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## The Role of 'Unity' in Refugee Communities: A Case Study of Integration Mechanisms in Leeds (UK)

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### Abstract

From anecdotal discussions with members of refugee communities in Leeds, this research has developed the hypothesis of a refugee-made integration mechanism called 'unity' helping to support and further integrate these communities through the facilitation of social networks and accumulation of social capital. As such, this paper is an experiment assessing the positive impact on integration that 'unity' has for the communities who practice it. Thus, this study examines the role of 'unity' as a mechanism facilitating the creation and maintenance of social networks in refugee community organisations (RCOs) in Leeds.

In order to test the hypothesis, this research evidence-checks the role of 'unity' comparing it to established literature on integration mechanisms and social capital theories, additionally bringing case studies and evidence from interviews conducted with eight refugee leaders of the communities.

The key findings of this study confirmed that 'unity' plays two roles simultaneously as a mechanism for integration by acting as an ignition for new organisations and networks, but also by being the glue maintaining the community together and continuously offering support towards integration. 'Unity' operates within the 'shared values' of the communities and turns these values into sustained and valuable networks. The networks then become eased pathways to achieving 'marks and means', which is the last stage of a successful integration within frameworks used by research and policies in the global north.

**Keywords** *integration mechanism; refugee community organisations; social capital.*

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In conclusion, I hope that this work contributes to ongoing research efforts aimed at enhancing the integration of individuals seeking a life of dignity and security in another country.

## 1. Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the role of ‘unity’ developed by refugee communities in Leeds in attempts to integrate. The research focuses on analysing how refugee leaders perceive ‘unity’ as a social network mechanism within refugee groups and the factors influencing its development. This study also investigates what role ‘unity’ plays as a common dynamic in the communities, and which are the factors behind its conception. Additionally, the research examines the benefits of framing ‘unity’ as a social network mechanism within the framework of social capital theories. Finally, the study examines the potential impact of the social capital generated through ‘unity’ on the integration of these communities.

For refugees, integration is a key aspect of the traditional ‘durable solutions’ presented by UNHCR<sup>1</sup>. Despite extensive literature on integration, its dynamism and constant adjustments to new geopolitical arrangements require continuous research and re-evaluation. Whilst UK policies and approaches towards the concept of integration have changed radically over the past 10 years, one of the main factors considered by scholars remains: social networks and social capital are core tools for the integration process.<sup>2</sup> Morrice reinforced that, for successful integration of refugees, social capital should be taken into account as a mechanism to make other aspects of integration feasible, such as informal and social learning opportunities.<sup>3</sup> International and influential institutions such as the World Bank and OECD have promoted the concept to the growing interest of policy-making circles on social capital. Researchers at the World Bank believe that ‘social relations provide opportunities for mobilizing other growth-enhancing resources, that social capital does not exist in a political vacuum, and that the nature and extent of the interactions between communities and institutions hold the key to understanding the prospects for development in a given society’.<sup>4</sup> On a similar note, OECD established that human capital to advance economic prosperity goes together with social capital.<sup>5</sup>

According to Cheong et al, since the 1960’s, policies addressing integration of migrants in the UK ‘have been based on a complex range of ideologies, including ‘assimilation’, ‘integration’ and ‘multiculturalism’.<sup>6</sup> For these authors, the integration of migrants in Britain, and mostly in the global north countries, represents a concern for policy makers due to the challenges to connecting the concepts of immigration, social cohesion and social capital. Morrice explains that the social capital concept and relevance is present in the UK’s political sphere, generating interest in Government policy and research areas.<sup>7</sup> This is due to social capital’s established relationship with the outcomes that concern policy makers such as economic growth, social inclusion and cohesion, lower unemployment and crime, improved health and educational achievement, effective government and more active citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

1 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2003), Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4124b6a04.html> [accessed May 2023].

2 Broadhead, J. (2020), Policy Primer: Integration [Online] The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/primers/policy-primer-integration/> [accessed May 2023]; Kindler, M., Ratcheva, V. and Piechowska, M. (2015) ‘Social networks, social capital and migrant integration at local level. European literature review’, IRIS Working Paper Series, No. 6/2015. Birmingham: Institute for Research into Superdiversity. Available at: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2015/working-paper-series/iris-wp-6-2015.pdf> [accessed May 2023]

3 Morrice, L. (2007) Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26:2, 155-172. Available at: Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital: *International Journal of Lifelong Education*: Vol 26, No 2 (tandfonline.com) [accessed May 2023]

4 Woolcock, M. and Narayan, D. (2000) ‘Social capital: Implications for development theory, research, and policy’, *The World Bank research observer*, 15(2), pp. 225–249. doi: 10.1093/wbro/15.2.225. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3986417> [accessed May 2023]. Pg 243.

5 OECD (2001), *The Well-being of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264189515-en>. Available at: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-well-being-of-nations\\_9789264189515-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-well-being-of-nations_9789264189515-en) [accessed May 2023]

6 Cheong, P.H. et al (2007), *Immigration, social cohesion and social capital: A critical review*, SAGE PUBLICATIONS, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi. Available at: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?iname=Cheong&handle=hein.journals/critsplcy27&collection=&page=24&collection=journals> [accessed May 2023]. Pg 3

7 Morrice, L. (2007) Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26:2, 155-172. Available at: Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital: *International Journal of Lifelong Education*: Vol 26, No 2 (tandfonline.com) [accessed May 2023]

8 SEU, 2000; SEU 2001; Harper, 2001 cited in Morrice, 2007, p. 160.

That said, Morrice emphasises that the concept's nature is contested, and similarly shows limitations as an instrument of policy.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the author also explains that the idea of social capital has the power to show some of the 'less tangible barriers' faced by refugees and asylum seekers when trying to access some of the 'means and marks' of integration, such as employment and educational opportunities.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, social capital is associated with an individual's power through relationships and connections. This power links the individual to knowledge, ideas and skills that can be used for their own advantage. What Morrice acknowledges accurately is that isolated and marginalised communities, such as refugees and asylum seekers, will have less access to the more valuable bridging and linking social capital.<sup>11</sup> This will reflect into fewer opportunities in any area of these communities' lives and end up being deployed for what Putnam calls 'getting by', evidencing several limitations in their integration and achievements.<sup>12</sup> In sum, the author highlights that refugees and asylum seekers might be foregoing advantageous forms of social capital as most of the time they are dependent on wider social and political contexts, such as the ones under the influence of immigration and ethnicity, to be able to develop and foster connections.<sup>13</sup>

The main problem that comes with migrants' social capital's dependence on wider social and political contexts is that, as a by-product of on the 11th September 2001 terrorist attacks, immigration has become a symbol of possible danger and framed as 'security risk, igniting xenophobia and the fear of the other'.<sup>14</sup> On the social sphere, several recent studies have examined whether the terrorist attacks in the US on 9/11 increased discrimination toward certain minorities, not only in the US, but also in other countries such as Canada, Australia, UK, Sweden and Germany. Findings have shown that, among native German residents, the attacks had a significant and negative impact on individual attitudes toward immigration and immigrants for example.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, as research shows, instead of focusing on integration policies, the Home Office has been following a route to fortify the idea of 'invading migrants'. Morrice and Cheong et al explained that this line of thinking reflects inevitably into cuts in the budget for research and migrant's support towards integration.<sup>16</sup> More recently, the Illegal Migration Act 2023 which the UK parliament enacted in July 2023, has also contributed to the notion that integration is not a priority policy, which has caused negative effects on the funding and planning for integration of migrants, especially refugees. An externality of this scenario is indicated in the fact that migrant communities need to build solutions on their own in order to be able to integrate. Morrice calls attention to the fact that most of the social capital accrued by migrants is within their own communities, which indicates a lack of diversity in the connections and limitations on the value and types of capital accumulated.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, although there is literature around general integration processes within the region of Yorkshire, the city of Leeds presents a rich and diverse social aspects of the integration dynamics, which are still vastly

9 Morrice, L. (2007) Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26:2, 155-172. Available at: Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital: *International Journal of Lifelong Education*: Vol 26, No 2 (tandfonline.com) [accessed May 2023]

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid. P.42

15 Schuller, S. (2012). The Effects of 9/11 on Attitudes Toward Immigration and the Moderating Role of Education, IZA Discussion Paper No. 7052. Available at: <https://docs.iza.org/dp7052.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

16 Ibid; Cheong, P.H. et al (2007), Immigration, social cohesion and social capital: A critical review, SAGE PUBLICATIONS, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi. Available at: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?iname=Cheong&handle=hein.journals/critsplyc27&collection=&page=24&collection=journals> [accessed May 2023].

17 Morrice, L. (2007) Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26:2, 155-172. Available at: Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital: *International Journal of Lifelong Education*: Vol 26, No 2 (tandfonline.com) [accessed May 2023].

unexplored.<sup>18</sup> According to the Leeds Observatory platform run by Leeds City Council, the city has been known as a big hub for migrant communities.<sup>19</sup> Although the report's numbers are based on the National Insurance Number (NiN) registrations requested in Leeds and overseas, it is still relevant to note that there are 169 different nationalities registered in the city. Morrice describes such phenomenon as 'chain migration', which explains 'the tendency for new migrants to follow in the footsteps of earlier migrants and to settle in areas where they already have kinship groups or friends.'<sup>20</sup> In this sense, chain migration provides more opportunity for 'support and access to social capital for the newly arrived migrants while they are getting established'.

In response to such a large movement, Leeds City Council, as the main authority for integration policies in the region of Yorkshire, has elaborated a plan called 'Migration in Leeds 2021 – 2025'. This plan's approach to integration strategies revolves around deploying integration services within the third sector service providers, such as charities and independent migrant community organisations. This has propelled local communities and charities, such as Leeds Refugee Forum (LRF), a grassroots and refugee-led organisation established to empower and support refugee communities and their leaders, to organise themselves and develop services that best accommodate their own needs. In this sense, the Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) in Leeds have become a valuable case study to understand how and which strategies and mechanisms are developed within the communities' fostering integration for migrants.

Although 'chain migration' can improve the life of newly comers, and as seen by Leeds City Council actions can be added into local policies as a beneficial approach to social cohesion, the UK Government sought a way of dispersing asylum seekers around the country, resulting into inhibiting social capital formation through the *Immigration and Asylum Act*.<sup>21</sup> Due to UK migration policies for people seeking refuge in the country like this one, there is a large contribution to the perception of refugees being a burden to small communities. This way, it does not come as a surprise when the diversity and number of communities established in Leeds are an attraction to newly status-granted refugees due to the positive environment provided by these communities. This fact is corroborated by the large number of RCOs registered with the LRF. Since its establishment in 2007, the LRF has been supporting more than 50 different registered RCOs in Leeds.

The motivation for this research topic stemmed from previous anecdotal discussions between the researcher, whilst working at LRF, and refugees which are part of the organisations supported by the charity. During these discussions, a recurring theme emerged: the recognition of 'social networks mechanisms' that fostered a sense of community among the refugees. Interestingly, the perspectives on these social networks varied among individuals, leading to divergent viewpoints. Nevertheless, one particular 'social network mechanism' stood out, characterized by diverse groups consistently forming strong bonds based on their shared willingness to support one another within their communities. This observation emphasized the potential significance of 'unity' as a social network mechanism in shaping the experiences and dynamics of refugee integration. Refugees highlighted the positive outcomes (such as community peer support and camaraderie) brought by relationships shaped through the concept of 'unity' within refugee communities in Leeds. Settled refugees frequently expressed 'unity' as a recurring dynamic, driven by the collective intention for well-being within the community as a whole. Community leaders emphasized 'unity' as the primary and unique source of emotional and mental support during challenging times. Additionally, they viewed it as a phenomenon that safeguarded their culture and heritage by preserving traditions, providing comfort and assistance during hardships, and fostering a sense of celebration for individual achievements.

18 Phillimore, J. (2021), "Refugee-Integration-Opportunity Structures: Shifting the Focus From Refugees to Context", *Journal of refugee studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 1946-1966. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/34/2/1946/5804123?login=true> [accessed May 2023]

19 <https://observatory.leeds.gov.uk/migration-map/>

20 Morrice, L. (2007) Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26:2, 155-172. Available at: Lifelong learning and the social integration of refugees in the UK: the significance of social capital: *International Journal of Lifelong Education*: Vol 26, No 2 (tandfonline.com) [accessed May 2023].

21 HOME OFFICE (2002) Nationality and Immigration Act (London: HMSO). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/41/contents> [accessed May 2023].

In this context, while 'unity' can be portrayed differently in each one of the several communities, all the testimonies associated with the idea of 'unity' around Leeds are displayed with positive outcomes for the group they belong to, which sparks this research's interest on analysing if 'unity' can be identified as playing a role within the integration process for the refugee communities. Given the recent deterring policies towards immigration in the UK, the research of 'unity' comes as an interesting study within the mechanisms considered for integration policies, which can potentially compensate for the lack of support and interest in improving channels of integration from public institutions. Understanding the possible role of 'unity' as a social network mechanism can provide some important reflections by showing how supporting such mechanisms can impact positively the integration of migrants, especially when policies are aiming for social cohesion given the large number of different groups settled in the UK. Finally, given the skyrocketing numbers of refugees migrating and settling in Leeds<sup>22</sup>, and predictions of migratory waves for the foreseeable future, discussing integration mechanisms and dynamics provides a relevant window to explore and a touchstone for further studies on policies and projects promoting inclusion and integration of refugees further.<sup>23</sup>

Within this context, this paper explores the idea of 'unity' as a mechanism playing a role within the integration process for the refugee communities settled in Leeds. This hypothesis was generated from the anecdotal observations of 'unity' made by members of the communities and is tested by reviewing literature on integration and social capital for migrants. As a second step for validation of the hypothesis, this study interviews leaders of RCOs in order to gather data on their communities' views on 'unity'. Finally, this research analyses and cross-checks the information on the possibility of 'unity' performing a role in integration, and also brings suggestions on how this mechanism could add to policies and research on integration for migrants.

The paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter One reviews the relevant literature, which focuses on: (i) understanding the gap in 'integration within refugee groups' (ii) exploring forced migration and refugee studies on social capital and network ties during integration and settlement periods, and (iii) analysing the existent literature and ideas on 'unity' for integration. This chapter aims to connect the areas of study and capture the essence of a potential 'unity' mechanism, which role it plays within the integration framework.

Chapter Two presents the methodological approach, detailing the ethical considerations and the limitations encountered during the literature desk research and interviews process.

Chapter Three analyses the experiences lived and told in interviews by refugee community leaders settled in Leeds, connecting to themes and patterns found in established literature. This chapter aims to understand and identify the factors which incentivises 'unity' within the communities, and the benefits and impacts of this phenomenon for these groups. This last chapter also puts into perspective the data gathered in the interviews against the integration's framework developed throughout the research by crosschecking and potentially identifying the existence of an 'unity' mechanism factor playing in the integration process for refugees in Leeds.

The conclusions reveal dual roles for 'unity' as a mechanism. Firstly, it functions as an intrinsic 'feeling' inside leaders, and secondly, it acts as the catalyst for initiating and sustaining social networks. Furthermore, a noteworthy finding underscores the beneficial role of 'unity' as a mechanism in enhancing the effective integration of refugees, contributing to their success in a new social environment. Finally, the study offers

22 'Arrivals to Leeds increased in 2022 as 93% more people arrived compared to 2021, whereas across the UK immigration increased by 71%'. Leeds City Council (2023) Annual update on migration activity in Leeds, [online]<https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s250377/Annual%20Update%20on%20Migration%20Cover%20Report%20081023.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

23 Chazalnoël, M.T. and A. Randall (2021) Migration and the slow-onset impacts of climate change: Taking stock and taking action. In: World Migration Report 2022 (M. McAuliffe and A. Triandafyllidou, eds.). International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva. Available at: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022-chapter-9> [accessed May 2023]

insights into the potential synergy between community-initiated integration mechanisms and established integration frameworks and policies. This suggests that locally-driven approaches can complement and enrich existing integration strategies, thereby presenting a promising avenue for future policy considerations. In summary, this research sheds light on the multifaceted role of 'unity' in leadership, social networking, and refugee integration, and highlights the potential of community-led mechanisms to enhance integration outcomes and policies.



## 2. Literature Review

This chapter considers the hypothesis of the existence of 'unity' and aims to provide a background for building a concept for this social network mechanism, by a detailed examination of relevant literature. For this reason, the desk research literature stems from established social capital theories for integration of migrants. In order to understand the possible 'social network' role of 'unity' within the integration process, it is essential to identify the key components and mechanisms played by refugee groups embedded in integration. Whilst most of the mainstream literature analyses the integration between migrants and host communities, this study will focus on investigating integration mechanisms played within and inside the refugee communities. The conceptual framework established by the traditional literature will serve, nevertheless, as a model to understand the structure and framework of mechanisms in the integration process, also assisting in the identification of factors and subcategories composing integration process' domains.

### 2.1 Integration

As the research for this paper was conducted with communities in Leeds, this literature review focuses on integration within the UK. The UK has been a host country for migration for a very long time and continues to do so until nowadays<sup>24</sup>. In other words, as a host country it is responsible for hosting asylum seekers and refugees usually for a very prolonged, during which refugees receive support and protection. Concomitantly, as time progresses, there has also been a shift in the motives and needs of migrants coming to the UK, and most precisely on policies regulating and assisting the integration of these migrants<sup>25</sup>. By June 2021, 'the size of foreign-born population in the UK had increased from about 5.3 million in 2004 to 9.5 million', despite the net outflow of EU citizens after Brexit and barriers imposed by Covid-19 pandemic with closing borders<sup>26</sup>. Although not accounting for the asylum seekers living in hotels, and missing collection of data during lockdown periods of the pandemic, numbers still have shown that 64% of the foreign-born people are non-EU citizens in the UK<sup>27</sup>. Given the considerable number of refugees within this population, integration strategies and policies for refugees are attracting considerable critical attention in the UK<sup>28</sup>.

Over the past decade, the UK's approach to integration has shifted dramatically. In the 2010s, policies focused on fostering conditions conducive to integration. In contrast, recent initiatives, such as the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and the Rwanda Bill, have redirected funds towards preventing migrant entry into the UK.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, of the main factors considered by scholars in the field of integration remains: social networks, generating social capital, are core tools for the integration process<sup>30</sup>. Within this frame of reference, this paper investigates the integration literature and its frameworks from the refugee and forced migration area which approach the social mechanisms within migrants in host countries. The most relevant feature in this literature is the perspective that each society, sphere or field allows for different opportunity structures, and therefore integration frameworks and the outcomes of integration process cannot be unidimensional<sup>31</sup>. This statement has been based on the premise of the integration framework designed by Ager

24 Broadhead, J. (2020), Policy Primer: Integration [Online] The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/primers/policy-primer-integration/> [accessed May 2023]

25 Ibid.

26 Rienzo, C. & Vargas-Silva, C. (2022) Migrants in the UK: An Overview. Migration Observatory briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/> [accessed May 2023].

27 Ibid.

28 Kindler, M., Ratcheva, V. and Piechowska, M. (2015) 'Social networks, social capital and migrant integration at local level. European literature review', IRIS Working Paper Series, No. 6/2015. Birmingham: Institute for Research into Superdiversity. Available at: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2015/working-paper-series/iris-wp-6-2015.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

29 Walsh, P. (2024) 'Q&A: The UK's former policy to send asylum seekers to Rwanda'. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/qa-the-uks-policy-to-send-asylum-seekers-to-rwanda/> [accessed July 2024].

30 Broadhead, J. (2020), Policy Primer: Integration [Online] The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/primers/policy-primer-integration/> [accessed May 2023].

31 Phillimore, J. (2021), "Refugee-Integration-Opportunity Structures: Shifting the Focus From Refugees to Context", *Journal of refugee studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 1946-1966. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/34/2/1946/5804123?login=true> [accessed May 2023].

and Strang. This framework has been used as a multinational reference and largely promoted in the global north countries and government reports, as well as implanted into policies for integration<sup>32</sup>. Phillimore's multidimensional report has also based her research on the framework, which states that a successful integration should entail:

*achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; **processes of social connection within and between groups within the community**; and structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture and the local environment (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 166).*

Likewise, Fielden also acknowledges that integration is only seen as a durable solution when it takes into consideration the following three main dimensions: migrants being legally recognised by the host state, with the opportunity of becoming economically, socially and culturally active in the host society without fearing discrimination<sup>33</sup>. In opposition to 'assimilation', Fielden states that integration happens effectively when migrants do not abandon their own culture and way of life to feel integrated. In sum, social engagement, as above mentioned, is one of the domains playing a vital role within integration mechanisms.

Ager and Strang note in their framework that a "successful integration" is a process that includes the practice of social connection – which they separate between social bonds, bridges and links. Alongside, they also make a reservation that social capital within integration is the 'outcome of interrelated integration domains', thus avoiding the assumption that integration and social cohesion are achievable through social connection alone<sup>34</sup>. In sum, there is the understanding that social connection is one of the pillars alongside others generating social capital for 'successful integration' in global north countries, and that it does not act on its own<sup>35</sup>.

Furthermore, Ager and Strang established that 'social connection' is a domain and the 'connective tissue', mediating the 'foundational principles of citizenship and rights on one hand, and public outcomes in sectors such as employment, housing, education and health on the other'<sup>36</sup>. On top of that, after analysing the interviews done throughout their research, the authors explained that, for refugees, integration is a 'two-way' process, and translates into expectations beyond the 'absence of conflict and toleration between different groups', but to a community where there is an active 'mixing' of people. This process involves a sense of 'belonging', which represents 'links with family, committed friendships and a sense of respect and shared values'<sup>37</sup>.

Additionally, Hovil has explained that it is an imperative for migrants to be able to create national and local social bonds in order to have the possibility of an effective integration. For example, in one of Hovil's case studies, migrants in Tanzania would jeopardise their national citizenship in the host country to remain in the locality in which they established themselves, so as to show the relevance of social ties to this group<sup>38</sup>.

Refugee and forced migration literature may be lacking the supportive framework needed for the investigation of specific social capital and networks within refugee groups. Although Ager and Strang's integra-

32 Kindler, M., Ratcheva, V. and Piechowska, M. (2015) 'Social networks, social capital and migrant integration at local level. European literature review', IRIS Working Paper Series, No. 6/2015. Birmingham: Institute for Research into Superdiversity. Available at: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2015/working-paper-series/iris-wp-6-2015.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

33 Fielden, A. (2008) "Local Integration: an under-reported solution to protracted refugee situations", UNHCR - New Issues in Refugee Research, [Online], Research Paper no. 158. P. 1. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/local-integration-under-reported-solution-protracted-refugee-situations-alexandra-fielden> [accessed May 2023].

34 Ager, A. and Strang, A. (2008) 'Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(2): 166–191. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262?login=true> [accessed May 2023].

35 Ibid.

36 p. 177

37 p. 178

38 Hovil, L. (2016) *Refugees, Conflict and the Search for Belonging*, 1st edn, Springer International Publishing, Cham. p. 111. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307523310\\_Refugees\\_Conflict\\_and\\_the\\_Search\\_for\\_Belonging](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307523310_Refugees_Conflict_and_the_Search_for_Belonging) [accessed May 2023].

tion concept framework encompasses the integration aspects within the UK, some authors pointed out to the fact that it takes less account of aspects of social, political and economic context in which individuals or groups integrate<sup>39</sup>.

This framework has also been criticised for its 'national' approach to different local integration levels. If looking more specifically into how integration processes are governed in the UK, Crul and Schneider note that the importance of local context proved very relevant by the outcome of their research using second-generation migrant's data. According to the authors, the data on 'how civic participation and immigrant belonging were shaped' showed an issue with different levels of integration in each area<sup>40</sup>. Due to these discoveries, England has shifted from national to local integration strategies as the 'challenges are not uniform throughout the country' according to the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper<sup>41</sup>. In this sense, the integration framework is not completely reliable when considered as the main approach to integration in small and local areas.

As this study is focused on the integration mechanisms of communities living within the Leeds area, the authority responsible for integration policies in this case is Leeds City Council. In its attempt to address and improve integration, the council has developed, in partnership with Leeds Migration Partnership and other organisations, the plan called 'Migration in Leeds 2021 – 2025'<sup>42</sup>. This was a joint work covering on the ambitions of being a 'Best City' in terms of the strategies, coordination, and inclusive approach to migrants in the city. Although the document does not explicitly use the word 'integration' of migrants, it develops a 'long term strategic direction on migration which aims to ensure people who migrate to Leeds are able to establish their lives quickly and successfully'.

The Leeds City Council '2022 Annual update on migration activity in Leeds' includes sections explaining other concomitant plans being used to support integration of migrants in the city, such as the 'Safer Stronger Communities Leeds Plan 2021-2024' which entails 'community safety partnership and services, by focusing on the people who are new to Leeds and ensuring that their interests and contributions are included in all aspects of city life'<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, the document mentions a list of partners which contribute with giving directions, addressing the issues and ensuring provision of support to key migration programmes<sup>44</sup>. Some of the partners within the list are community-led and based organisations, being parties to several programmes promoted by the council, which vary between local, as the Leeds Migrant Access Programme, and national initiatives, such as the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) or the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

It is interesting to note, for the purposes of this study, that the report highlights the Leeds Migration Partnership as the most relevant partner for contribution within the third sector to Leeds City Council's strategies and policies for integration of migrants. According to the document's words, this group:

*is led by the migrant third sector and supported by Leeds City Council. It brings together individuals, groups and organisations to meet, think and share information and ensure that the voices of migrants are heard and influence decision makers. The partnership agreed that the previously agreed priorities of health, housing, learning and employment and safety and inclusion, were still relevant,*

39 Phillimore, J. (2021), "Refugee-Integration-Opportunity Structures: Shifting the Focus From Refugees to Context", *Journal of refugee studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 1946-1966. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/34/2/1946/5804123?login=true> [accessed May 2023].

40 Crul, M & Schneider, J. (2010) Comparative integration context theory: participation and belonging in new diverse European cities, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33:7, 1249-1268. p. 1260. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01419871003624068> [accessed May 2023]

41 DHCLG (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) (2018) Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, HM Government. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ac490f4e5274a0b1849f8c2/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ac490f4e5274a0b1849f8c2/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf) [accessed May 2023].

42 Leeds City Council (2021) Migration in Leeds 2021 – 2025. p. 2 [online] <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s224708/Migration%20in%20Leeds%20Strategy.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

43 Leeds City Council (2022) Annual update on migration activity in Leeds. p. 2 [online] <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s238824/Migration%20Update%20Cover%20Report%20101022.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

44 The list of partners includes Leeds Strategic Migration Board, Leeds Migrant Health Board, Leeds Migration Partnership, Community Champions, Cultural Food Hub, Communities of Interest Network, British Red Cross, PAFRAS, Leeds Asylum Seeker Support Network, within others.

*but a couple of other major priorities were raised – access to legal advice and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and associated implications*<sup>45</sup>.

Leeds Refugee Forum is part of the Leeds Migration Partnership group. This grassroots community-based registered charity advocates the promotion of further, better services for integration of migrants, and at the same time looks for resources to provide, within its scope and limitations, such services themselves. Unfortunately, the '2022 Annual update on migration activity in Leeds' does not provide more details on how specifically the planned strategies led by the Council are being applied in practice, however there is confirmation that these initiatives are being performed through the third sector, and sums of funds are awarded by the council to community-based organisations such as Leeds Refugee Forum, in order to promote services for integration of migrants.

In conclusion, although integration has been recognised by scholars as a multidimensional and local approach, reality shows that European countries still adopt the same standardised framework to build policies and strategies of integration of migrants.<sup>46</sup> For the purposes of this case study, when analysing the city of Leeds approaches to integration, this paper finds that the Leeds City Council supports local communities' initiatives as a way to support integration. Based on this, the services effectively performing this task are mainly run by the third sector and independent refugee and migrant's communities. In this regard, refugee groups established in Leeds configure a valuable case study to analyse mechanisms, such as 'unity', developed by migrants towards their integration process.

## 2.2 Social Capital

It is critical, for the abovementioned reasons, that this paper approaches social capital theories as to understand how they fit into the integration framework set out for migrant communities, and possibly, accommodate 'unity' within its framework. Within Ager and Strang's, the 'social connection' domain (including social bridges, bonds, links and potentially 'unity') feed from traditional theories on social capital, such as Bourdieu's and Putnam's<sup>47</sup>. These are all networks based on different components: for Bourdieu, the 3 dimensions of capital (economic, cultural and social) are closely related to the individual's social class. On the other hand, Putnam explains that social capital needs 3 components to be accounted for: (i) moral obligations and norms; (ii) social values – especially trust; and (iii) social networks, which include voluntary associations.

Bourdieu's theories encompass a great variety of aspects and networks relating to the building of social capital. His approach states that 'society is a plurality of social fields', and the forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) 'are the core factors defining positions and possibilities of the various actors in any field'<sup>48</sup>. For Bourdieu, the 'formation of a voluntary association can be seen as collective and individual strategies of investment aimed at the creation of permanent network of relations that will make possible the accumulation of social capital'<sup>49</sup>. This is well suited to explain the phenomenon called 'conviviality' in migrant literature. The studies in conviviality have shown that groups can demonstrate 'voluntary associations' when there is a strategy in place to reach a common goal.<sup>50</sup> For Bourdieu, these 'voluntary associations' are also social capital outcomes 'understood as resources produced by the association as a collective and shared

<sup>45</sup> 2022 Annual update on migration activity in Leeds (p. 3).

<sup>46</sup> European Commission (2020) 'The EC reveals its new EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)', [online] [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/ec-reveals-its-new-eu-action-plan-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/ec-reveals-its-new-eu-action-plan-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027_en) [accessed July 2024].

<sup>47</sup> p. 177

<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital. In: John G. Richardson (ed.): Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. New York: Greenwood Press. 241-258. p.14. Available at: [https://home.iitk.ac.in/~amman/soc748/bourdieu\\_forms\\_of\\_capital.pdf](https://home.iitk.ac.in/~amman/soc748/bourdieu_forms_of_capital.pdf) [accessed May 2023]

<sup>49</sup> p. 21

<sup>50</sup> Nyamnjoh, F. B. & Brudvig, I. (2014) "Conviviality and Negotiations with Belonging in Urban Africa", in E. F. Isin & P. Nyers (eds.), Routledge Handbook of global Citizenship Studies, London, Routledge, 217-229.

by its members<sup>51</sup>. From this perspective, Bourdieu ignores the possibility of networks where there is no apparent strategy in sight or clear goal to achieve, but just the union of the group and the possible outcomes that can come out of it – which would not be planned in advance.

Putnam's theories have been used in order to explain social capital outcomes from the migrant and refugee's communities. According to Newton<sup>52</sup>, Putnam's idea of trust considers that 'individual actors do something for the general good not because they know other interactors but because they trust that their own actions will be 'rewarded' via the positive development of communal relations'. However, Shapiro<sup>53</sup> acknowledges that Putnam's explanation on the origins of trust does not explain refugee's process through integration as it does not perceive other forms of groups outside the 'Euro-American' societies, forgetting about subcultural spheres for example. Likewise, Putnam's views also do not take into account the role of mass media or alternative forms of communication, only reflecting a theory that could be applied to 'homological organisational societies' dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, Putnam's theories do not cover the idea of conflict or opposing interests, rather focusing on trust and mechanisms that strengthen integration values in society. This paper's investigation exceeds the idea of conflict and rather focuses on identifying the social networks and connections that positively connect refugee groups, however, that does not mean that the 'conflictive' aspect of the groups must be disregarded as these connections are also part of the building or obstruction of the development of social capital within the refugee communities.

In summary, Putnam's approach on the idea of social capital regards societal and collective integration, whereas Bourdieu's perspectives are from 'the actors engaged in struggle in pursuit of their interests.'<sup>55</sup>

Although Putnam's idea on trust can explain some of the relationships between refugee groups, and Bourdieu's ideas on conflict demonstrate ways of building social capital in general, neither of these approaches fully addresses this paper's subject, which investigates a possible social network for refugee groups 'without an ulterior interest or goal'.

The literature on social capital theories directly applied to migration also fails to address the entire range of dynamics within refugee groups. Kindler, M., Ratcheva, V. and Piechowska, M.'s study findings have shown that volumes of network social capital are 'conditioned by nationality (country of origin), level of education, religion, type of mobility and level or earnings'<sup>56</sup>. Equally, the findings reveal that different types of networks, accrued social capital and how this capital is utilised are different depending on migrant's gender<sup>57</sup>. Likewise, a majority of studies illustrate a close relation among cultural, family, friends, ethnicity, shared values and religion ties for social connections.

However, this understanding of the concept also raises controversies between the experts. Kindler, Ratcheva and Piechowska's study acknowledges the confusion in defining anything social as social capital. For this reason, they find it important to present the main concepts of reviewed studies on social capital, such

51 p. 14

52 Newton, K. (2001) "Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy", *International political science review*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 201-214. p.8. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1601186> [accessed May 2023].

53 Shapiro, M.J. (1997) "Bowling Blind: Post Liberal Civil Society and the Worlds of Neo-Tocquevillean Social Theory", *Theory & event*, vol. 1, no. 1. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/32441> [accessed May 2023].

54 Ager, A. and Strang, A. (2008) 'Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(2): 166–191. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262?login=true> [accessed May 2023].

55 Siisiäinen, M. (2000). 'Two Concepts of Social Capital: Bourdieu vs. Putnam', ISTR Fourth International Conference: "The Third Sector: For What and for Whom?". Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, July 5-8, 2000. Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä. Available at: <https://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/7661/siisiainen.pdf?1> [accessed May 2023].

56 p. 7

57 p. 8

as Bourdieu and Putnam theoretical components, alongside with the main debates on the reviewed literature for refugee and forced migration's field<sup>58</sup>. Although traditional social capital theories (Bourdieu and Putnam) are considered all-encompassing of social networks in society, refugee and forced migration studies bring many criticisms when they are applied to migrants' social capital experiences. Rather, the field demonstrates that, theoretically, there is a wider range of different social networks in migrants' lives, which are part of the development and mobilisation of social capital.<sup>59</sup> Although Kindler, Ratcheva, and Piechowska's study brings policy contexts and how they affect the development of social capital among other things by the formation of migrant associations or communities, they do not identify refugees' unique social networks mechanisms to form them in the analysis. In view of this, one might say there is the need for more research focusing on social networks within the refugees' communities where 'social networks are built with no ulterior motive, but rather from a sense of belonging together'.

### 2.3 'Unity'

Due to scarce literature on this subject, this study uses a framework for investigating the role of 'unity' through a sociological gaze. The framework contained in the work produced by Lalonde, 'Unity in Diversity', was originally developed to establish the unity of humankind for the purposes of a sustainable and balanced development of the planet and humanity based on the unity of different environmental perspectives. On its foundation exactly lies the inspiration for this paper's proposal as it structures and explains 'unity' as a mechanism that is within all human beings. The 'diversity' aspect, in turn, is based on local and individual levels of systems and behavioural patterns. In the conclusion, Lalonde explains that the 'unity' within human beings and communities, despite the 'diversity' of each local environment, makes it possible to develop strategies and common actions for the groups, achieving better outcomes in universal terms.<sup>60</sup>

The connection between integration mechanisms researched by forced migration and refugee literature, and the sociological conceptual framework on 'Unity' is made through the sense of 'belonging' described by Ager and Strang. During the anecdotal discussions with leaders of the refugee communities, the sense of 'belonging' was frequently mentioned as the ignition starting the groups and the glue maintaining the community together. During the posterior interviews conducted for this study, the leaders developed further on the 'shared values' making this sense of 'belonging'. These shared values, which are also mentioned in Ager and Strang's work, can be translated into Lalonde's conceptual framework as the feeling incentivising common actions and development of strategies and better outcomes for everyone. Moreover, similar to Lalonde's work, Ager and Strang research findings were that 'such shared values did not deny diversity, difference and one's identity within a particular group, but provided a wider context within which people had a sense of belonging.'<sup>61</sup>

'Unity', then, can be interpreted as having a potential role as social network mechanism playing within the 'shared values', and therefore enhancing the chances of integration. If placed within the integration framework domains<sup>62</sup>, 'unity' would be a mechanism incentivising the social networks between the 'social connections', and also adding to 'facilitators' as the domains of integration.

<sup>58</sup> p. 5

<sup>59</sup> Kindler, M., Ratcheva, V. and Piechowska, M. (2015) 'Social networks, social capital and migrant integration at local level. European literature review', IRiS Working Paper Series, No. 6/2015. Birmingham: Institute for Research into Superdiversity. Available at: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2015/working-paper-series/iris-wp-6-2015.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

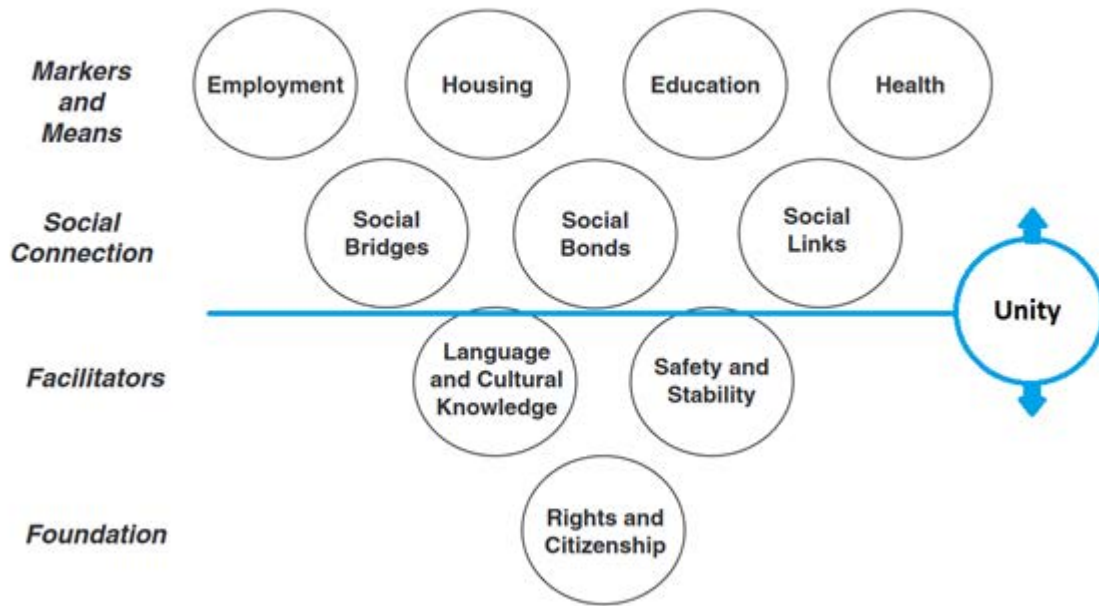
<sup>60</sup> Lalonde, R. (1994) 'Unity in Diversity: Acceptance and Integration in an Era of Intolerance and Fragmentation', *The Journal of Bahai Studies*. Available at: [https://bahai-library.com/lalonde\\_unity\\_diversity\\_jbs](https://bahai-library.com/lalonde_unity_diversity_jbs) [accessed May 2023].

<sup>61</sup> p. 178

<sup>62</sup> Ager, A. and Strang, A. (2008) 'Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(2): 166–191. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262?login=true> [accessed May 2023]; Ndofor-Tah et al (2019). Home Office indicators of integration framework 2019. Home Office Research Report. London: Home Office. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/627cc6d3d3bf7f052d33b06e/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf> [accessed May 2023]

2.3.1 Image 1 – A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration

**A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration**



Source: Ager and Strang (2008, p. 170), modified by author.

2.3.2 Image 2 – Home Office indicators of integration framework



Source: Ndofor-Tah et al (2019, page 15), modified by author.

In 2008's and 2019's frameworks, 'social connections' are separated between three types of relationship: 'social bridges', 'social bonds' and 'social links'. 'Social bridges' consider the relationship built between groups that do not share the same sense of identity, whereas 'social bonds' are built between groups with similar background. 'Social links' identify relationships and access as a migrant group to institutions such as the

government.<sup>63</sup> 'Facilitators', on the other hand, represent 'the factors facilitating the integration process'. After 2008, there was an evident increase on the role of digital skills into being able to access basic services, more so over and after the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, the literature review shows that, for successful integration of migrants, the integration process should consider the relationships and networks established within migrants' own groups and in their connections with other members of society. From Ager and Strang's integration framework perspective, networks are seen as a vital connector between 'facilitators' (language, digital skills, etc) and 'markers and means' (education, work, housing, etc). Such networks vary in modality and require several different mechanisms to stimulate and sustain them. These networks are known to accrue social capital, which in turn can give the migrants involved consequential outcomes. The outcomes can be strategically planned all along or mere consequences of networks which were promoted without any ulterior intentions of strategic gains down the line. Understanding the potential role of 'unity' translated from the latest intention is the main focus of this research.

Bourdieu's and Putnam's theories on social capital supported the understanding of how networks can translate into the 'markers and means' in practice, and what kind of mechanisms are used within the networks to start and accumulate such capital. For the purposes of this study, Bourdieu's theories involve the idea that voluntary associations are leading to the accumulation of social capital, whilst Putnam puts emphasis on the importance of "trust" and "voluntary associations" to create social networks. In different ways, both authors contribute to understanding the mechanisms and intentions of developing the networks to achieve social capital, and therefore, progressing towards integration.

There are some gaps in the literature on researching integration within refugee groups and forced migrant communities in the UK, especially given the large number of communities established in Leeds. Likewise, because the topic revolves around a very specific mechanism to develop social networks during integration, the refugee and forced migration studies literature would benefit from the contributions of this case study on local communities' practices for policies and further research developments for global north countries. Additionally, studying 'unity's relevance is tied to understanding communities' own mechanisms to navigate and improve their integration process. By having a conception of what the mechanism 'unity' means and what the factors promoting its development are, the literature in refugee and forced migration studies towards integration might be able to incorporate and comprehend further possibilities, which could be translated into new policies for instance, in order to support and improve migrants' integration journeys. Moreover, this study's purpose is the examination of refugee leaders' voices where this mechanism is constantly present and presented as a vital tool assisting the community in order to thrive in the host country. Bringing to light the role of 'unity' as a mechanism might be the answer to some gaps in previous works that have been left unexplained.

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<sup>63</sup> Ndofor-Tah et al (2019). Home Office indicators of integration framework 2019. Home Office Research Report. London: Home Office. p. 16. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/627cc6d3d3bf7f052d33b06e/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf> [accessed May 2023].

<sup>64</sup> Breaking Barriers – Meaningful employment for refugees (2021) One year later: the impact of Covid-19 on refugees. Report [online]. Available at: <https://breaking-barriers.co.uk/resource/one-year-later-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-refugees-one-year-later/> [accessed May 2023].



### 3. Methodology

The data collection in this research consisted of a literature review and qualitative interviews. The literature review involved analysing academic articles, books, reports, policy documents, and relevant studies on social capital theories, refugee and migrant integration conceptual frameworks, and related sociological topics. The search was conducted using Google Scholar and the University of London Online Library. This study's approach also included a systematic review to place 'unity' within Ager and Strang's framework, and also the gathering of data on UK and local government legislation. As well, local organisations' projects related to refugee integration in Leeds were incorporated into the study.

Regarding the qualitative approach, this study employed semi-structured interviews with eight leaders affiliated with Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) dedicated to facilitating the successful integration of refugees. The selection of participants was facilitated by a gatekeeper, who serves as the director at Leeds Refugee Forum, where the researcher is employed. Prior to their involvement, all individuals were provided with comprehensive written and verbal explanations regarding the research project and voluntarily granted informed consent by signing the necessary documentation. The interviews were conducted between May and July 2023.

Given the diversity of refugee communities in the UK, various factors such as ethnicity, country of origin, length of residence, and leadership roles within RCOs were considered when selecting the study participants. The interview questions centred on participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the potential role of 'unity', integration, and the factors influencing the development of 'unity' as a social network mechanism within their communities. The semi-structured interview format ensured consistency across participants and facilitated efficient data analysis, allowing to gain a deeper understanding of the unique experiences and perspectives related to integration from refugee groups' standpoint and the factors influencing the development of 'unity' as a mechanism for social networks within these communities.

#### 3.1 Limitations

Although the literature review has helped identifying a topic that has not been explored enough before, it still encountered some limitations. Most of them were overcome by the data gathered in interviews. Other difficulties arose during the qualitative research, such as finding times when participants were available; however, this issue was also overcome as LRF community centre allowed the researcher to use the space out of commercial hours. Although not ideal, a plan B based on interviewing online or via the phone was also offered to the participants just in case. Due to the scarce time available, three of the participants did not engage deeply with questions as they felt rushed by other commitments, which concurred with the risk of limiting the research to only leaders' personal views. As a counterpoint to this issue, the interview questions were shaped to ask about the whole community's dynamics. Additionally, the participants selected for the interviews were exclusively leaders of refugee communities, who have already settled<sup>65</sup> in Leeds, which excluded refugees from recent migration experiences such as the Ukrainians who are part of a big community in Leeds after Russian's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

#### 3.2 Ethical Considerations

To minimize the risk of recalling traumatic events, refugees with traumatic settlement experiences or those

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<sup>65</sup> In legal terms, a "settled migrant" in the UK refers to an individual who has been granted indefinite leave to remain (ILR) or another form of permanent residency, allowing them to live and work in the UK indefinitely without any immigration restrictions. This status is not exclusive to EU migrants and can apply to individuals from any country who meet the necessary requirements. UK Government (n.d.) Indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/indefinite-leave-to-remain> [Accessed: 28 July 2024].

in vulnerable situations were not invited to participate. Participants received written information about the scope of the questions before agreeing to be interviewed, and verbal clarification was given before the interviews commenced. They were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any point. Additionally, sensitive questions were formulated in a 'positive format' to avoid difficulties or discomfort for the participants. For clarity, questions regarding why they travelled to the UK or their journeys to reach the UK were not posed.

In summary, this study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilising qualitative interviews and literature review to gather comprehensive data. The choice of this methodology was driven by the multidimensional nature of the research questions, seeking to explore both the breadth and depth of the issue at hand. While this methodology provided a robust framework for data collection, potential limitations included scarce literature and limited time for interviews. The ensuing chapter will delve into the analysis of the data collected, building upon the methodological foundation laid herein to derive insightful conclusions regarding the research questions posed.

## 4. Analysis of interviews conducted with Refugee Community Organisation Leaders in Leeds

This chapter analyses the data gathered from the interviews conducted with leaders of RCOs in Leeds and draws out factors and categories identified as the main aspects contributing to and identifying 'unity' as an integration mechanism within refugee communities. Firstly, the chapter approaches 'unity's' conception with examples and cases presented by the participants, alongside crosschecks with elements building mechanisms propelling social networks and integration in established literature. After consolidating the conceptual framework, this chapter presents the connectivity between the concept of 'unity' and the impacts it has on the development of social connectors and integration for the communities involved in this research. As a way to validate such connections, the chapter analyses the cases brought by the participants through the lenses of social capital and integration theories to verify the occurrence of the phenomenon within the groups.

The eight interviews conducted took place at the Leeds Refugee Forum grassroots and refugee-led community organisation, which holds and supports all of communities from which the participants are leaders. The leaders who took part were Afghani, Sudanese, Senegalese, Eritrean, Iranian, Ghanaian, Guinean, and Somali nationals. Potential categories for setting the ground for an 'unity' role in the communities were identified from integration and social capital literature. A system was developed with keywords identifying 'new aspects' or 'categories' that came across during the interviews. The semi-structured and open-ended approaches assisted in the discovery of new factors, and in the cross-out of incorrect assumptions.

### 4.1 'Unity' as a concept

Although Ager and Strang's research focused on the general factors and domains promoting integration of refugee communities, the very similar features of their work were mentioned by interviewees when referring to the relationships developed within their groups. In their research with refugees, Ager and Strang demonstrated that some expectations regarding relationships and the social networks between groups were defined by the 'absence of conflict' and 'toleration' of the different. Nevertheless, their conclusions also added that most of the individuals who took part in the research showed expectations beyond this, identifying that relationships building integration also mean a sense of 'belonging' in the community<sup>66</sup>. Another relevant point highlighted by their research is that the sense of 'belonging', which translates into relationships, is built upon 'shared values'. According to all eight interviewees, these 'shared values' are important factors provoking the initial relationships and creation of the groups. Within their testimonies, 'shared values' were exemplified as values such as the same nationality, language, culture, care for their family, trust, past migration and integration experiences.

The 'shared values' were identified throughout the interviews by the frequency of their appearance in the leaders' speeches. At some point in their interviews, leaders pointed to these values by bringing up examples of cases or dynamics that bring the community together or develop relationships. Nationality was a common trend bringing people together across all of the communities as they are mainly separated by the country of origin, with only a few exceptions where there is a mix of nationalities. Language was a strong suit incentivising 'unity' as a mechanism due to the importance of teaching their children their mother tongue through schools they have set up for this purpose. Whilst culture and care for their families were also values held dearly, as they represented the 'unity' mechanisms acting when leaders organised events for traditions and holiday celebrations, while they also highlighted the importance of caring for everyone's families and wellbeing, such as organising fundraising for funeral costs or cooking for the family who is grieving, for example. Similarly, trust was a repeated word used by the leaders when explaining one of the pillars motivating the relationships and formation of groups, as the majority of members do not have

66 p. 177 – 178.

confidence that other institutions will assist or have the good willing or mechanisms to understand their issues. Lastly, the past migration and integration issues were presented as the leader's main intentions incentivising them to start the organisations of the communities and helping others.

In order to turn these 'shared values' into a sense of 'belonging' or relationships, RCO leaders engaged with others to start a group of support for the community. This movement or action was shared by interviewees as the 'unity' mechanism. In other words, the mechanism 'unity' is for the leaders is the key starting point, the ignition, driving these crucial elements together in favour of bringing people in collaboration to help each other, creating relationships and a sense of 'belonging'. From the interviews analysis, one of 'unity's strongest features trending with all the leaders is the common understanding of the difficulties that leaders and other members of the communities have been through at some point in their lives. From this perspective, leaders are propelled by this strong feeling of assisting others in the community, supporting themselves in the 'unity' mechanism to strategically act on this feeling.

Lalonde elucidated that 'belonging' is the 'feeling incentivising common actions and developments of strategies'<sup>67</sup>. Interviewees also explained that sense of 'belonging' was a very important feature for the community for the same reasons, and which was only possible through the support of 'unity' as a mechanism, so the group could achieve 'common actions and development of strategies'. From this angle, the interviews showed that these dynamics are a circled scheme that feeds into itself: the sense of 'belonging' propels the creation of common actions and strategies, which occurs through the 'unity' mechanism coming into place. Once 'unity' is exercised within the group, a wider sense of 'belonging' happens due to 'unity' bringing together all the 'shared values' for creation of 'belonging'. And then the sense of 'belonging' is consolidated, and the circle continues to its next cycle. Interviewees 0001 and 0005 spoke about this feeling:

*'This community is very encouraging, very heartwarming. It did help me as in progressing in my life. It did help me in a moral way. I felt there was someone behind me. There was someone there for me. And I didn't need it a lot because I had my own family. But I did need people support where my mother fell ill. A lot of people helped. That's the way help works here' (Interviewee 0005)*

*'If you have good relationship with your Afghan community, they give you the strength, they give you the energy, they give you the morale, you know, to cope with the things that are different, that you don't understand, that is a hassle for you. They might not help you directly, like teaching you or help you understand the differences, but the energy you get from them will help you to cope with the difficulties. They might not help you understand the host culture but the strength you get from the relationship you have with them help you to cope and understand and make more efforts to resettle, so you can integrate with the host country.' (Interviewee 0001)*

In sum, community leaders explained in their own words that 'unity' as a mechanism is not only a dynamic present in the creation of the groups, but also in the maintenance and development of different sorts of relationships, and in the continuous support of the sense of 'belonging' in the community. In this regard, it is a mechanism that self-feeds by sustaining relationships that are established and incentivising the formation of new relationships, bringing a wider sense of 'belonging'. This can also be seen by the continuous creation of strategies to improve members' lives when new challenges arise, such as the ones adopted during the COVID pandemic for example.

*'During COVID we started to put list of elderly people. And people, they started to organise in areas for people who really needed assistance. You had five people in charge of checking all of them in all the areas. It was made voluntarily; it made the community to tight the knots between themselves and then to check up one another, and that made a big difference.' (Interviewee 0004)*

Another relevant aspect that came up during the interviews was the RCO leaders' personal stories and profiles. It is important to note that out of eight participants, six were first-generation refugees. The other two, despite not seeing themselves as refugees and not having been granted refugee status, had very sim-

ilar experiences to the asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the UK. The sense of 'belonging' expressed through their speeches, based on their 'shared values' from their countries of origin and own experiences as first-generation refugees setting up the communities in Leeds, served to also explain how they see 'unity' as a 'feeling'. For example, when all the interviewees talked about the know-how and expertise they accrued with the community, they portrayed these skills as something they only developed because they think of their work with the community grounded on a moral and ethical responsibility. That means, according to these leaders, that 'unity' as a mechanism would not exist only from 'shared values' – as not all the communities share the same values, and this understanding of 'unity' would end up being a contradiction to some leaders, i.e. when they are talking about the ethnic differences in the groups that made them grow apart.

However, by having 'shared values' in common, and the moral and ethical responsibility with the communities, all of these leaders were able to channel these elements into creating 'unity'. Similar understanding of this dynamics can be found in the elements existent in the networks within the literature on 'conviviality'<sup>68</sup>, which talks about individuals having a drive to organise themselves into communities and perform common actions in benefit of the community. 'Unity', in this sense, is also made of a virtuous feeling for those who start and lead the refugee communities. This dynamic is exemplified by the fact that everything leaders do, in terms of financial costs, for example, comes mostly from their own income, on top of also contributing much of their time to community work so willingly. Interviewee 0006 shared how 'unity' means prioritising the needs of the community over his personal life commitments most of the time, making his personal life very attached to the community. Equally important, this leader talks about the sense of responsibility, especially when looking after the most vulnerable in the group, which are usually the elders and single mothers. He spoke of an occasion where a member was trying to get their documents issued, and when this member had told him a solicitor was charging an enormous amount of money for the service, the leader himself assisted the member in getting the document he was after. In sum, he spent his own time, with no financial compensation, to help a stranger.

This feeling of responsibility with the community has also been demonstrated to the family of Interviewee 0008, when her mother arrived in the country as an asylum seeker with two small children whilst the rest of the family remained in Somalia. She stated her mother received enormous support from the community as she was facing many challenges, including sleeping rough at some point. However, with the assistance of members of the Somali community, she managed to overcome the issues and go through the lengthy asylum process with empathy, help and reassurance from her peers. When she received the refugee status, the community continued to provide support as to get her family reunited. Once the family arrived in the UK, the community drove her mother to the airport to collect them whilst other members were taking care of her small children. In summary, Interviewee 0008 said that the support her family received was based on the actions of members that shared the 'unity' feeling, but were also actions dependant on the mechanism developed within the community to improve the wellbeing and chances of succeeding for the members in need.

On a second note, the same way that Putnam expresses that trust is a very valuable element for building of networks, and consequently social capital, more than one of the interviewees mentioned 'trust' as a vital factor playing in the build-up of the community. Interviewee 0004 explained that the base for creating a community through 'unity' mechanism is that leaders must acknowledge the importance of respecting members' dignity and trust so the relationships in the group can be created and sustained. In this leader's words:

*'Well, moreover, they will not be participating in other organisations. They didn't even know how to look for information. Often they are embarrassed because of their pride, because, you know, people have dignity. And we need to develop trust in the community so we can help effectively.'* (Interviewee 0004)

68 Nyamnjoh, F. B. & Brudvig, I. (2014) "Conviviality and Negotiations with Belonging in Urban Africa", in E. F. Isin & P. Nyers (eds.), Routledge Handbook of global Citizenship Studies, London, Routledge, 217-229.

This means that 'unity' as a feeling also comes from the leaders' past experience with migration and integration, which gives them an understanding of the struggles of other members of the community, alongside with the empathy and selfless search for alleviating others' pain through setting up a group that offers support to their communities. According to Interviewee 0003, African communities have a natural tendency to feel 'unity'; he exemplifies cases within his role in the community where people come to know the community and are offering to join in and help with no retribution in sight. He also adds that it was never needed any efforts to 'recruit' or ask people to join in. Quite the opposite, this leader has even accounted receiving calls from relatives of members that are abroad as they were connected to the community in the UK through the feeling of 'unity' as well.

In conclusion, 'unity' as a concept can be represented through two different channels. Firstly, as a feeling of leaders representing the empathy, understanding, and willingness to assist others. This feeling is shown through leaders' action of selflessly donating their time and financial means to these communities, not expecting anything in exchange. In practical actions, 'unity' is the mechanism and tool enabling RCO leaders' intent to create 'common actions and develop strategies' to support the communities. As a mechanism present in other members and communities' dynamics, 'unity' is the mechanism that turns 'shared values' into a sense of 'belonging' and established relationships. The 'shared values' are a group of elements (nationality, cuisine, language, etc) that are shared by the members of the communities, whilst 'unity' turns these elements into strategies and actions so communities can be formed based on a sense of 'belonging' and established on trusted relationships.

## 4.2 Role of 'unity' within social networks and integration

After analysing interviews and coming to a concept of 'unity' as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, it is imperative to understand how this concept relates into ideas of social network, and consequentially, into the process of integration.

According to Kindler, Ratcheva, and Piechowska, in their studies on relationships within the integration process for migrants, volumes of network and social capital are conditioned by 'nationality, level of education, religion, type of mobility and level of earnings, migrant's gender, cultural, family, friends, ethnicity, shared values and religion ties'<sup>69</sup>. Besides the fact that many of these factors match the elements within the concept of 'unity', these factors are also reflecting and corroborating the testimonies of the leaders on the relevance of 'unity' for the building of networks and relationships.

### 4.2.1 Nationality, language, culture and 'unity'

All of the leaders acknowledged that the nationality aspect is what prominently attracts members to the community. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this trend, such as the Senegalese and Gambian which is a dual-nationality community. For Interviewee 0003, 'unity' is a very strong feeling when aimed at your national peers, however, he added that 'unity' propelled the connection to relationships with Gambian members, disregarding the nationality aspect. For this leader, nationality can be a drive, but it is not what will propel 'unity' as a feeling and the aftermath development of relationships. He explained that rather than nationality, the Senegalese and Gambian communities build their networks on other common grounds, such as similar cultural habits and language.

Similar to Interviewee 0003's testimony, Interviewee 0005 has stated that in her community there is also a mixed nationality attendance ranging from Iranian, Afghani, and Pakistani members. For this leader, 'unity' as a feeling has brought all three different nationalities together, and as a mechanism has engaged other 'shared values' of the communities to create strategies to improve their wellbeing. As a result, strategies

<sup>69</sup> p. 7

such as common activities were conceptualised and put into place to meet the demands of the different nationalities. As an example, this leader talks about the Farsi school which is run by the community. For the Iranian community leader, the 'unity' mechanism and feeling come across quite clearly when activities with young people in the community are observed. According to this leader, youngsters of Iranian origins brought up in the UK do not feel the need to connect with Iranian culture and be part of an Iranian community generally. However, 25 years old or those of older generations are really connected and seek the community. 'Unity', then, comes along when members seek each other's help to reconnect the youngsters with their roots:

*'The community then organises an Iranian school and community activities to prove to children they are not 'weird', and not 'different' in a bad way, that they have a lot of qualities from having Iranian heritage.' (Interviewee 0005)*

Moreover, the Iranian school also hosts several Afghani and Kurdish children because many of the youngsters clash with their parents at home, and they need guidance and advice as a request from parents for their children. Additionally, 'unity' relationships also make it possible for Afghani children to come to school to learn Farsi as they want to connect with their grandparents and also excel at their GCSEs in Farsi. In sum, 'unity' through the community according to the Iranian leader allows the children of refugees to understand their identities and reconnect with their families, further supporting their future and integration in the UK. Lastly, the Iranian leader also spoke about the importance of the relationships, which are sustained by 'unity', to all the members as a way to ease the challenges they face when arriving in the UK:

*'When I was new to the city, to the community, to the country, there were millions of things that could have helped me a lot more without me experimenting and finding out. So it's very simple. If I can help others, and if I have the time, I will do it gladly. Make life slightly easier.' (Interviewee 0005)*

In summary, 'unity' propels relationships where people are facing the same struggles and genuinely decide to come together to overcome them. 'Unity', through one or many of the factors cited in the work of Kindler, Ratcheva, and Piechowska, creates and establishes relationships between the community, which can lead to a step closer into advancing in the integration process. The same way that 'unity' can be identified by contributing to building relationships based on the factors brought by Kindler, Ratcheva, and Piechowska, it is relevant to look into how 'unity' connects to the social capital literature to confirm if the relationships developed by 'unity's feeling and mechanism are de facto accruing social capital. According to Ager and Strang's integration framework, the most pertinent social capital types of networks are categorised within 'social connections'. More specifically, they are divided between social 'bridges', social 'bonds' and social 'links'. According to the testimonies from the participants, 'unity' was identified as a mechanism driving all of them separately and in different occasions.

According to Interviewees 0003, 0004, and 0007, 'unity' mechanisms propelled the organisation of the community to come together during challenges presented by the COVID pandemic. There is a common understanding among all the leaders that the most vulnerable members of the refugee and asylum seeker communities in the UK are systematically fearful of government institutions given the treatment they were previously given by their own governments in their country of origin, and by the government of their host countries. This fear within the communities has jeopardised attempts to spread information and awareness to these communities from the government during COVID pandemic. Leaders explained that the COVID pandemic illuminated a phenomenon that has been happening since migrant communities have established themselves in Leeds, which is the lack of access to government and other statutory institutions by the communities, resulting in the deniability of access of basic rights quite often and an impediment in the integration front for these persons. Interviewee 0004 stated that 'unity' has also made it possible for the community to receive easy communication and to spread verifiable information during the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained that Eritrean doctors, who were previously refugees, started recording videos and messages in the language of their own community spreading information about safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this regard, 'unity' mechanisms made leaders organise strategies and actions towards creating, previously inexistent, social 'links' between the community and the information the government was trying to convey to these groups by setting up hotlines and spreading information in their communities' own language within the channels used by the communities. Through accessible and shaped to the communities' approach, leaders successfully reached the most vulnerable to convey the very important information, also providing guidance on how to access the services that were guaranteed to be available to these communities, and managed to keep their members safe.

Likewise, Interviewee 0008 spoke about how 'unity' has propelled her actions and strategies to protect all-time vulnerable members. She started working directly with the community by being an interpreter, and then also getting more involved because she wanted to make a difference in people's lives. She disclosed an example of a case where she was able to spot a case of harassment and danger for a newly arrived female minor and prevent her from being assaulted by someone put in the same house as the minor by the Home Office. She advocated for this female and took her to live in her house, with the interviewee's family. In this specific case, the interviewee disclosed the importance of 'unity' as they protect the vulnerable communities through the mutual care and sharing of information when a new arrival does not have the local knowledge to protect themselves and make informed decisions, or even aware of the legal protection they should be receiving from the State.

A 'unity' mechanism has also been a starting point to networks identified as social 'bridges'. These are relationships established with other communities, which can be seen by leaders and other members engagement with communities that are from the same country but of different ethnicity. Interviewee 0002 talked about how after establishing a community based on 'unity', it has brought different groups together, which were previously apart due to ethnic disagreements. The 'unity' feeling and mechanisms propelled this leader to organise activities, such as joint traditional holidays and celebrations, also weekly sports gathering for the young members, in order to integrate the different groups and establish social 'bridges'. With time, these actions have also changed and shaped the relationships of the younger generations, who already do not see any difference between groups, but rather understand the community as a whole. According to the leader, these social 'bonds' make the community stronger as they allow members to progress another step towards support within the community, reaching also other opportunities for relationships outside the same circle they were living so far. In this sense, social 'bridges' over time turn into social 'bonds' – which are the relationships within their own group. In sum, the combination of these networks also supports the community towards achieving leisure as shown in the 'marks and means' section in Ager and Strang's integration framework.

On a similar note, Interviewee 0002 disclosed that his need to get support for a university application was met by the community's 'unity' on willing to help and support his way to achieving a better life in the UK. Likewise, Interviewee 0004 disclosed a case where he would feel the sense of responsibility with the community, and would voluntarily take another member of the community in his car and teach them how to drive. Similarly, Interviewee 0003 mentioned that 'unity' was the feeling behind organising fundraising or a regular pot where members deposit a small but symbolic amount of money monthly for any emergencies for any members of the community. According to the leader, this initiative took place as 'unity' brought some people together to assist members who could not afford a traditional funeral for their relatives. In summary, all of these examples show how social 'bridges' were built between members and services that might have been almost impossible to reach without 'unity' as a mechanism enabling these dynamics.

'Unity' has also played a role as a mechanism for establishing social 'bonds' within all the communities taking part in this research. All of the interviewees acknowledged that the 'unity' feeling brought them together with others as a starting point to set up the RCO in the first place, but it has also continued to be the mechanism that drives the maintenance of social 'bonds' within the community. These are exemplified by leaders' personal stories of commitment and devotion to the work of the community. Not just leaders,



but other members of the community feel incentivised by leaders' example and role and decide to join in to make a difference in the community. Interviewees 0004 and 0007 disclosed strategies and actions enabled by 'unity' which resulted in the initiation, establishment and consolidation of positive practices and social 'bonds' for the members.

Interviewee 0004 shared that he started the RCO as a mentoring group to support newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees in the Eritrean community in Leeds. The aim of the group was to look after each other's mental health, as according to this leader, most of the free mental health institutions and services in the UK do not have the appropriate cultural approach to the communities. Equally, each community has their own issues in regards to receiving treatment for mental health, let alone trusting external and foreign institutions. As an outcome of these challenges, and through the 'unity' mechanism, the Eritrean community has organised a system where more experienced members who have been in the UK for a long time are 'mentors' to others. This system targets assisting with mental health healing after going through the experience of being an asylum seeker and refugee. In this respect, the leader speaks of social 'bonds' as the key to making such system viable, and inevitably, positively contributing to achieving wellbeing in order to progress in other aspects of life and reaching other 'marks and means' of the integration framework.

In conclusion, according to leaders and their examples, 'unity' mechanisms are a factor contributing towards the establishment of the three types of social connectors envisioned in Ager and Strang's integration framework. These networks also represent the means to gain social capital as a vital step to progress and success in the integration of a new host country.

#### 4.2.2 Social capital theories and 'unity'

If looking through the angle of how the accumulation of social capital happens within the relationships established by 'unity', the same examples explained above can be analysed through the lenses of Bourdieu and Putnam's theories. As per Bourdieu's theoretical framework, social capital can be accrued through economic, cultural or social ties. It is important to note that in his theory social capital gains are mainly related to the social class the person is in, and 'voluntary associations' are individual strategies for accumulation of social capital. The testimonies of the interviewees fit within the perspective of gains from cultural and social ties. This is because leaders' opinions showed a positive outcome for themselves and members of the community that resulted in the achievement of 'marks and means' in Ager and Strang's integration framework. These were only possible through the gain of social capital and are exemplified by the communities providing mental health care and leisure activities, support towards accessing higher education and jobs, and by providing channels to access public services and governmental institutions.

As per Bourdieu's theory, the accumulation of social capital for these communities is not as high or quick in comparison to other social classes in the society they live in, however, interviewees highlighted that there would be a large improbability of achieving the types of networks, and posterior social capital with them, if it was not for the 'unity' motivating these dynamics to happen. Or, at least, it would be several times worse to gain access to these dynamics if leaders' and communities' 'unity' actions and strategies were not in place. As a result, integration steps would have been much harder and improbable to achieve, leading to worse social cohesion than the one already established in the host country. Secondly, although Bourdieu's theory speaks of 'voluntary associations' as individual strategies to accumulate capital, all of the participants of this research when speaking of 'unity' and the relationships they have developed for the community have not disclosed personal gains for themselves. Quite the opposite, all the social connections made were in favour of a bigger achievement, as the main purpose of their actions and strategies is to reach the whole community they are part of.

The main aspect defining Bourdieu's theory's angle is that the individual is in pursuit of their own interests through the lenses of social capital. Although this theory might not seem to fit within the concept of 'unity', as leaders have explained that 'unity' is a selfless feeling in service of the community's, the theory can still

explain that leaders behave this way to accumulate social capital together with the community. In this sense, the feeling of 'unity' incentivises leaders to act in pursuit of their own interests, which are benefiting the community with their expertise, devotion, time, financial resources and care. By the end of this process, accumulation of social capital is evident by building a community and establishing all the social connections, which inevitably feeds into the integration process which is evidenced by all the positive outcomes demonstrated within the examples.

Social capital for Putnam is conditioned by moral norms, social values – which includes 'trust', and social networks – including 'voluntary associations'. In the author's point of view, 'trust' means the individual trusts that the good they are doing will be rewarded via the positive development of communal relations. As well, Putnam's theory disregards 'conflict' within the groups, approaching the idea of accumulation of social capital in a more societal and collective integration view. During interviews, leaders disclosed that the networks, and examples of social capital gains from these networks, were based on the moral responsibilities these leaders felt they had with the community. As previously mentioned, all the leaders expressed to fit in the role of the people with more experience and conditioned to the 'unity' feeling as the motivation to create actions and strategies to benefit the other members. Likewise, leaders expressed that 'trust' was an important feature in the community, and leaders were trusting that the 'unity' mechanism as 'the good they are doing', via actions and strategies, is always rewarded with positive outcomes for the community. Within all the collected cases and examples of social connections previously approached in this study, it is evident that the effort put in by leaders is bringing social capital gains to the groups they are part of.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to note that there are examples where 'unity' is not present all the time or cannot even overcome negative aspects affecting the migrant communities. Although Putnam's theory does not approach the existence of 'conflict' within the groups, and how this might jeopardise the process of accumulation of social capital, leaders have disclosed some of the barriers they face in order to practice 'unity' and achieve the established relationships and social capital gains. One of the common issues is the conflict that exists in some communities and that originates from ethnic differences. Interviewee 0001 has unfolded the struggles to bring the community together due to differences that originated in the distant past, correlated to conflicts that were happening back in Afghanistan at that time. Interviewee 0008 spoke about some dissonance in the group over women's use of hijab and women's personal choice to not wear it, and how this creates clashes in their gatherings sometimes. However, Interviewee 0002 has disclosed how 'unity' actions and strategies have managed to solve the ethnic differences' issues by creating activities that the groups could attend and mingle. Likewise, Interviewee 0007 stated that 'unity' incentivised her to take initiative to start a women's only group as to be able to address women's concerns and specific issues without any restriction from the male members of the community. From her own experience as migrant and abuse of human rights against women back in her country, she developed 'unity' feeling and put this mechanism towards creating social connections to spread information on women's rights and how to seek help. This leader disclosed that because FGM is acceptable in their culture, many women would have this past trauma and continue to suffer from it or be discriminated against by male members if they had not passed the ritual. The leader voiced that by noticing this pattern in the community she has come up with the idea of a female-only group. In this sense, even if sometimes there is 'conflict' with others in the community, it has been channelled to trigger 'unity', resulting in the creation of social 'bonds' in order to form a group of support, plus accruing social capital by enhancing these women's confidence towards their own worth. In essence, through 'unity', these Somali women are able to protect their roots, talk about their traumas and receive empathy and solidarity from their peers, in such a way that facilitates integration by increasing their confidence and self-esteem. This, in turn, developed into leading them to achieve other 'marks and means', such as education and work.

Differently from the cultural background, the social background differences were touched in the interviews as leaders spoke about generational and social class disparities in the communities. Interviewee 0001 gave an example on how refugees who are newcomers and have mostly worked with government agencies and international organisations, do not align in perspectives with the older generations that have been living in

the UK for decades. According to this leader, this is mostly due to the old generation origins from rural areas. In this sense, there is an understanding that 'unity' mechanism and feeling might be affected by social aspects and how close the members feel in terms of social backgrounds. This trend has also been spotted by Roggeveen and van Meeteren<sup>70</sup> in their studies regarding migrant communities in Belgium. The authors found out that the Brazilian community tend to marginalise migrants who are undocumented (which are often from lower social classes) as a way to not be related to their social class. Interviewee 0005 has also brought up the change in the behaviour of community members once they pass from asylum seekers to refugees. According to this leader, once they get the refugee status, they do not want to be associated to being a refugee, as they prefer rather calling themselves only 'migrants' and try hiding their past as asylum seekers. Similarly, Interviewee 0002 explained that social background issues only appear within the older generation, whilst the young and second third-generation on refugees tend to foster 'unity' relationships regardless of the social backgrounds. For this community, this is shown through playing football every weekend, for example.

#### 4.2.3 Integration and 'unity'

The literature on integration brought different perspectives on frameworks assisting migrants to succeed in integrating. Ager and Strang's framework has been widely used by governments as a guidance to public policies supporting integration, however, experts such as Phillimore have stated that there are risks if using the same framework in different locations, as local circumstances matter when discussing strategies and actions to integrate. Crul and Schneider also acknowledged that in the UK, different local councils have applied the same model of framework and failed to achieve successful rates of integration all over the country. Since this paper is a case study on integration mechanisms in Leeds, an analysis on integration services and policies provided by Leeds City Council was also conducted. The conclusions led to the understanding that services of integration are coordinated initially by Leeds City Council, but mostly delivered in several different projects and by diverse third sector charities and organisations to the migrant population across the city. In this sense, the council relies on the expertise of the local communities to meet the demands of these communities and develop the best approaches to enhance rates of integration.

Although integration is a common occurrence in all communities, experiences might vary due to different aspects and backgrounds. All of the interviewees disclosed barriers and bottlenecks in making more difficult progress on integration for their communities. Interviewee 0001 disclosed that there is a feeling within the Afghan community members that they struggle to integrate in comparison to other western culture communities in the UK. In his words, integration means 'not feeling you are living in a foreign country'. Similarly, the struggles of integration were translated in the words of the Interviewee 0008, where she explained that 'costs for integration are very high' referring to the fees required for the British Citizenship application, for example.

The leaders who took part in this case study were associated with Leeds Refugee Forum (LRF), which is one of the third-sector charities delivering services and easing integration for the different communities in Leeds. During the interviews, RCOs disclosed that 'unity' would also not be as an effective tool towards integration if there was not in place the support of organisations such as LRF. LRF, as a refugee-led organisation, is also an example of how 'unity' plays a mechanism by organising their own strategies and actions from 'unity', and turning them into social connections: social 'bonds' within the various community members attending the activities, social 'bridges' with other organisations doing the same or similar work in terms of services, and social 'links' with the government and other statutory institutions. Interviewee 0006 stated that the activities and meetings for RCO's organised by LRF, on development and leadership training, are an essential instrument to transform 'unity' into actions and strategies helping the community.

<sup>70</sup> Roggeveen, S., & van Meeteren, M. (2013) 'Beyond community: An analysis of social capital and the social networks of Brazilian migrants in Amsterdam'. *Current Sociology*, 61(7), 1078-1096. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011392113495862> [accessed May 2023]

When asked about their perceptions of the community's integration, leaders brought up cases of successful integration in the communities. Interviewee 0003 disclosed that the Senegalese community registered great examples of building relationships with members and external groups, which are coincidentally established in the host society and are willing to help others to integrate further.

Alongside those lines, the Eritrean interviewee revealed that his community only benefited from further forms of integration through 'unity' perks – he states that there is a misconception in society where it is understood that refugees do not want to integrate fully. This misconception is reflected in public policies, which results in a lack of support towards integration, and it is in this gap where the community's 'unity' fulfils its role. According to this leader, by supporting the members in this way, members have managed to access basic services but also satisfy essential demands for their dignity. He also explains that for refugees, mental health issues are a major impeditive to making any plans or seeing a future, and the community has played a successful part in creating a supportive space and network to their members so they could thrive just by addressing mental health issues through a mentoring system.

Discussing integration in the interviews also revealed that leaders are very careful about its meaning, at the same time holding clear the meaning of assimilation to members of the communities. For this reason, leaders explained that any events or activities promoting cultural ties are directly connected to the protection of the member's cultural and ethnic identities, as some sort of 'continuous resistance against colonisation' as said by Interviewee 0003.

Most of the interviewees stated that 'unity' relationships, through the glaze of cultural heritage and association, is a form of allowing themselves to celebrate their traditions such as holidays, cuisine, language and customs. In this sense, all the groups find that it is very important to teach their children their cultural traditions and language, especially to the second or third-generation of descendants of refugees, as to understand their origins and their parents' cultural habits. This is also a way to prevent familiar clashes as they are very common within refugees' families according to leaders.

An interesting observation was made by Interviewee 0006 on social and cultural engagement for integration, in opposition to movements of assimilation. This and other leaders explained the importance for the communities to keep their identities and cultural heritage, passing it to the next generations born outside of their country of origin. In this sense, this leader highlights the importance of social and cultural events with the community, to keep their traditions and celebrations alive. According to her, this is only possible given the social 'bonds' established by 'unity' in the first place. Interviewee 0007 also added that this is a matter of priority for the community as it also creates local social connections, creating a culture of respect and acknowledgement of their heritage without discrimination and prejudice, or being forced to go through a process of assimilation in order to feel fully integrated. Similarly, Interviewee 0007 emphasised the confidence improvement for members attending the community meetings. This confidence assists people on how to deal with basic needs and challenges of their new lives, which reflects one of the steps in integrating into the new society.

To synthesise, by reverting to Ager and Strang's conceptual framework of integration, and the Home Office indicators of integration framework, this paper aims to validate or disprove the hypothesis of the role that 'unity' plays a mechanism for integration for migrants in the UK. In both frameworks, 'unity' was hypothetically considered to be part of 'social connections'. These relationships are split between three categories: 'social bridges', 'social bonds' and 'social links'. If the concept of 'unity' relationships is analysed by the social capital it accumulates, one can say that 'trust' is a big factor, similar to Putnam's theory. In this perspective, the three categories of relationships can be developed and generate social capital through 'unity': 'social bridges' as 'unity' also brings connections with other groups; 'social bonds', which are built between groups with similar backgrounds as it happens with members that overcome ethnic differences but share the same cultural background; and 'social links' in a way that members with more access and information on

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basic services are providing access to other members of the group to institutions such as the government.

In light of this, 'unity' fits better as one of the 'facilitators,' allowing the creation of 'social connections' and the possibility of successful achievement of a life with dignity for community members. In the case of 'unity,' differently from the framework, this is done by giving support to members on trauma and mental health issues, help with access to basic services, guidance on integration and becoming confident in a new foreign land, to cite some of the positive examples brought by the leaders. In a manner, 'unity' creates the relationships which will give access to the 'means and markers' established in the frameworks, such as employment, education, health care, wellbeing, and legal rights.

## 5. Conclusions

The objective of this case study was to bring awareness and give voice to an interesting development that would assist the understanding of a mechanism playing a role within a key part of integration, which perhaps has not been explored enough before. The main hypothesis of this case study was that 'unity' plays a role as an integration mechanism within refugee communities established in Leeds. The second relevant hypothesis for this paper was that 'unity's role was positively impacting the social networks developed during migrant's integration in the UK, and, further down the line, also improving and assisting integration.

This paper identified 'unity' as a key mechanism propelling social connections and integration for migrants through a literature review of integration and social capital theories, highlighting the elements and factors involved. Although there were gaps in the literature around 'unity', this study managed to overcome such issues with concepts borrowed from fields different than migration. The latest, in addition to wanting to give voice to communities of refugees on this matter, was the reason why this research methodology gathered data on 'unity' from interviews with Refugee Community Organisations' leaders in Leeds. This data was then cross-checked with the literature available, resulting in the presentation of a concept for the 'unity' mechanism.

Chapter 3 showed many key findings, which included that 'unity' presents itself in two ways. One concept encompassed leaders stating that 'unity' is a feeling, guided by leaders and members of the community who are seasoned migrants, who had already established themselves and are able to empathise, understand and have the will to assist others. These leaders' selfless donation of financial resources, time and commitment to the communities has been provided as evidence to 'unity' as a feeling propelling their actions.

'Unity' was also conceptualised as a mechanism for driving social connections. The existence of 'shared values' motivating 'unity' as a mechanism for initiating and maintaining social connectors for the communities revealed another key finding. The 'shared values' were identified as nationality, language, culture, family, past migration and integration experiences. As well, a major finding was understanding how 'unity' plays its role. The paper showed that 'unity' as a mechanism turns the quoted 'shared values' into a sense of 'belonging' in the community. From this point, social connections start to develop (leaders start gathering people and setting up the community as an organisation), and at the same time actions and strategies are triggered with the aim to improve the wellbeing and conditions to members (by creating events, activities and services for example).

A key finding and confirmation is that 'unity' plays a role as a mechanism for accumulation of social capital and networks. By utilising Bourdieu's and Putnam's social capital theories, together with the evidence gathered from the interviews, this study concluded that 'unity' plays a role as a mechanism instigating the social connectors from Ager and Strang's integration framework. 'Unity' is an agent for social 'bonds', when it is developing relationships between the members, i.e. leaders establishing the refugee community organisation. Also, 'unity' is playing a role in developing social 'bridges', i.e. promoting events that accommodate different ethnic groups and nationalities. Lastly, 'unity' also is a mechanism utilised for building social 'links', i.e. leaders developing channels to support members in accessing public services such as the right information regarding keeping safe during COVID-19 pandemic. In sum, 'unity' as a mechanism and feeling has demonstrated to facilitate social connectors which are vital elements in the process of integration of migrants.

Finally, through the knowledge of 'unity's impact on the social connectors, another key finding was that positive outcomes for integration are motivated by 'unity'. In essence, the three social networks developed through 'unity' were also found to be able to produce social capital. Associated with 'unity', the social capital

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accrued facilitated the advance on the integration scale, i.e. leaders organising services find support for the communities and have contact with authorities to demand basic needs assistance, but also delivering outcomes related to employability, access to higher education and improvement on mental health of members. In other words, by achieving these 'means and marks' from the integration framework, there is indication that 'unity' has a positive impact on the progression towards successful integration for migrants.

These findings suggest that research and policies aimed at enhancing refugee integration should consider adopting the successful approach developed by RCOs' leaders. Further research on the topic could help refine the concept of 'unity' and enhance the strategies and approaches employed by leaders in fostering community's integration. In a similar vein, by leveraging the knowledge and expertise of 'unity' from the community's perspective, authorities could collaborate on projects to significantly improve the lives of these communities while achieving remarkable cohesion and integration for the host country.

In closing, this study has successfully collected a large amount of data on 'unity', which gives some building blocks for future research and policies to develop more work given the many findings on the topic. After concluding that 'unity' is a common practice within the diverse refugee communities established in Leeds, it would be interesting to see developments of such constructive and beneficial mechanism reflected on research and public policies towards the ease of integration processes.

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## 7. Appendix

**Interviewee [0001]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023

**Interviewee [0002]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023

**Interviewee [0003]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023

**Interviewee [0004]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2023

**Interviewee [0005]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023

**Interviewee [0006]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2023

**Interviewee [0007]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023

**Interviewee [0008]:** Refugee Leader in Leeds – Semi-structured interview conducted face to face on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2023