the organisation of a spectrum of ideas, effectively connecting the collective knowledge and diverse perspectives of the refugees. Furthermore, visualising the vote played a pivotal role by allowing refugees to agree on the solutions they perceived as most promising. This technique is rooted in the principles of democratic decision-making and ensured that solutions were chosen based on collective consensus rather than individual biases (Sanoff, 1990). Both tools encouraged active participation and empowered refugees to be active contributors to the solution-building process. Moreover, by creating a tangible interface (sticky notes, visualised votes) for the ideation process, refugees were able to see their contributions in real time. This visibility, according to Brandt et al. (2012), fosters trust in the process, promoting genuine engagement and collaboration.

Finally, the prototyping tool gave refugees the opportunity to further develop and present their solutions, fostering a sense of ownership and agency. According to Brown (2009), by giving participants the power to shape their ideas, prototyping develops a deep sense of connection to the proposed solutions. The act of building, testing, and refining their prototypes empowers individuals, making them more invested in the success of the outcome. Giving refugees the tools and platform to prototype affirmed their capacities as active contributors and transitioned them from being users to co-designers, asserting control over the design narrative (Sanders and Stappers, 2014).

9.3.3 Insights and Co-Production of Solutions

It is argued that involving end-users in the design process leads to more relevant and user-centred solutions (Norman, 2013). I learned that applying the above methods and tools can foster an environment of collaborative problem-solving. During the FGDs refugees actively engaged in defining integration, identifying challenges, and co-producing potential solutions. Furthermore, the structured design thinking approach facilitated a mutual learning environment, where refugees could articulate their needs and experiences, contributing to a richer understanding of the complexities of integration (Manzini, 2015). The use of creative tools fostered engagement and facilitated the generation of valuable insights, confirming the potential of design thinking as a participatory and user-centred approach to generate knowledge for

policymaking (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). The active involvement of refugees in co-creating solutions highlighted the value of participatory approaches in policymaking and the potential implications for both policy and practice. It demonstrated that refugees, when given the opportunity, can provide valuable insights and practical solutions to the challenges they face. It also emphasised the importance of continuous dialogue and collaboration between refugees and policymakers. By fostering mutual understanding and co-creation, policies can be more attuned to the needs and aspirations of refugees, increasing the likelihood of successful integration.

While the design thinking approach demonstrated significant potential to enhance refugee participation, several challenges emerged that limited the depth and breadth of engagement. These included issues of power imbalance, trauma and distrust, language barriers, and culturally embedded assumptions about policymaking.

Firstly, the inherent power imbalance between refugees and policymakers remained difficult to fully overcome. Although the co-design process (as described in Chapter 6.3) used participatory tools like anonymous voting and group brainstorming to equalise voices, refugees remained acutely aware of their limited formal influence. However, the mere act of consultation does not dissolve power imbalance. To counter this, future applications should institutionalise co-design roles for lived experience experts, akin to citizen panels used in deliberative democracy models (Smith, 2009). Trauma and mistrust of authorities also influenced participation, particularly in early-stage discussions. As explored in section 6.6, many participants had experienced state surveillance, war, or forced displacement, which understandably shaped their perceptions of institutions. As Phillimore (2012) argues, trust is not a prerequisite but a by-product of safe, inclusive processes. Partnering with trusted community organisations and allocating time for relationship-building are essential steps.

Language barriers also posed limitations. While I spoke the same language, not all participants experienced the design thinking tools in the same manner, as literacy barriers presented unique challenges for some. A few of the refugee participants were illiterate, which necessitated a more hands-on approach in facilitating their involvement in the design thinking activities. To ensure that these individuals had the opportunity to contribute their insights and ideas, I worked closely with them, assisting in articulating their thoughts, and documenting them on sticky notes. This enabled their

active participation but also underscored the importance of adaptability and inclusivity in participatory design processes. It highlighted that effective facilitation must accommodate diverse capabilities and backgrounds, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued, regardless of literacy levels. This experience reinforced the significance of flexibility in participatory methods, demonstrating that with thoughtful engagement strategies, barriers to participation can be overcome, leading to richer and more inclusive outcomes.

Underlying all of these were cultural assumptions—from both refugee participants and institutional actors—about what counts as a "feasible" solution. Policymakers tended to default to existing resource frameworks, while refugees often framed solutions in terms of ideal conditions. Design thinking's emphasis on "possibility thinking" helped to bridge this gap, encouraging a space where aspirational and practical perspectives could interact productively (Kimbell, 2011; Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016).

Another challenge was the decision to keep refugees and policymakers in separate discussions, which was done to ensure safe and open conversations (Chapter 6.2). While this helped participants feel more comfortable sharing their views and reduced power imbalance, it may have missed opportunities for real-time empathy-building and iterative dialogue. Future initiatives should consider incorporating joint co-design or prototyping workshops after initial stages, enabling deliberative co-production where both refugee communities and institutional actors can engage in direct and iterative collaboration (Fung, 2006; Bason, 2017).

Finally, although this research intentionally focused on refugees to amplify their voices, the exclusion of host community members may have limited exploration of integration as a two-way process. Including non-refugee residents in co-design activities could have illuminated shared needs, surface tensions, or collaborative potential in areas like housing, education, and health—thereby enriching the quality and relevance of the proposed solutions (Ager & Strang, 2008; Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). However, excluding them also created a safer and more focused space for refugee voices to emerge.

9.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of a Design Thinking Approach

Reflecting on my PhD research, I was able to identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of a design thinking approach. In this section, I will discuss these and answer research question 6.

Research Question: What are the strengths and weaknesses of a design thinking approach?

9.4.1 Strengths of design thinking

As discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, adopting a design thinking approach has helped me examine the current refugee integration services and work with refugees to highlight their shortcomings and co-produce ideas for creative solutions that are user centric. The utilisation of the design thinking creative tools has created an environment that promoted creativity and ideation. Below I expand on these strengths:

a. Enhances User-Centric Innovation

One of the primary strengths of design thinking is its focus on understanding and empathising with users. By prioritising user needs and experiences, design thinking fosters innovations that are more likely to meet real-world demands where feasible. Brown and Katz (2011) argue that this empathy-driven approach enables designers to create more intuitive and accessible solutions, significantly improving user satisfaction and adoption rates. A critical advantage of design thinking is its ability to engage end-users actively in the design process. This approach, with its participatory design, not only empowers users but also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment towards the solution. Sanders and Stappers (2008) argue that involving users as co-creators in the design process can enhance their engagement and satisfaction, as they feel their needs and ideas are genuinely considered. This engagement is pivotal for companies looking to involve their employees in overcoming challenges, thereby strengthening internal collaboration and commitment.

b. Promotes Creativity and Ideation

Design thinking encourages an open and creative mindset that facilitates the generation of novel ideas. Ideation, as a phase of design thinking, allows for the

exploration of a wide range of solutions, fostering innovative new ideas. Cross (2011) emphasises the role of design thinking in breaking traditional boundaries, enabling multidisciplinary teams to leverage their diverse expertise in creating innovative solutions. Implementing design thinking practices within a policy context, where policy problems are complex, can facilitate the dissemination and growth of an innovative culture and creative solutions. By championing a user-centric, iterative, and collaborative approach to problem-solving, design thinking encourages policymakers to adopt a more innovative mindset that could allow them to empathise with policy users. Such a cultural shift towards innovation can potentially lead to significant improvements in policymaking and service design, as it encourages continuous learning, adaptability, and creativity (Kimbell, 2011).

c. Facilitates and Speeds Up Solution Adoption

Design thinking's bottom-up approach, which commences with a deep understanding of end-user needs, significantly enhances the adoption of solutions, whether technological or process-oriented. By constructing solutions that are essentially valuable to the end-user, design thinking ensures that the final products or services are not only useful but also desired by the target users. Design thinking's user-focused strategy accelerates solution adoption by aligning innovations closely with user expectations and requirements, thereby increasing the likelihood of success. This was evident in my PhD case study where policymakers were keen to adopt some of the solutions proposed by refugees including DIY training in housing and practical English learning through employment, as well as exploring the potential for creating a buddy system.

d. Encourages Cultural Change in Policymaking

A further strength of design thinking is its ability to encourage cultural change within policymaking environments when enacted through specific design practices and roles. Rather than acting solely as a toolkit for problem-solving, design thinking (as facilitated by designers) challenges traditional, top-down approaches by introducing more collaborative, empathetic, and iterative practices. As explored in Chapter 8, several policymakers reflected on how participating in designer-facilitated co-production processes and engaging with refugee-generated solutions prompted them to

reconsider existing assumptions and reflect more deeply on the value of user insights in shaping integration strategies. Importantly, this shift also extended to how they saw their own roles. The design-led co-production process created conditions in which policymakers encouraged a move away from the traditional view of policymakers as solution-providers, toward seeing themselves as facilitators of dialogue and inclusion. This reflects Kimbell (2011) assertion that designers increasingly act as cultural intermediaries interpreting social and institutional contexts while enabling new forms of participation, empathy, and iteration. In this sense, cultural change did not arise from design thinking in the abstract, but from the designer's active role in structuring reflective encounters, legitimising refugee knowledge, and opening up spaces for institutional learning. By encouraging this kind of reflective practice and redefinition of key policy concepts, design thinking contributed not only to the generation of new solutions but also to deeper institutional learning. This positions design-led approaches as a valuable approach for transforming policy cultures—particularly in areas like refugee integration, where rigid or technocratic frameworks often fall short of addressing lived realities.

9.4.2 Weaknesses of design thinking

Despite the benefits of utilising a design thinking approach, there are some limitations. During my exploration of the realm of design thinking, I was able to identify some of these weaknesses, some of which were experienced during my experiment and others are based on observations I made when reviewing its applications as part of my attempt to build a better understanding of its practices. Below I discuss some of these weaknesses:

a. Requirement for Direct User Involvement

A pivotal aspect of design thinking is the direct involvement of users, who must be available and willing to contribute their insights and feedback. This necessitates not only the users' time but also institutional resources to facilitate their involvement. During my research, I faced challenges in encouraging refugees to participate, which limited the knowledge generated by the focus group discussions as I did not have sufficient respondents to offer a broad range of experiences and ideas. Constantin et al. (2021) highlight the logistical and resource challenges in engaging users effectively,

emphasising that the success of design thinking depends on the active participation of end-users, which can be difficult to ensure, especially in large-scale or geographically dispersed settings, or where levels of trust in the system and government are low. As my case study focused on one city within England and engaged with a limited number of refugee participants, this definitely affected the generalisability of my findings.

b. Time and Resource Intensiveness

A significant critique of design thinking is its demand for extensive time and resources, particularly in the empathy and prototyping phases. This can be a barrier for policymakers or service providers with limited resources or strict timelines. Martin (2009) notes that the extensive research and iterative cycles required by design thinking may not always be feasible or cost-effective for everyone. For instance, due to the time constraints, I had to compress the four stages of the design thinking process within the period of the focus group discussion. This meant that I didn't get the full outcomes from what is expected from such an approach. In a different setting, each of these stages might take a day to allow for expansion of the gaps and solutions in more detail and allow for better prototyping.

c. Ambiguity and Lack of Structure

The non-linear process of design thinking can be challenging to manage, especially in traditional policy contexts accustomed to structured, linear approaches. Johansson-Sköldberg et al. (2013) discuss the difficulties organisations face in implementing design thinking due to its departure from conventional management methodologies, leading to resistance and implementation challenges. In the UK context, which lacks a national framework that guides the refugee integration issues, the implementation of design thinking could be difficult. Adapting design thinking at the local level could provide an efficient alternative, especially as refugee integration usually happens at local level. In my case study, I took a localised perspective which allowed easier adaptation to the design thinking approach; however, this meant that my findings couldn't be generalised to the national level.

d. Difficulty in Measuring Impact

Quantifying the impact of design thinking initiatives can be challenging due to the qualitative nature of its outcomes, such as enhanced user experience or increased innovation. Carlgren et al. (2016) highlight the challenges in measuring the success of design thinking projects, which can hinder the ability to demonstrate value and secure buy-in from stakeholders. For instance, when I attempted to measure the impact of design thinking tools on refugee knowledge, I faced a challenge when analysing the result due to the small sample. Consequently, I wasn't able to positively say that it was a significant impact. Similarly, when trying to measure the impact on policy it was difficult to make it tangible. Even though policymakers showed interest in some of the ideas generated and envisaged integrating some of them in future programming, I was not able to evidence the impact.

e. Medium-Long Duration of Projects

Design thinking projects often span a medium to long duration, typically ranging from seven to eight months. This extended timeframe can pose challenges for organisations or government seeking swift solutions. For limited purposes, such as ideation, a lighter version of design thinking may be adopted to expedite the process. However, this condensed approach might not fully capitalise on the depth and benefits of comprehensive design thinking methodologies. Leifer and Steinert (2011) discuss the temporal challenges associated with design thinking, noting that the time investment required for thorough user research, iterative prototyping, and testing phases can delay project timelines, impacting the agility of organisations in responding to market changes. To avoid this in my project, I tried to simplify the process to make it quicker, as running multiple workshops with refugees would have made the participation even less than what I was able to achieve.

f. Feasibility of Co-Produced Solutions

Another limitation of the design thinking approach is the feasibility of implementing co-produced solutions, particularly those developed with input from specific groups such as refugees. Although engaging refugees in the design process can lead to tailored and effective solutions, these solutions may not always be viable when scaled to address broader societal issues. Tailored solutions can create friction between different community groups, as they might be perceived as favouring one group over

others. This issue is particularly pronounced in contexts where resources are scarce, and there is a need to balance the specific needs of refugees with those of the wider population. Clarke and Craft (2019) argue that while co-production can enhance the relevance and acceptance of policy interventions, it also raises the risk of exacerbating social divisions if not managed inclusively. During my research, this challenge became apparent as some refugee-specific solutions conflicted with broader community priorities, highlighting the difficulty of integrating these bespoke approaches into a unified policy framework. As noted by Linders (2012), achieving a balance between targeted interventions and inclusive policymaking is essential to avoid potential conflicts and ensure social cohesion.

9.5 Further Research

The influence of the design thinking approach, as demonstrated through the outcomes of my PhD research, on both policymakers at BCC and integration service providers, underscores the potential for a shift towards the creation of more adaptive, participatory, and efficacious policies and services dedicated to refugee integration. This shift signifies a realignment of policy development processes, with a greater emphasis on user-centric methodologies. By placing the voices and experiences of refugees at the heart of the service design and decision-making processes, my research not only fostered innovative solutions but also ensured that these solutions were deeply connected to the actual needs and challenges faced by refugees.

The enthusiastic response and readiness of policymakers and service providers to integrate these methodologies into their future planning activities highlight the potential of design thinking. This approach serves as a bridge, effectively closing the gap that often exists between the theoretical intentions of policies and their practical implications on the ground. By doing so, it can enhance the experience of integration for refugees, helping to ensure that policies and services are pragmatically effective and aligned with the lived realities of those they aim to support. Moreover, the positive influence of the design thinking approach extends beyond the immediate context of refugee integration. It offers a model for policy development and service design, emphasising the importance of empathy, co-creation, and user involvement. This model promotes a more dynamic and responsive approach to addressing complex

social challenges, encouraging a collaborative attitude among stakeholders, and fostering solutions that are both innovative and grounded in real-world contexts.

Building upon this demonstrated efficacy of design thinking in fostering innovative and user-centred solutions for refugee integration, future research should aim to explore several key areas to further enhance the impact and applicability of this approach. Firstly, a broader examination of the scalability and adaptability of design thinking methodologies across different geographical contexts and refugee populations is essential. Such research could identify how varying cultural, social, and economic environments influence the implementation and outcomes of design thinking processes, ensuring the development of flexible and context-sensitive approaches to policymaking and service design.

Secondly, future studies should examine the long-term effects of policies and services developed through design thinking on refugee integration outcomes. This involves tracking the effectiveness and sustainability of implemented solutions, their adaptability to changing circumstances, and their impact on the social and economic well-being of refugees over time. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for refining design thinking methodologies and ensuring their ongoing relevance and effectiveness.

Thirdly, there is a significant opportunity for future research to explore the integration of digital technologies within design thinking processes. Investigating how digital tools and platforms can enhance the participation of refugees in the co-production of policies and services could lead to more accessible, inclusive, and efficient engagement methods. This research could also examine the potential for digital technologies to support the dissemination of knowledge and best practices among policymakers and service providers, facilitating a more collaborative and informed approach to policy development and service provision.

Additionally, comparative studies that evaluate the effectiveness of design thinking against other policy development and service design methodologies could provide valuable insights into its relative strengths and limitations. Such research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of where design thinking offers the greatest benefits and where alternative approaches may be more appropriate.

Finally, a critical area for future research lies in the development of robust frameworks for measuring the impact of design thinking on policy and service outcomes. Establishing standardised metrics and evaluation methodologies would enable more systematic assessment and comparison of results, supporting the continuous improvement of design thinking practices and their contribution to successful refugee integration.

In conclusion, there is much potential for future research in the realm of design thinking and refugee integration. By addressing these key areas, future studies can build on the foundational work established by this PhD research, further advancing our understanding of how design thinking can be leveraged to create more humane, effective, and sustainable solutions for the challenges faced by refugees and the communities that host them.

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Appendices

10.1 Information sheets

10.1.1 Participant Information Sheet for Interviews with policymakers

‘The importance of user-experience in refugee integration policymaking: how can a design thinking approach inform a better UK integration policy?’

Researcher: Allaa Barri

Project Supervisors: Professor Jenny Phillimore [REDACTED] and Dr Laurence Lessard-Phillips [REDACTED]

Address: University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham UK B15 2TT

Contact Details: [REDACTED]

The Research Project

My name is Allaa Barri and I am a doctoral researcher based at the University of Birmingham. You are invited to participate in a research project that focuses on refugee integration in the UK. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are identified and agreed to take part as an individual working on designing or implementing refugee integration services provided by Birmingham City council. Specifically, the study will focus on examining the possibility of applying design thinking in the refugee integration process to generate new knowledge from refugees and share with policymakers. design thinking is a human and user-centred approach that leads to solutions which are progressively refined through an interactive process of providing voice to end-users and engaging them in shaping decisions. I am interested to learn from refugees how they view refugee integration and what problems they are facing while integrating in the UK, in order to be able to generate solutions that could be presented to policymakers and see how possible it is to use this knowledge in designing future integration projects. I will be conducting selective interviews with policymakers affiliated with Birmingham City Council. These

interviews follow on from two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with refugees. The interviews with policymakers will be conducted in two rounds; the first round will be focus on knowledge generated from the FGDs, and the second round will be conducted after 3-12 months later to discuss whether this knowledge was taken into consideration, and how it influenced new integration projects. You are asked to participate in both rounds.

The Interview Process

If you agree to take part in these interviews, you are agreeing to take part in a virtual or socially distanced interview regarding refugee integration in the UK. During the interview, the researcher will present knowledge generated from FGDs and ask you questions about your experience in planning refugee integration projects in the UK and whether you think the knowledge presented to you could help in designing future projects. The approach to interviewing will depend on whether you decide to be interviewed in person or virtually, and of course on Government guidelines regarding Covid 19. If in person, the researcher will implement social distancing and you and the researcher will be required to wear a face mask and use hand sanitiser. The researcher will provide a FFP2-standard mask and hand sanitiser at the beginning of the interview. If the interview is undertaken remotely, the researcher will use the platform of your choice.

Information about Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Each interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes and will be digitally recorded, the researcher will also take notes.

Please note that if you are agreeing to conduct this first round of interview, you are also asked to agree to participate in a follow-up interview after 3-12 months, to discuss the ways in which you used the knowledge that was shared with you.

Data Collected

The data collected in this study will be used in the writing of a PhD thesis at the University of Birmingham. It may also be used within other publications such as journal articles, books and reports as well as conference proceedings and seminars.

If you agree to take part in this study, participation is entirely confidential, and your personal details will not be shared in any way.

The transcript of the interviews and its recording will remain within a secure data storage facility at the University of Birmingham for at least ten years from the date of any publication to ensure that the study complies with the UK Data Protection Act. Data that is collected will only be accessible by the researcher and their supervisors.

Withdrawing from the Study

You can withdraw from this project at any point up until the data analysis has begun (30 days after the interview has taken place). During the interview you can tell the researcher that you would like to withdraw and not continue with the interview. If you wish to withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed.

Fund

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Questions

If you have any questions about this study before completing a consent form, please contact the lead researcher –

What should I do if I have any concerns about this study?

If you have concerns about this study, please feel free to contact my lead supervisor Professor Jenny Phillimore: [REDACTED]. You can also raise any concerns through the University of Birmingham's ethical review process. Further details about the process are available here:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>

Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part in this research project.

10.1.2 Participant Information Sheet for refugees

‘The importance of user-experience in refugee integration policymaking: how can a design thinking approach inform a better UK integration policy?’

Researcher: Allaa Barri

Project Supervisors: Professor Jenny Phillimore [REDACTED] and Dr Laurence Lessard-Phillips [REDACTED]

Address: University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham UK B15 2TT

Contact Details: [REDACTED]

The Research Project

My name is Allaa Barri and I am a doctoral researcher based at the University of Birmingham. You are invited to participate in a research project that focuses on refugee integration in the UK because you are an individual with refugee status in the UK. The study will use a special method called design thinking to allow refugees to work together to generate new knowledge about integration and share it with policymakers. I am interested to learn what integration means to refugees and what problems are faced while integrating in the UK, and to work together to generate solutions that I will present to policymakers. I will be running four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in partnership with Birmingham City Council focusing on integration services provided to resettled Syrian refugees.

The Focus Group Discussion Process

If you agree to take part in this Focus Group Discussion, you are agreeing to take part in a socially distanced interactive conversation regarding refugee integration in

the UK that will take place face to face following the Government guidelines regarding Covid-19. During the Focus Group Discussion, the researcher will ask you questions about your experience as refugee in the UK and what can be done to facilitate refugee integration into British society. The researcher will make sure to implement social distancing and you will be required to wear a face mask and use hand sanitiser. The researcher will provide a FFP2-standard mask and hand sanitiser at the beginning of the FGD. If the government guidelines are against conducting the discussion face- to- face an online option will be considered.

Information about Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Each Focus Group Discussion will last for approximately 90- 120 minutes and will be recorded via an audio recorder. The researcher will also take pictures of material produced during the FGDs, and record videos of presentations. Videos will not be published but will be used by the researcher to write up the analysis. Photos will only be taken of the main interactive activities; the researcher will make sure that faces of people are not seen in the pictures and could not be identified. It is your choice whether you feature in the recording or photos, please don't tick the box in relation to this in the consent form if you don't want pictures/ videos to be taken of you.

Data Collected

The data collected in this study will be used in the second stage of the research in which I will interview policymakers to discuss the possibility of using the knowledge generated from Focus Group Discussions in the design of integration projects as part of resettlement programme in the future, but there is no guarantee that policymakers will agree on using any of these ideas in future integration projects. The data collected will be also used in the writing of PhD thesis at the University of Birmingham. It may also be used within other publications such as journal articles, books and reports as well as conference proceedings and seminars.

If you agree to take part in this study, participation is entirely voluntary, and your personal details will not be shared in any way. You will be asked to select a fake name which will be used instead of your real name within the research.

The transcript (written copy) of the FGDs and any other audio, photos and videos taken during the FGDs will remain within a secure data storage facility at the University of Birmingham for at least ten years from the date of any publication to ensure that the study complies with the UK Data Protection Act. Data that is collected will only be accessible by the researcher and their supervisors.

Withdrawing from the Study

You can withdraw from this project at any point up until the data analysis has begun (30 days after the FGD has taken place). You can tell me at any point that you do not wish to continue being part of this FGD. If you wish to withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed within a few days. Please note that sticky notes or any data collected from you as part of group activities will not be destroyed as it would be difficult to know who contributed what.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study before completing a consent form, please contact the lead researcher – [REDACTED]

What should I do if I have any concerns about this study?

If you have concerns about this study, please feel free to contact my lead supervisor Professor Jenny Phillimore: [REDACTED]. You can also raise any concerns through the University of Birmingham's ethical review process. Further details about the process are available here:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>

**Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part in
this research project.**

10.2 Consent forms

10.2.1 Informed Consent Form for Interviews

‘The importance of user-experience in refugee integration policymaking: how can a design thinking approach inform a better UK integration policy?’

Researcher: Allaa Barri

Project Supervisors: Professor Jenny Phillimore [REDACTED] and
Dr Laurence Lessard-Phillips [REDACTED]

Address: University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham UK B15 2TT

Contact Details: [REDACTED]

Please complete this form after you have read the participant information sheet. If you require any further information prior to completing this consent form, please contact the lead researcher – Allaa Barri. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep and refer back to at any time.

Participant’s Statement

I confirm that

(Please tick the box if you agree with the statement)

I have read the participant information sheet and I understand what participation in this research project involves.	
I understand that if I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can withdraw before taking part in the interview.	

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the UK's Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
I agree that my participation in the interview will be audio recorded via a digital audio recorder, and that the lead researcher can take notes during the interview, and I consent to the use of these materials as part of the research project.	
I understand that data collected during the interview will be published as a PhD thesis and may be published as part of other material including but not limited to journal articles, books, reviews. Information will also be using in presentations, conferences and seminars.	
I understand that I can request that data relating to my contributions to the interview can be removed from the study and destroyed up to 30 days after my participation.	
I understand that my personal information will be anonymised in all outputs from this research project, and it will not be possible to identify me from any publications or presentations.	
I agree that the research project has been explained in a satisfactory way and I consent to taking part in this study.	

Name of participant:

Signature:

Date:

Name of researcher:

Signature:

Date:

10.2.2 Informed Consent Form for Focus Group Discussions with Refugees

‘The importance of user-experience in refugee integration policymaking: how can a design thinking approach inform a better UK integration policy?’

Researcher: Allaa Barri

Project Supervisors: Professor Jenny Phillimore [REDACTED] and Dr Laurence Lessard-Phillips [REDACTED]

Address: University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham UK B15 2TT

Contact Details: [REDACTED]

Please complete this form after you have read the participant information sheet. If you require any further information prior to completing this consent form, please contact the lead researcher – Allaa Barri. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep and refer back to at any time.

Participant’s Statement

I confirm that

(Please tick the box if you agree with the statement)

I have read the participant information sheet and I understand what participation in this research project involves.	
I understand that if I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can withdraw before taking part in the focus group discussions.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such	

information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the UK's Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
I agree that my participation in the Focus Group Discussion could be audio recorded via a digital audio recorder, and I consent to the use of this material as part of the research project.	
I agree that the researcher can take pictures and record videos during the focus group, and I consent to the use of this material as part of the research project.	
I understand that the lead researcher will take notes during the Focus Group Discussion and I consent to the use of this material as part of the research project.	
I understand that data collected during the Focus Group Discussion will be presented to policymakers to discuss the possibilities of using it in designing future refugee integration projects.	
I understand that data collected during the Focus Group Discussion will be published as a PhD thesis and may be published as part of other material including but not limited to journal articles, books, reviews. Information will also be using in presentations, conferences and seminars.	
I understand that I can request that data collected relating to my contributions to the Focus Group Discussion can be removed from the study and destroyed up to 30 days after my participation (except for sticky notes or other information contributed as part of group activities).	

I understand that my personal information will be anonymised in all outputs from this research project, and it will not be possible to identify me from any publications or presentations.	
I confirm that I will maintain confidentiality of information discussed during this focus group discussion and understand that I should not repeat anything outside the group.	
I agree that the research project has been explained in a satisfactory way and I consent to taking part in this study.	

Name of participant:

Signature:

Date:

Name of researcher:

Signature:

Date:

10.3 Topic guides

10.3.1 Focus Group Discussion Guide- Refugees

Brainstorming (10 min)

- Defining refugee integration: What is refugee integration?
- Introducing indicators/domains.

Experience Diagramming (*mapping refugees' journey to integration through services*) (25 min)

- On a white board with a horizontal arrow, add integration services provided under each indicator (i.e., education, employment, health, housing, etc).
- Then add two smiley faces at the beginning of the arrow, one on top of the arrow to represent having a positive experience and one negative experience.
- Provide sticky notes to participants and ask them to capture their reflections on these services and ask them to either post it on top of the arrow to capture a positive experience or post it under the arrow to capture a negative experience and challenges.
- Summarise the main issues raised under each indicator/domain.

Statement starter (*identifying solutions*) (25 min)

- On a white board draw boxes and include a statement starter (How might we?), in each statement starter tackle one of the constraints in each domain highlighted before.
- Provide sticky notes to participants and invite them to write solutions/ answers under any statements they want.
- Summarise the ideas, collate duplicates, and prepare a list of solutions for the next activity.

Visualise the vote (*deciding which idea to priorities for prototyping*) (20 min)

- On a white board write solutions suggested in the previous activity and put a small box next to each solution.
- Give each participant 3 index sticky tabs, and ask them to vote for their best 3 solutions so that they can work on it in their next activity
- Highlight the top 3 voted solutions.

Proposals/ Prototype (*give participants opportunity to develop solutions further*) **(40 min)**

- Divide participants into 3 smaller groups and allocate a solution from the previous activity to develop further.
- Give the groups 20 minutes to work on their solution and prepare a presentation.
- Give each group 5 minutes to present their solution.
- Take 5 minutes to discuss these 3 presentations and thanking everyone for participating.

10.3.2 Interview guide – Policy Makers – First round

Current Role in the organisation/ integration service

- > What organisation do you work for?
- > What is your role in the organisation? (please specify beyond the job title)

Existing Knowledge about Refugee Integration

- Perceptions of and experience in refugee integration area
 - > How do you define integration?
 - > How long have you been working on refugee integration?
 - > Which areas of refugee integration are you familiar with?
 - > How do you define an integrated society?
- Pro and Cons of current practices
 - > What are the main challenges or limitations that you face while planning or implementing refugee integration?
 - > What are the main opportunities?
 - > Can you please give me an example of good practice in refugee integration?

Introducing and Discussing Knowledge Generated by Refugees

- Sharing new knowledge
 - > Who do you think should be involved in planning refugee integration interventions and policy? What are your reasons for this?
 - > Introducing new ideas about refugee integration, and proposed solutions.
- Discussing knowledge
 - > How do you perceive the ideas generated by refugees?
 - > What did you learn that was new knowledge for you?
 - > Which of these ideas could be implemented in your future interventions? Which could not be implemented and why?

Design thinking and Co-Production

- > Do you think the use of co-production help to inform refugee integration policy by bringing the knowledge from refugees to the policymaking level?
- > Would you recommend co-production for planning future refugee integration projects? Why (not)?

10.3.3 Interview guide – Policy Makers – Second round

Changes in Knowledge and Perception

- How do you define integration?
- How do you define an integrated society?
- Since our last interview did you learn anything new about refugee integration?
- What did you learn? Where did you learn it from?

Using Knowledge Generated by Refugees

- Since our last interview did you use any of the ideas that we discussed in planning or implementing refugee integration?
- If yes:
 - > How did you use this knowledge?
 - > Did it help you in facilitating integration?
 - > Would you say that you will try applying Co-Production in future projects?
- If no:
 - > Why did you choose not to use this knowledge?
 - > What could be done to enhance Co-production so that it can generate useful knowledge?
 - > Would you say that you will try applying Co-Production in future projects?

10.4 Questionnaires

10.4.1 Pre-Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire

Name: _____

- *This questionnaire was designed to determine what you already know about refugee integration. You will be asked to complete another questionnaire at the end of the focus group discussion so that we can assess what you have learned and how your knowledge changed.*
- *This is not a “test” and you will not be “graded” on your performance.*
- *The questionnaire has questions about a variety of topics that will be covered in this focus group discussion. You should complete all questions on your own and to the best of your ability.*

What does the term refugee integration mean to you?

What are the main challenges that refugees face while trying to integrate into British society?

**What do you think is/are the most important thing(s) to facilitating integration?
(you can choose multiple answers)**

- ☐ Access to education
- ☐ Access to language courses
- ☐ Access to employment
- ☐ Access to housing
- ☐ Access to health
- ☐ Building a social network
- ☐ Access to leisure
- ☐ Culture awareness
- ☐ Having digital skills
- ☐ Having safety
- ☐ Having stability
- ☐ Having rights and responsibilities
- ☐ All of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify)_____

Who do you think should be involved in planning refugee integration? (you can choose multiple answers)

- ☐ Government

☐ Host Community

☐ Refugees

☐ NGOs/ Charities

☐ All of the above

☐ Other (please

specify) _____

Do you feel that you know better your needs as a refugee and what can facilitate your integration in the UK? (please choose one answer)

☐ Yes No ☐

Do you feel that you share the same knowledge or view on integration with other refugees? (please choose one answer)

☐ Yes No ☐

10.4.2 Post-Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire

Name: _____

- *This questionnaire was designed to determine what you already know about refugee integration. You have been asked to complete a questionnaire earlier so that we can assess what you have learned and how your knowledge changed.*
- *This is not a “test” and you will not be “graded” on your performance.*
- *The questionnaire has questions about a variety of topics that were covered in the focus group discussion. You should complete all questions on your own and to the best of your ability.*

What does the term refugee integration mean to you?

What are the main challenges that refugees face while trying to integrate into British society?

What do you think is/are the most important thing(s) for facilitating integration? (you can choose multiple answers)

- ☐ Access to education
- ☐ Access to language courses
- ☐ Access to employment
- ☐ Access to housing
- ☐ Access to health
- ☐ Building a social network
- ☐ Access to leisure
- ☐ Culture awareness
- ☐ Having digital skills
- ☐ Having safety
- ☐ Having stability
- ☐ Having rights and responsibilities
- ☐ All of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify)_____

Who do you think should be involved in planning refugee integration? (you can choose multiple answers)

- ☐ Government
- ☐ Host Community
- ☐ Refugees

☐ NGOs/ Charities

☐ All of the above

☐ Other (please specify) _____

Do you feel that you know better your needs as a refugee and what can facilitate your integration in the United Kingdom?(please choose one answer)

☐ Yes No ☐

Do you feel that you share the same knowledge or views on integration with other refugees? (please choose one answer)

☐ Yes No ☐

Do you feel that your knowledge about refugee integration has changed after this focus group discussion? (please choose one answer)

☐ Yes No ☐

What is the most important thing that you learned today? What information will be the most useful to you as a refugee?

10.5 Refugee Participant Sample

Participant ID	Gender	Age Group	Length of Time in UK	English Proficiency	Educational Level	Employment Status
P1	Female	25-34	3-5 years	Advanced	University	Employed
P2	Male	35-44	3-5 years	Advanced	University	Employed
P3	Female	18-24	3-5 years	Intermediate	University	Unemployed
P4	Female	45-54	3-5 years	Basic	Illiterate	Unemployed
P5	Female	45-54	2-3 years	Intermediate	High School	Employed
P6	Female	25-34	2-3 years	Basic	University	Unemployed
P7	Male	55+	3-5 years	Basic	Primary	Unemployed
P8	Female	35-44	3-5 years	Intermediate	High School	Employed
P9	Female	45-54	3-5 years	Advanced	University	Employed
P10	Female	25-34	2-3 years	Intermediate	University	Unemployed
P11	Female	18-24	3-5 years	Basic	High School	Unemployed
