Reason for migration and subjective well-being of migrants in the United Kingdom



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Abstract

This doctoral research consists of a mixed methods analysis of the subjective well-being of migrants in the UK. The analysis considers the main reason why a person migrated to the UK in the first place, providing additional insight into the case of those who migrated to seek asylum. The qualitative component comprises 20 semi-structured interviews with refugees in the UK. These were conducted between March and August 2022. The quantitative component analyses subjective well-being data from the Annual Population Survey, using datasets from April 2012 to April 2022. Since 2010, this large-scale survey also includes a question indicating migrants' initial reason for migrating to the UK. These reasons include work, study, family, and asylum-seeking, and this information is the focus of the quantitative component. Findings from these two components are compiled in an integrated thesis, where chapters 4 to 7 constitute standalone articles for submission to academic journals.

Chapter 1 introduces the motivation for the doctoral research, highlights the overarching research questions and provides an outline for the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 reviews conceptual and empirical literature in two areas: first, on the conceptualisation of subjective well-being; second, on migrants' subjective well-being in destination countries.

Chapter 3 sets the scene in the UK by outlining characteristics of the country's immigration and employment policies between 2012 and 2022. Chapter 3 also presents statistics on the migrant population within this timeframe.

Chapter 4 is one of the main substantive chapters of the thesis. It draws from interviews with refugees in the UK to gain insight into the meaning of happiness and life satisfaction, two widely used measures of subjective well-being, from their perspectives. The interviews highlight significant overlaps between refugees' understandings of these measures, and how these are conceptualised in broader literature. Important nuances are brought by participants' unique socio-demographics and experiences, including experiences that relate to asylum-seeking.

Chapter 5 is one of the main substantive chapters of the thesis. It provides empirical evidence on subjective well-being differences between the UK-born and migrants in the country, based on migrants' initial reason for migration. To do so, the analysis uses data from the Annual Population Survey for the period 2012-2022. This Chapter further explores whether there are patterns of convergence or divergence in migrants' subjective well-being with years of residence in the UK, towards subjective well-being levels of those individuals born in the country. The analysis reveals surprisingly few differences in subjective well-being outcomes of migrants who migrated for different reasons, given stark differences in indicators of their objective living outcomes.

Chapter 6 is one of the main substantive chapters of the thesis. It examines the implications of employment status for differences in subjective well-being between migrants and the UK-born, using Annual Population Survey data for the period 2012-2022. Here also, the analysis considers migrants' initial reason for migration as a key explanatory factor, alongside migrants' years of residence in the UK. Findings for this Chapter suggest that migrants' SWB implications from employment relate to characteristics of the UK's immigration and employment policies.

Chapter 7 is the final substantive Chapter of the thesis. It returns to the qualitative interviews and probes the comprehensiveness of widely used measures of subjective well-being in capturing what it means to be well from refugees' perspectives. In doing so, the Chapter introduces the concept of '*safeness*', which materialises as an integral component of refugees' subjective well-being. Safeness is described as a sense of internal peace of mind, extending in present and future temporalities, and which is not entirely related to objective indicators of refugees' safety. Safeness shares many similarities with subjective well-being components as defined beyond Western contexts, thus opening important avenues for further research.

Before concluding, Chapter 8 discusses limitations in conducting research on migrants' subjective well-being in destination countries. Then, the Chapter draws separate conclusions together, indicating three main contributions and suggesting four avenues for further research. Chapter 8 concludes by discussing two policy implications.

Keywords: employment, migrants, refugees, subjective well-being, United Kingdom.

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List of Abbreviations

- ACH - Ashley Community Housing
- ADAPT - Adaptation and Development after Persecution and Trauma
- APS - Annual Population Survey
- COMPAS - Centre on Migration, Policy and Society
- DARES - Direction de l'Animation des Etudes, de la Recherche et des Statistiques
- EEA - European Economic Area
- EU - European Union
- GDP - Gross Domestic Product
- HOPE - Hébergement, Orientation, Parcours vers l'Emploi
- ILR - Indefinite Leave to Remain
- LFS - Labour Force Survey
- NRPF - No Recourse to Public Funds
- OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
- OLS - Ordinary Least Squares
- ONS - Office for National Statistics
- PBS - Points-Based System
- PTG - Post-Traumatic Growth
- PTSD - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- SAME - School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography
- SOC - Standard Occupational Classification
- SWB - Subjective Well-being
- UN - United Nations
- UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Key terms

This section provides a brief description of key terms used throughout the thesis. A more in-depth discussion of each term is provided where relevant in subsequent chapters. While subject to debate, these key terms aim to ensure consistency and ease interpretation of the findings across different chapters.

- *Subjective well-being.* SWB refers to individuals' subjective appreciation of how well their life is going. In the UK context, nationally representative information on SWB is collected in the APS through four survey questions on an individual's anxiety, happiness, life satisfaction and sense of worthwhile. This is therefore slightly different to what the SWB acronym often refers to following the influential work of social psychologist Ed Diener. Diener advanced SWB as the combination of life satisfaction, positive (e.g. happiness) and negative (e.g. anxiety) affect. In this thesis, the four APS questions are sometimes referred to as a SWB '*framework*' as they aim to offer a comprehensive framework in which to assess the population's SWB.
- *Home countries.* Home countries indicate the countries where migrants are moving from.
- *Destination countries.* Destination countries indicate the countries to which migrants move.
- *Asylum countries.* Asylum countries also refer to destination countries for migrants, in the specific case of migrants who moved to seek asylum.
- *Local-born.* Local-born are individuals born in the country in which they currently reside.
- *Migrants.* In the context of this research, a migrant is a foreign-born resident.
- *Reasons for migration.* The migration reasons refer to migrants' own, self-reported, initial reason for which they migrated to the UK. This provides information that may differ from migrants' current residence status or visa in the country. The relevant APS question is formulated as '*What was your main reason for coming to the UK (most recent arrival)*?'.
- *Work migrants.* Work migrants are migrants who report in the APS that they migrated for employment reasons.
- *Study migrants.* Study migrants are migrants who report in the APS that they migrated for study reasons.

- *Family migrants.* Family migrants are migrants who report in the APS that they migrated to the UK to accompany a family member or to join a family member already resident in the country.
- *Other migrants.* Other migrants are migrants who reported other reasons for migrating to the UK. In the APS, this means reasons other than the options available of work, study, family and seeking asylum.
- *Asylum migrants.* Asylum migrants are individuals who report in the APS that they migrated to the UK to seek asylum.
- *Refugees.* Refugees are individuals who migrated to seek asylum, and who have since obtained a legal protection status in the destination country.

1 Introduction

1.1 The refugee crisis and migration in Europe

Prior to commencing my DPhil in Migration Studies, at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), I worked in the evaluation department of the French Ministry of Labour (DARES, *Direction de l'Animation de la Recherche, des Etudes et des Statistiques*). My main role in this department was to support the design, implementation and evaluation of HOPE (*Hébergement, Orientation et Parcours vers l'Emploi*), a national scale program launched in 2018 to facilitate refugees' access to the labour market and integration into society. HOPE was developed in the context of the refugee crisis, or the significant increase in the number of individuals worldwide fleeing their country to seek asylum. In 2015, over 1.2 million new applications were recorded across the 28 states of the European Union (EU), a 122% increase from the previous year. This increase resulted from the outbreak or worsening of wars in several countries, including Syria and Afghanistan. These two countries accounted for 29% and 25% of all asylum applications in 2015, respectively (Eurostat, 2016).

New asylum applications were heterogeneously distributed across the EU-28 member states. Germany for example received a record high 480,000 new asylum claims in 2015, of which 47% would result in a refugee or subsidiary protection status. In France, there were 80,075 new claims made in 2015, with a 40% protection granting rate. The UK received a lower number of new claims, with under 40,000 applications, and an acceptance rate similar to that of France (Pew Research Center, 2016). For comparative purposes, 98,900 new asylum claims were lodged in the UK in 2000, and over 100,000 in 2002, mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and ex-Yugoslavia, although perceptions that the refugee crisis was producing record-high numbers of asylum claims were widespread in the UK (Duffy, 2014, Morris, 2019).

EU countries also differed in addressing how new refugees, mostly young and male, would integrate into society. In the UK, refugees were more likely to be men under 40, raising concerns about the legitimacy of asylum claims and fears that these migrants sought to exploit opportunities on the labour market. Such fears translated into multiple policies aiming to reduce the attractiveness of the UK as a country of asylum at the height of the crisis. These include new citizenship policies and increased

securitisation of border controls (Stewart and Mulvey, 2014, Silverman, 2017, Ibrahim and Howarth, 2018, Bosworth and Vannier, 2020). This approach differed from a more welcoming stance expressed in German policies. Chancellor at the time Angela Merkel declared '*We can do this*'[1] following the country's pledge to integrate 1 million new refugees. In 2016, a German Integration Law ensured that asylum seekers with high prospects of obtaining a refugee status could access different forms of integration support. This included the authorisation to enter paid employment and attend German classes. That asylum seekers could access integration support before a final decision on their application was quite a unique feature of Germany's approach.

As for France, HOPE was unprecedented in several regards. First, the 8-month program, available only to refugees, included a skills assessment of each individual, and orientation towards professional training after this assessment. HOPE's design aimed to improve the sustainability of refugees' employment by creating a better match between trainings and refugees' professional background. However, training was mostly restricted to 30 labour market sectors experiencing shortages, such as in construction and service industries. Second, the program secured housing and healthcare, including mental health support, for refugees throughout the 8 months. The ambition of HOPE was to foster a holistic perspective on what matters for refugees' integration into French society, beyond their participation on the labour market. Between 2018 and 2021, 1,500 new refugees took part in the program each year, with a 72.5 % success rate if measured as the percentage of HOPE refugees graduating with a formal work contract.

In developing the evaluation of HOPE, the DARES team had to take stock of different stakeholder concerns, such as the use of public funds (a total budget of 60 million euros), the number of jobs filled within collaborating companies, and the quality and sustainability of the matching process between an individual set of skills and a shortage on the labour market. We developed an expansive set of measures

[1] Full statement (August, 2015): '*Deutschland ist ein starkes Land (...) Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das*.' (Translation to English: 'Germany is a strong country (...) we have accomplished so much, we can do it.' *Bundespressekonferenz*.

to address these different points. Reports produced in the first years of HOPE's implementation generated substantial enthusiasm.

In parallel, I was asked to visit local training centres across France and conduct interviews with refugees who had taken part in the program. The objective was to understand how they had experienced HOPE and what could be improved. These interviews provided a complex perspective on how HOPE affected refugees, with personal stories of successes and failures extending beyond the labour market. Many gave positive feedback on their training program and subsequent employment, even if the latter was in a sector that differed from occupations they had held in their home country. Other participants struggled with having their sense of purpose and worth ignored when pushed into a specific industry. Some participants did not discuss the program much, and others explained that their current state of well-being rendered discussions about employment irrelevant, referring rather to the need for more in-depth mental health support.

The interview material was not used in our formal assessment of HOPE, but raised many questions: how do employment programs affect refugees' lives in countries where they obtain asylum? What measures provide relevant insight into how refugees are doing in these contexts? What does it mean to be '*doing well*' following experiences of seeking asylum? This last point arose from elements of these interviews, that put into question a central assumption behind an intervention like HOPE – that a change in refugees' employment status would generate positive effects for their lives in general. By extension, the assumption is that employment becomes more central to the well-being of individuals who migrated to seek asylum.

This assumption did not match heterogenous perspectives regarding how re-employment (through HOPE) affected refugees' life in the country. The interviews did indicate that refugees perceived employment as beneficial in many ways, such as ensuring financial independence, or helping secure private accommodation. However, refugees had other thoughts about what mattered in their lives, alongside being active on the labour market. Furthermore, the interviews highlighted that being content with employment did not automatically equate with being content with life in the country, more broadly.

In summary, the HOPE interviews questioned the assumption behind many employment policies for refugees, that doing well, by doing some form of employment, automatically means being well. These were issues I wanted to explore further, and through which I obtained an offer to pursue a doctoral research project in the UK context, specifically.

1.2 Changes in the UK's immigration policies

There are different reasons why the research questions progressively centred in the UK. The first was the resentment towards immigration at the time when developing this research, which was symptomatic of the UK. With Brexit, the referendum in June 2016 where 52% of the population expressed a desire for the UK to exit the EU, resentment from the UK public and government toward EU policies was crystallising around immigration, in general, and in particular, how the EU had dealt with inflows of asylum migrants (Favell and Barbulescu, 2018, Outhwaite and Menjívar, 2019). This materialised in the direction immigration policies were taking in the country. For example, the UK introduced several policies criminalising the entry of asylum-seekers without a legal status before their arrival to the country (Haglund, 2012, Bosworth and Turnbull, 2017). The legal pathway to international protection in the UK was thus focused on resettlement schemes. In these schemes, refugees are selected for resettlement by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) officials from refugee camps. Concerning life in the country, successive changes to policies and immigration acts reduced migrants' access to public services and welfare support. Evidence suggests that this led to growing poverty, social isolation and economic deprivation among migrants in the UK, and perhaps more so for those who originally migrated to seek asylum (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006, Allsopp et al., 2014, Pemberton et al., 2014, Clark et al., 2019). Such a dramatically shifting context called for a focus on the UK.

The second was logistical. My initial research ambition was to compare the French and UK approaches to migrants and refugees' labour market and societal integration, and the implications for how migrants perceived their lives in these destination countries. At the time of the research, the French and UK governments were reinforcing immigration and border control agreements, generating criticism regarding the respect of migrants' human rights in the process. Alongside growing convergence in

borders, however, there seemed to be a growing divergence in the support offered to migrants in the country, both in terms of policy and public debate. The implications of this for migrants' own perspective on their life is what I wanted to explore. However, the dramatic context of a global Covid-19 pandemic, marked by widespread travel restrictions and lockdowns, made it difficult to anticipate doing research involving movement across borders, ironically, and more realistic to focus on a single context, the UK.

1.3 The use of SWB measures in public policy

My supervisor Professor Carlos Vargas-Silva suggested a framework in which to develop and formalise my research questions: subjective well-being (SWB). The subjective perspective on well-being theorises that individuals are best equipped to provide information on how they are doing in their lives and what matters in their lives (Diener, 2009, Stiglitz et al., 2009b, Veenhoven, 2011). From a conceptual perspective, SWB consists of multiple components, which reflect that there are multiple ways in which individuals think about how their life is going. Research exploring these different forms of SWB is not new, with for example a centuries-old distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives on what it means to be well (Waterman, 1993, Deci and Ryan, 2008, Huta and Ryan, 2010, Huta and Waterman, 2014, Pancheva et al., 2021). To situate this distinction, hedonic well-being relates to positive and pleasurable feelings, while eudaimonic well-being relates to feeling worthwhile and fully functioning. Chapter 2 describes these two perspectives in more depth.

The generalisation of SWB data collection to gain insight into populations' SWB and inform policymaking is perhaps a more recent trend. Following the failure of governments to anticipate the financial crisis of 2008, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy commissioned economists Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz to explore alternative measures of population well-being. Their findings compiled in a landmark report highlighted the limitations of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in assessing well-being. It emphasised the need to incorporate broader dimensions such as health, education, and individuals' subjective appreciation of their own living outcomes (Stiglitz et al., 2009b). Many UK researchers, such as Paul Dolan, Richard Layard, and Robert Metcalfe, worked with UK government officials to promote the use of SWB data. These authors argued that SWB measures were

sufficiently robust to provide relevant information for policy monitoring and evaluation (Layard, 2009, 2016, Waldron, 2010, Dolan et al., 2011).

In 2010, the UK government under David Cameron thus called for the monitoring of subjective measures of well-being and quality of life in the country. Interestingly, David Cameron, then UK Prime Minister, relied on the topic of immigration to illustrate what sort of complementary insight SWB could provide, relative to more widespread indicators of economic well-being:

'I do think it's high time we admitted that, taken on its own, GDP is an incomplete way of measuring a country's progress. Of course, it shows you that the economy is growing, but it doesn't show you how that growth is created. Let me give you some domestic examples, if you like, of this issue. We had, in Britain, something of an immigration free-for-all justified by the argument that it supposed to be good for growth, but without enough thought about the impact on public services and social cohesion.'[2]

As a result, information on four measures of individual SWB, namely happiness, anxiety, life satisfaction and sense of worthwhile is collected in the UK since 2011 in the Annual Population Survey (APS). These questions are referred to as the ONS4, or the Personal Well-being questions. The qualificative '*personal*' substitutes '*subjective*' only to facilitate the interpretation of the questions among APS respondents (Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2018b). The APS is a cross-sectional, continuous household survey, which has the largest coverage among household surveys in the UK. While the full APS sample amounts to 320,000 individuals each year, around 45% are surveyed for these SWB questions, such that these 45% are representative of the general population, and APS datasets are provided weighted such that they are indeed representative of the UK population. The scale of this sample offers the possibility to compare the SWB of different groups of the UK population, at narrow geographical levels such as respondents' local authority of residence. In parallel, the APS is a rich source of information on objective well-being measured in other areas such as employment,

[2] Full speech pronounced by David Cameron (2010): https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-wellbeing.

housing and health. Since 2010, APS respondents born outside the UK also indicate the reason for which they migrated to the UK.

1.4 Migrants' SWB in destination countries

Research on migrants' SWB in destination countries has expanded in the last decade (Polgreen and Simpson, 2011, Hendriks, 2015, Sachs et al., 2018, Grimes and Wesselbaum, 2019, Hendriks and Bartram, 2019, Hendriks and Burger, 2021). If unrelated, this happens concurrently with the reframing of concepts such as '*integration*', and the perspective they offer on migrants' lives in post-migration contexts (McPherson, 2010, Spencer and Charsley, 2016, Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, Penninx, 2019). This is not to say that SWB theories stand as substitutes for those of integration. The concept of integration is unique in referring to processes of change in migrants' living outcomes, which occur with years of residence in a destination country (Favell, 2001, Castles et al., 2002, Valtonen, 2016). However, within different integration frameworks, such as that developed by Ager and Strang (2008) in the UK, authors do refer to migrants' subjective sense of well-being in understanding implications of these processes.

SWB research addresses a multitude of questions, such as whether the act of moving improves migrants' well-being, relative to what would have been their living outcomes in the home country (Bartram, 2013, Stillman et al., 2015), or whether migrants become as well off as the local-born population (Bălţătescu, 2007, Tegegne and Glanville, 2019, Helliwell et al., 2020). Other research aims to identify factors that challenge or promote migrants' SWB in destination countries (Bartram, 2011, Kogan et al., 2018, Hendriks and Burger, 2020, Shen and Kogan, 2020). Using cross-sectional, experimental and longitudinal data, the answer to these questions is usually that, it depends. However, across these different contributions, there is an overarching rationale for considering the intersection of migration and SWB, clearly summarised by Hendriks and Bartram (2019): the SWB of migrants in destination countries matters because migrants choose, as rational agents in the sense of Harris and Todaro (1970), to migrate in order to improve their well-being.

However, in this context of growing empirical evidence on migrants' SWB, there is often a differentiation between those who choose to migrate and those whose reason for migration is labelled as forced, or involuntary. These migrants are referred to as '*refugees*' upon obtaining a legal protection status in the destination country. As further outlined by Hendriks and Bartram (2019), the issue with SWB research in the case of forced migration is as follows:

'*To what extent is happiness a relevant concern in situations of this sort?(…) In some instances, migration is forced in a very direct sense: If someone does not leave, he or she will die or face threats to basic components of well-being (starve, be shot, lose one's house in a bombing, etc.). In situations of that sort, happiness is probably not relevant to the question of whether migration led to a "successful" outcome. What matters, at least initially, is only whether the threats to survival are mitigated.*'

Relatedly, research on how refugees are doing in asylum countries often focuses on identifying symptoms of mental illness, at the forefront of which depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD, Carswell et al., 2011, Tay et al., 2015, Sangalang et al., 2019, Blackmore et al., 2020, Henkelmann et al., 2020). In other words, the focus is on components of ill-being as opposed to well-being. Reasons for this focus are intuitive. For example, refugees are more likely to suffer from mental health illnesses relative to other migrants. These persist with years of residence in the destination country and result from experiences in home, transit and destination settings (Porter and Haslam, 2005, Ryan et al., 2008a, Björnberg, 2012, Gleeson et al., 2020, Williams et al., 2021). In parallel, studies focusing on positive dimensions of refugees' well-being, explicitly, tend to do so through alternative concepts, such as resilience (Ssenyonga et al., 2013, Siriwardhana et al., 2014, Fozdar and Torezani, 2018, Karaman et al., 2022), post-traumatic growth (PTG, Kroo and Nagy, 2011, Teodorescu et al., 2012, Chan et al., 2016, Umer and Elliot, 2021) or psycho-social adaptation and coping (Yakushko et al., 2008, Wehrle et al., 2018).

This lack of insight into refugees' SWB could matter for different reasons. For one, SWB research indicates that positive and negative mental states are not strictly orthogonal (Chamberlain, 1988, Lucas

and Diener, 2008, Schimmack, 2008). As such, that refugees have a higher likelihood of suffering from mental health illnesses is not necessarily informative about their perspectives on well-being. In addition, refugees tend to experience worse objective living outcomes compared to migrants who migrated for other reasons, and to individuals born in the destination country. For example, in terms of employment, often singled out as the most important contributor to refugees' lives in destination countries (Bloch, 2008, Colic-Peisker, 2009, Phillimore, 2020, Knappert et al., 2023), studies consistently point to refugees' lower likelihood of employment, and lower occupational quality once employed (Jackson and Bauder, 2014, Piętka-Nykaza, 2015, Lumley-Sapanski, 2019, Brell et al., 2020, Landesmann and Leitner, 2020, Fasani et al., 2022). Such trends are also observed in the UK (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2017, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018, Kone et al., 2019, Kone et al., 2020). In all cases, implications for how positively refugees consider their life are largely unknown.

To summarize, there is therefore lack of information on a number of aspects relating to refugees: first, on positive dimensions of their well-being; second, on whether differences in important living outcomes, relative to other migrants and the local-born, materialise in how positively they perceive their life in asylum countries.

1.5 Research questions

This introductory discussion leads to the 3 overarching questions I address throughout this doctoral research:

1. What does SWB mean for refugees living in the UK?
2. Are there differences between the local-born, refugees and other migrants' SWB in the UK?
3. How does employment contribute to the SWB of the local-born, refugees and other migrants in the UK?

1.6 Outline of remaining chapters

To address these questions, this thesis is composed of seven additional chapters, four of which constitute standalone articles for submission to academic journals. Chapters 4 and 7 draw from qualitative

interviews conducted in 2022 with refugees in the UK. Chapters 5 and 6 consist of empirical analyses of the APS, using quarterly datasets from 2012 to 2022.

- Chapter 2. *Conceptual and empirical review*. Chapter 2 reviews literature in two areas. The first is SWB. This includes a discussion of what sort of outcome is in question when referring to well-being, and the different ways in which well-being relates to individuals' subjective appreciation of how their life is going. The second relates to empirical evidence on migrants' SWB in destination countries. The focus is on high-income countries, which are informative for the UK context. This second part of the review also introduces the importance of migrants' initial reason for migration and years of residence in a destination country in gaining insight into their SWB.
- Chapter 3. *Setting the scene in the UK context.* Chapter 3 provides a brief description of immigration in the UK between 2012 and 2022, the main timeframe for this thesis. This Chapter also presents summary statistics on the immigrant population in the country in this timeframe. These statistics relate to the distribution of migrants across migration reasons as categorised in the APS. The Chapter outlines how this distribution has evolved between 2012 and 2022. Given the substantial policy changes brought by Brexit, differences between EU-nationals and non-EU nationals are also discussed.
- Chapter 4. *Understandings of Happiness and Life Satisfaction among Refugees in the UK* (Published in the Journal of Refugee Studies). In Chapter 4, I explore refugees' understandings of life satisfaction and happiness. Happiness and life satisfaction are two of the four SWB measures included in the UK's national data collection, and the objective of Chapter 4 is to explore how these resonate with refugees in the country, thus providing evidence for research question (1). Drawing from 20 semi-structured interviews, I find evidence of significant overlaps between refugees' understandings of happiness and life satisfaction and how these measures are conceptualised in broader research. Specifically, refugees refer to life satisfaction as a global assessment of key domains in their lives. These domains include employment status and time spent with family, for example. Second, refugees define happiness not only as a

positive emotion, but also as a personal disposition towards experiencing emotions positively. Third, there is a complex relational conditionality between these two components of SWB. This suggests that the relation between SWB components is affected by experiences of seeking asylum. While interviewees' socio-demographics and experiences bring nuances to the findings, I conclude Chapter 4 by suggesting implications for how we consider refugees' SWB in the UK and in asylum countries more broadly. Furthermore, findings from Chapter 4 lay the foundations for ensuing chapters, that compare the SWB of different migrant groups in the UK, including those who migrated to seek asylum.

- Chapter 5. *Differences in Migrants' Reason for Migration and Subjective Well-being: Not So Different After All* (Published in the journal of Comparative Migration Studies). Chapter 5 is co-written with Professor Carlos Vargas-Silva. In this Chapter, we explore differences in SWB, measured as happiness, anxiety, life satisfaction, and having a worthwhile life, between individuals born in the UK and migrants who migrated for different reasons to the country. This Chapter therefore provides insight into research question (2). In this Chapter, migrants are differentiated on whether they migrated for work, study, family, asylum seeking, or other reasons. The empirical analysis is conducted using APS survey data since 2012 when the SWB questions were first introduced. Previous literature looking at objective indicators such as employment rates and health suggests that migrants' reason for migration relate to major differences across groups in these types of well-being indicators. In contrast, our analysis suggests that differences in SWB with the UK-born are relatively similar across those who migrated for different reasons to the country. Moreover, across reasons for migration, there is a pattern of convergence to SWB levels of the UK-born as length of residence in the UK increases. This differs from studies looking at objective well-being indicators, in which some groups, such as those who migrated for family or asylum reasons, take longer to converge to the levels of those born in the country. Alongside this empirical contribution, Chapter 5 raises further questions as to the link between subjective and objective indicators of well-being for migrants in a destination country.

– Chapter 6. *Working Your Way to Remain. Subjective Well-Being Implications of Migrants' Employment in the UK*. Chapter 6 is co-written with Professor Carlos Vargas-Silva, and explores the SWB implications of employment for migrants, based on their initial reason for migrating to the UK (i.e., work, study, family, asylum seeking and other reasons). This Chapter contributes evidence to research question (3). While there is literature on the impact of employment for migrants' SWB, the role of reason for migration has largely been ignored. Using data from the APS between 2012 and 2022, the decade for which SWB data is available, the analysis provides several key insights. First, individuals who migrated for work and study reasons report significantly higher happiness when employed, compared to those who migrated for family reasons. Second, differences between migrant groups by reason for migration further materialise in how employment contributes to SWB across years of residence. Notably, study migrants are the only group for whom differences in SWB implications of employment increase over time. Characteristics of immigration and employment policies in the UK, such as the link between migrants' employment status and residence rights, provide a key framework to interpret these findings. As such, a contribution of Chapter 6 is to suggest different mechanisms to explain how employment contributes to migrants' SWB, alongside more widespread explanations such as comparison with reference groups and the availability of supporting resources.
– Chapter 7. *The Place of Safety in Refugees' Subjective Well-Being*. Chapter 7 is an enquiry into the place of safety in refugees' SWB in countries where they obtain asylum. This Chapter provides further evidence to research question (1). References to safety already feature in research on refugees' well-being in destination countries. However, these tend to restrict the meaning of safety to the absence of important threats (e.g., financial, emotional, physical and social). Furthermore, these threats are often considered resolved as soon as a person seeking asylum is in a '*safe*' country. Following semi-structured interviews with refugees on their thoughts about SWB, I identify a form of safety that is positive and continuous, characterised by a sense of peace with oneself in both present and future temporalities. I outline the concept

of '*safeness*' that reflects this subjective sense of safety, and which helps capture more comprehensively what it means to be well from refugees' perspectives. Furthermore, safeness shares similarities with how SWB is defined in contributions beyond the UK context. As such, understanding safeness has implications for how we conceptualise and promote refugees' SWB and for SWB research more broadly.

- Chapter 8. *Conclusions.* Before drawing the thesis to a close, Chapter 8 addresses some limitations, which are especially important for the four research chapters. These limitations pertain to conducting research on SWB, on the one hand, and research on migrants' SWB in destination countries, on the other hand. With these limitations in mind, Chapter 8 then brings conclusions from separate chapters together, highlighting the contributions of the research as a whole. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses four avenues for further research, and suggests two policy implications.

1.7 Integration of the thesis chapters

Given the nature of the research questions stated above, the thesis benefits from being conducted in an integrated format, with the possibility of implementing different methodologies, and considering this broad research topic from multiple angles. The integrated format allows theses at the University of Oxford to be a collection of standalone chapters on a similar topic. As such, while each research chapter uniquely contributes to the literature on migrants' SWB in destination countries, there is some repetition across chapters. First, the methodological sections of chapters 4 and 7, and chapters 5 and 6, significantly overlap. Second, , several key references are used across multiple chapters. To avoid excessive repetition, references are compounded in a single bibliography at the end of this thesis.

2 Conceptual and empirical review

Chapter 2 reviews evidence in two areas. The first is SWB (2.1). The remaining chapters also describe relevant literature on SWB, yet several aspects are not discussed as they are too broad in scope. These are discussed here. The second area relates to literature on migrants' SWB. This discussion introduces the role of migrants' initial reason for migration and years of residence for SWB in the destination country (2.2).

2.1 Conceptual review of subjective well-being

2.1.1 Well-being

There are (at least) two parts to the concept of subjective well-being: one is '*well-being*', the other is '*subjective*'. From a conceptual perspective, well-being refers to a positive state, defined not only by being instrumentally good for a person – and that we should have reason to promote, but that is ultimately good (Velleman, 1991, Crisp, 2001, Raz, 2004, Angner, 2010, Clark, 2018, Östlund, 2024). Parfit (1984) identifies three accounts of well-being. The first is the objective account, where individuals' well-being is related to objective living outcomes which are positive in and of themselves, such as financial independence, social relationships, safety, knowledge and health (Griffin, 2000, Fletcher, 2013, Rice, 2013). In this account, the qualifier '*objective*' pertains to measurement, as opposed to suggesting that there exists an objective list of all domains which matter for and thereof constitute well-being (Varelius, 2004, Torras, 2008)[3].

2.1.2 Subjective

The second is the mental state account, where well-being relates to a person's subjective experience of objective outcomes in their life. Here, '*something contributes to well-being if, but only if, it affects the quality of one's experience*' (Scanlon, 2000). It is this focus on individuals' interpretation of their lived experiences which the qualifier '*subjective*' refers to (Diener, 1984, Biswas-Diener et al., 2004, Lucas and Diener, 2008, Angner, 2010). The third account is that of preference satisfaction and although the focus is also on subjective experiences, this account adds that a person who is well-off in objective

[3] Note that throughout the thesis, when using the qualifier '*objective*', such as objective living outcomes or objective well-being, this is the account which is being referred to.

terms will not necessarily perceive their life as such. This is because what matters for well-being is a matter of personal preferences (Frey and Stutzer, 1999, Olsaretti and Arneson, 2006, Hausman and McPherson, 2009, Benjamin et al., 2014).

In most SWB research, the claim is neither that objective accounts constitute well-being in and of themselves, nor that individuals' subjective interpretations of well-being exist in total independence of objective conditions. Diener (1984), for example, highlights that '*notably absent from definitions of SWB are necessary objective conditions such as health, comfort, virtue, or wealth. Although such conditions are seen as potential influences on SWB, they are not seen as an inherent and necessary part of it*'. As such, the focus of this thesis on SWB is on those subjective accounts of well-being that have no direct objective counterparts, recognising that objective and subjective accounts co-exit.

2.1.3 SWB components

There are different ways in which individuals think about how their life is going. These translate into different SWB components. Diener (1984) proposes 3 common characteristics to SWB components. The first is that they are subjective. As suggested above, this entails that they relate to individuals' own interpretation of their experiences. The second is that they are positive, meaning SWB is not defined by the absence of a negative mental state, but refers to a positive mental state in and of itself. Finally, a component of SWB must be global, pertaining to how individuals experience their life, broadly, as opposed to their life in narrow domains, such as their financial or health status. Put together, SWB components aim to provide a comprehensive account of what it means to be well from individuals' perspective. For much research situated in Western contexts, this is often approached through a discussion of hedonic and eudaimonic components of well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2008, Huta and Waterman, 2014, Pancheva et al., 2021).

2.1.4 Hedonia and affective well-being

In the hedonic account, Aristippus (435–356 bce) writes about the good life as the life in which we experience the maximum amount of pleasure. Epicurus (341–270 bce) proposes an alternative version which precludes experiences of pain and fear. Utilitarians advance a notion of balance or co-existence, in that the good life is contingent on both the frequency of pleasant events and the infrequency of

unpleasant ones (see a discussion of these references in Tatarkiewicz, 1976). In all, hedonic well-being is partly composed of individuals' affective, or emotional experiences. Alongside happiness[4], the lexical field of positive emotions includes other terms such as contentment, joy, excitement, and high spirits. In contrast, terms such as sadness, stress, anxiety and melancholy, typically connote negative emotions (Fredrickson and Cohn, 2008, Larsen and Prizmic, 2008, Larsen, 2009, Haybron, 2016). In the UK context, '*happiness*' and '*anxiety*' are those emotions included in the APS to capture individuals' daily, affective well-being.

Positive and negative affect share the characteristic of being temporary experiences. This said, negative and positive affect are generally not considered as opposites on an emotional continuum but rather as relatively independent (Bradburn, 1969, Diener and Emmons, 1984, Watson and Clark, 2013). There is indeed evidence that both types of affect associate with different correlates and '*unusual*' evidence of individuals experiencing both positive and negative emotions simultaneously (Larsen and McGraw, 2011, Berrios et al., 2015, Trampe et al., 2015).

In all, both positive and negative emotions capture an important component of how people are doing. For example, it seems unlikely that a person consistently experiencing negative emotions is someone that is doing well. However, there is also little evidence that individuals solely seek out positive emotions (Diener et al., 2003, Veenhoven, 2011).

2.1.5 Hedonia and evaluative well-being

Next, evaluative well-being captures how positively a person thinks about their life, all things considered. Questions about a person's '*life satisfaction*' are among the most widespread to measure this component (Helliwell, 2008, Pavot and Diener, 2008, Veenhoven, 2011, Diener et al., 2013). This is the case in the APS, where a person is asked to think overall, how satisfied they are with life nowadays. This component also fits in hedonic theories since some form of pleasurable experience is associated with positively evaluating one's life overall. To conduct this evaluation, individuals weigh

[4] The word '*happiness*' as used in SWB literature is a translation from several Greek terms that are not identical. While much contemporary literature uses the term happiness when referring to Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, I inscribe happiness in the affective component of well-being in so far as this reflects how happiness is measured in the UK's APS (Waldron, 2010, Dolan et al., 2011).

in different domains, thus reflecting on things that matter in their personal life. Whilst not being totally independent from momentary emotions, evaluative judgements have more temporal stability (Diener and Larsen, 1984, Ehrhardt et al., 2000, Eid and Diener, 2004, Fujita and Diener, 2005).

Each individual has unique preferences as to how different objective outcomes contribute to a broader sense of life satisfaction (Layard, 2009, Deaton, 2018, Stone et al., 2018). There are many domains which individuals consider when formulating a general assessment of how their life is going (Rojas, 2006, Oishi et al., 2009, Suh and Choi, 2018, Jebb et al., 2020). Cummins (2005) attempts to order this '*chaos*' of possible domains and summarises them into the following 8: health, standard of living, life achievements, personal relationships, personal safety, future security and personal spirituality. The under-lying assumption is that being satisfied with many life domains will associate with a broader sense of satisfaction with life[5].

2.1.6 Eudaimonic well-being

In much research, positive affect, negative affect and life evaluations comprehensively compose a person's SWB (Diener, 1984, Diener et al., 2002, Schimmack, 2008, Veenhoven, 2011). However, the APS also includes a eudaimonic component. This measures individuals' sense of how worthwhile are the things they do in life. Eudaimonia relates to an Aristotelian conception of well-being that is leading life according to the highest virtues (Ryff and Singer, 2008, Huta and Ryan, 2010, Kraut, 2015, Proctor and Tweed, 2016). Huta and Waterman (2014) highlight four ways in which eudaimonia is approached in well-being research. The first is eudaimonia as a person's orientation, or the why of their behaviours (Vittersø, 2004, Seligman et al., 2005, LeFebvre and Huta, 2021). The second relates to eudaimonic behaviours, such as volunteering and mindfulness (Ryan et al., 2008c, Steger et al., 2008). The third are processes which relate to being fully functioning, such as self-acceptance, self-realisation and the development of one's highest potential (Ryff, 1989, Waterman, 1993, Keyes, 2002, Lee and Carey, 2013, Joshanloo, 2018).

[5] See for example: Veenhoven, 1996, Hsieh, 2003, Charlemagne-Badal et al., 2015, Kaiser et al., 2020, Milovanska-Farrington and Farrington, 2022, Nakamura et al., 2022, Soylu, 2023.

The fourth relates to individuals' experiences (Delle Fave et al., 2011, McMahan and Renken, 2011, Vittersø and Søholt, 2011). In this latter perspective, the idea is that there are positive, subjective experiences that accompany the pursuit of what is worthwhile in one's life. While these experiences are positive, they are not necessarily pleasurable in the hedonic sense. Huta and Waterman (2014) describe these experiences as follows:

'*While such experiences are strongly positive, from a eudaimonic perspective, they are not the goal to be pursued but rather a by-product of the pursuit of virtue, excellence, and the best within us, and/or an indication that one is having some success in that regard. Thus, the modern understanding of eudaimonia includes not only pursuits but also outcomes.*'

This indicates why some SWB frameworks include measures of eudaimonic well-being, in so far as they fulfil the 3 characteristics highlighted by Diener (1984): they are positive, if not pleasurable, they are subjectively experienced, and they relate to global assessments of one's life.

As a final remark, eudaimonic and hedonic components are sometimes posited as irreconcilable and incompatible ways of experiencing a good life, such that eudaimonia tends to be defined as anything that is not well-being as hedonistic pleasures (Steger et al., 2008, Huta and Waterman, 2014). In the perspective adopted for this thesis, there is no need to consider these as irreconcilable since each captures a unique component of how individuals think about their well-being, overall (Huta and Ryan, 2010, McMahan and Estes, 2011, Huta, 2015, Joshanloo, 2016, Martela and Sheldon, 2019, Pancheva et al., 2021).

2.1.7 SWB framework in the UK

As a reference for subsequent chapters, Figure 2.1 illustrates the inter-play of these different SWB components, and how they translate to survey questions in the UK's APS.

Figure 2.1. SWB framework as measured in the APS

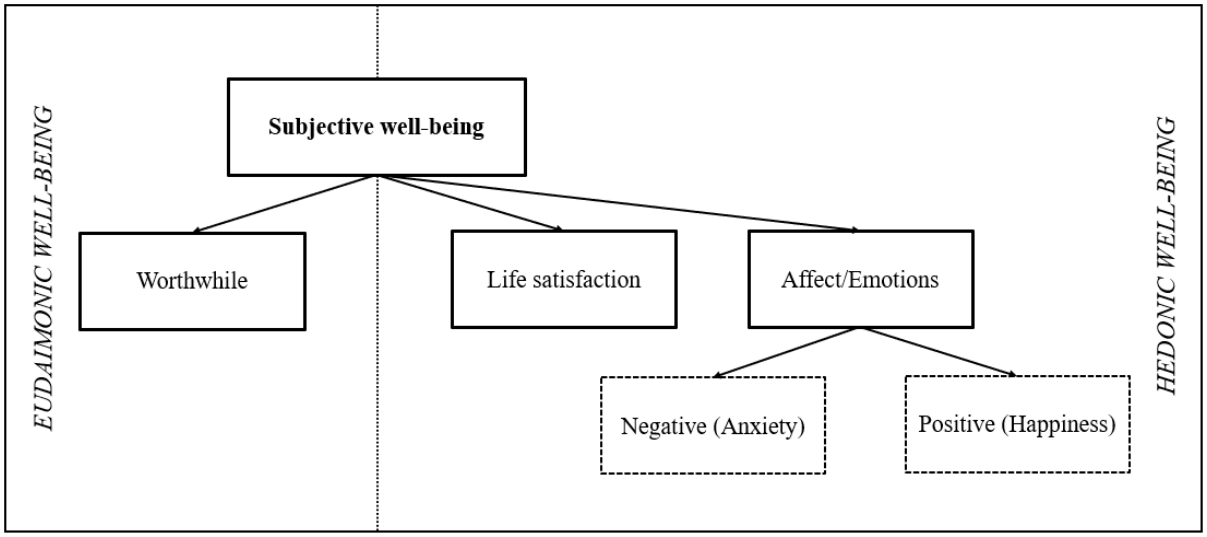


Table 2.1 below presents these measures in the same order as they are introduced in the APS.

Table 2.1. Four measures of personal well-being in the APS

Next I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".	
Measure	*Question*
Life satisfaction	Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Worthwhile	Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Happiness	Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
Anxiety	On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Source: See Office for National Statistics (2023), user guidance Volume 2, Labour Force Survey Questionnaire.

2.2 Empirical review of migration and SWB

With a clearer perspective on what SWB means, section 2.2 now reviews evidence on migrants' SWB in destination countries (2.2.1-2.2.5). The empirical review helps introduce why the main analysis for this thesis disaggregates migrants by reason for migration and by years of residence in the destination country (2.2.6).

2.2.1 Motivations for research on migrants' SWB

There are different motivations for conducting research on migrants' SWB. One essential motivation is that the choice to migrate is itself motivated by SWB. In many cases, migrants move countries because they expect this will improve their well-being (Knight and Gunatilaka, 2010, Birman, 2011, Czaika and

Vothknecht, 2012, Lovo, 2014, Boccagni, 2017, Lim, 2018, Aslany et al., 2021). This general statement leads to research that compares migrants' SWB before and after migration, to capture whether migration has indeed improved migrants' well-being in both objective and subjective terms. This literature mainly suggests that there are SWB gains from migration (Melzer, 2011, Bartram, 2013, Bartram, 2015b, Melzer and Muffels, 2017, Kratz, 2020, Dones, 2023).

A second motivation, more closely related to this thesis, is that migration associates with significant changes, both positive and negative, in migrants' objective living outcomes. These outcomes include those on the labour market, for example, or those concerning the availability of family and social relations in the destination country. Here, SWB can provide insight into whether migrants experience these changes in the destination country in a positive way. This literature generally highlights that migrants face many challenges in destination countries. Such challenges tend to concentrate in early years of residence and manifests in different ways, including that migrants report significantly lower SWB compared to those individuals born in the destination country (Ullman and Tatar, 2001, Hendriks and Bartram, 2016, Melzer and Muffels, 2017, Arpino and De Valk, 2018, Zafar and Ammara, 2023). Challenges to migrants' SWB and changes with years of residence are expanded in the two following sections.

2.2.2 Challenges to migrants' SWB in destination countries

Challenges migrants face in the destination are addressed here in two categories. On the one hand, migrants often face challenges in reaching living outcomes similar to those of individuals born in the country. For example, migrants typically have a lower likelihood of being employed relative to the local-born, and obtain jobs that tend to be of lower occupational quality (Liu et al., 2004, Nanos and Schluter, 2014, Jestl et al., 2015, Chort, 2017, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018, Sandoz, 2020, Guzi et al., 2021). Migrants also face substantial challenges in accessing different services in the destination country, especially those providing support in areas of housing and healthcare (Rousseau et al., 2008, McKeary and Newbold, 2010, Topal et al., 2012, Shier et al., 2016, Finn and Mayock, 2022). Such challenges are likely to contribute to migrants' lower SWB relative to the local-born.

On the other hand, migrants face challenges that stem from their experiences as migrants, specifically. These challenges differ in so far as they are unlikely to matter in the same way for the local-born SWB, yet they affect the comparison between the local-born and migrants' SWB. This includes having to learn a new language (Amit and Riss, 2014, Tegegne and Glanville, 2019, Lee et al., 2022), and facing multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination in the destination country by virtue of being an immigrant (Müller, 2003, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007, Safi, 2010, Greenwood et al., 2017). Other such challenges are not even visible in the destination country, and relate to conditions in migrants' home countries (Van Tubergen et al., 2004, Blau et al., 2011). For example, migrants often continue devoting resources to supporting and caring for family members back home (Skrbiš, 2008, Savic et al., 2013, Bryceson, 2019). As a result, authors refer to a '*dual frame of reference*' to emphasise how factors in both home and destination countries affect migrants' SWB (Reese, 2001, Menjívar and Bejarano, 2004, Akay et al., 2017, Nguyen and Duncan, 2020, Shekriladze and Javakhishvili, 2024).

The challenges mentioned here are not exhaustive. However, they are important in situating why migrants may have different SWB outcomes compared to the local-born. From here, the challenge for research on migrants' SWB in destination countries is to either account for these different SWB confounders, or to determine appropriate proxies.

2.2.3 Migrants' SWB with years of residence in destination countries

This '*dual frame of reference*' helps introduce the importance of migrants' years of residence in a destination country for SWB. First, years of residence associate with a progressive decoupling from conditions in the home country, or a shift in migrants' frame of reference toward the local-born (Frank et al., 2016, Akay et al., 2017, Liu et al., 2021). In a study across Canada and the UK, Helliwell et al. (2020) show that migrants' SWB converges towards that of the local-born, at the same time as it diverges from that of counterparts in the home country. Migrants' SWB is therefore often described as an '*alloy*' of home and destination influences, the composition of which partly reflects how long migrants have been in the destination country (Senik, 2014, Voicu and Vasile, 2014, Hajdu and Hajdu, 2016).

Second, years in the destination country associate with a weakening of some of the initial challenges migrants experience, including those mentioned in this section 2.2.2. For example, migrants acquire higher language skills over time (Chiswick et al., 2006, Braun, 2010, Föbker and Imani, 2017, Lochmann et al., 2019, Morrice et al., 2019). Migrants also expand networks which can offer various forms of support (Ryan et al., 2008b, Phillimore et al., 2014, Light et al., 2017, Munshi, 2020, Luthra and Platt, 2021). Longer years of residence typically open access to more permanent residence statuses, which facilitate access to support services in the destination country (Massey and Bartley, 2005, Kogan et al., 2018, Jacobs, 2019, Könönen, 2019, Goldring and Landolt, 2022). These changes over time likely improve migrants' SWB and therefore decrease the gap relative to the local-born.

This said, evidence suggests that migrants' objective and subjective well-being outcomes evolve in different directions across years of residence (Knight and Gunatilaka, 2012, Stillman et al., 2015). In particular, migrants' shifting reference points could explain why SWB does not increase linearly with years of residence, even when objective conditions consistently improve (Bălţătescu, 2007). A similar explanation is the '*hedonic treadmill*' on which migrants could be trapped: while migration does in many instances improve migrants' objective living outcomes, years in the destination country also lead to the development of higher aspirations and expectations (Czaika and Vothknecht, 2014). Similarly, migrants often have declining perceptions of the destination context, since full convergence towards objective outcomes of the local-born is rarely reached (Safi, 2010, Hendriks and Burger, 2020, Zafar and Ammara, 2023). These different factors explain why migrants' SWB is better understood in relation to time spent in the destination country.

2.2.4 The role of reason for migration

This far, existing research helps explain the association between migration and SWB, relative to the local-born, and the impact of years of residence on this association. In this framework, however, an omitted consideration is differences based on why migrants migrated in the first place. Most research differentiates migrants on other characteristics, such as region of origin, or immigration status, and this literature provides important insights as to why migrants' initial reason for migration could be an important consideration. These two examples are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, research on migrants' region of origin is informative in that it provides indirect information on the motivation for migration. For example, migration from lower-income countries is likely to reflect a move driven by economic motivations (Bartram, 2011, Kogan et al., 2018, Shen and Kogan, 2020). This is important for subsequent outcomes in the destination country, as the intuition is that migrants who move primarily for economic reasons can sort into countries in which they will have the best potential outcomes, in both objective and subjective terms (Aydemir, 2011, Grogger and Hanson, 2011, Geis et al., 2013, Hofmann, 2015, Bütikofer and Peri, 2017)[6]. In contrast, non-economic migrants may face stronger barriers to choosing a specific destination country and therefore face stronger challenges to their well-being after migration (Fafchamps and Shilpi, 2013, Hofmann, 2015, Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019). If this literature is informative, it is possible however that migrants' region of origin is conflating differences based on migration reason. For example, migrants who move to seek asylum also tend to move from lower-income countries, yet their migration motive is infrequently described in terms of economic motivation.

Second, research considering migrants' current residence status in the destination country indicates that migrants' initial entry route into the country relates to subsequent SWB. In particular, immigration statuses or visas associate with significant differences in access to rights, opportunities and support in the destination country (Aydemir, 2011, Mau et al., 2015, Lee, 2018). For example, it is often the case that, if a positive decision is made on their asylum application, those who migrated to seek asylum are granted the same access to residence and welfare rights as individuals born in the country (Dwyer et al., 2016, Łukasiewicz et al., 2023). In contrast, many countries impose strict requirements for migrants on work visas to maintain legal residence in the country (Cangiano, 2014, Jacobs, 2019, Kanas and Steinmetz, 2021, Guzi et al., 2023). As a result, there is much evidence that these immigration routes relate to subsequent outcomes, such as labour market status, health, and overall quality of life in the destination context (Chiswick et al., 2008, Connor, 2010, Bevelander and Pendakur, 2014, Bevelander

[6]This sorting is typically assessed through the matching of migrants' education and professional skill to characteristics of the destination country labour market (e.g., Chiswick and Miller, 2009, Piracha et al., 2012, Aleksynska and Tritah, 2013, Jestl et al., 2015, Chort, 2017, Jones and Teytelboym, 2018, Boucher, 2020, O'Connor and Crowley-Henry, 2020).

et al., 2019, Zwysen, 2019, Sandoz, 2020, Tervola, 2020). However, while a person's immigration status may change over time, in some cases by acquiring citizenship in the destination country, the initial reason for which they migrated there does not. This means that current immigration status and initial migration reason could relate in different ways to migrants' objective and subjective well-being in the destination country.

In parallel, there is some evidence that migrants' initial reason for migration modifies the relative contribution of objective living outcomes to SWB in the destination country. This research is more directly comparable to the focus of this thesis on migrants' reason for migration. Hendriks and Bartram (2019) highlight this with family unification migrants, where '*success with regard to the core motivation might seem obvious because the goal is achieved via the migration itself*'. In other words, what is likely to matter the most for family migrants' SWB is rejoining their family members. Similarly, for those who migrated for work reasons, often described as economic migrants in this literature, labour market participation is expected to strongly contribute to SWB in the destination country (Leopold et al., 2017, Shen and Kogan, 2020), as would regaining a specific occupational status (Zikic and Richardson, 2016, Frank and Hou, 2018, Wassermann and Hoppe, 2019). As such, among the various elements hinting at the importance of migrants' reason for migration for SWB, migration reasons may indicate what promotes SWB in the destination country.

2.2.5 Implications for those migrating to seek asylum

Arguably, this literature does not offer as much insight into the SWB of migrants whose migration reason is '*forced*', or '*involuntary*'[7]. These migrants are often referred to as refugees if the person obtains a legal protection status. There are different explanations for why the well-being of refugees is typically addressed separately. One is that in early years of residence, notions such as happiness and life satisfaction may be irrelevant when survival and basic well-being are still threatened (Ryan et al., 2008a, Chan et al., 2016, Hendriks and Bartram, 2019). Another reason pertains to the nature of forced

[7] There is a large literature highlighting that migration reasons are better represented by a continuum as opposed to categorisations such as economic versus non-economic, or forced versus voluntary (Jacobsen, 2005, Zetter, 2007, Betts, 2010, Bartram, 2015a, Kovacs, 2015). On this matter, the approach in the APS is to allow migrants to self-report their own main reason for migration.

migration. Forced migration is often characterised by traumatic experiences, in home, transit and destination contexts. This results in a significantly higher likelihood of PTSD, depression, anxiety and negative health outcomes for refugees, relative to any other group of migrants (Tay et al., 2015, Sangalang et al., 2019, Blackmore et al., 2020, Gleeson et al., 2020, Kumar et al., 2021). These different considerations lead to less research focusing on positive dimensions of refugees' well-being.

This said, to the extent that objective and subjective well-being are considered in parallel, the absence of insight into refugees' SWB is an important empirical gap in the literature. Indeed, there is much evidence in destination countries, including the UK, that refugees have worse objective well-being outcomes relative to other migrants and the local-born (e.g., employment outcomes: Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018, Brell et al., 2020, Fasani et al., 2022; housing quality: Murdie, 2008, Balkan et al., 2018, Fasani et al., 2022; health: Giuntella et al., 2018, Kaur et al., 2021, Kumar et al., 2021, Nowak et al., 2022). Refugees also face unique conditions in destination countries, such as lengthy asylum processes (Hainmueller et al., 2016, Rotter, 2016, Phillimore and Cheung, 2021, Lippi et al., 2023), being placed in temporary accommodation during these lengthy processes (Kreichauf, 2018, Kaur et al., 2021, Guma et al., 2024) and/or being dispersed across the destination country (Damm and Rosholm, 2003a, Damm and Rosholm, 2003b, Griffiths et al., 2006, Auer, 2018), and facing frequent bans to early labour market access (Hainmueller et al., 2016, Marbach et al., 2018, Fasani et al., 2021). These factors likely affect how positively refugees view their life in the country.

If the nature of migrants' reason for migration predicts what will matter for SWB in the destination country, it could be the case that, for those who migrated to seek asylum, all that matters for SWB is the obtention of an asylum status. This, however, does not fit well with an abundance of literature on the centrality of other factors for refugees' well-being, such as employment status (Bloch, 2007, Bloch, 2008, Colic-Peisker, 2009, Phillimore, 2020, Knappert et al., 2023).

2.2.6 Connection between existing literature and the focus of this thesis

To conclude this Chapter, section 2.2.6 summarises key elements that affect migrants' SWB in destination countries, and therefore why these are key elements in the main analysis for this thesis.

The first is the inclusion of a subjective perspective on migrants' well-being. Section 2.1 highlights that objective and subjective accounts of well-being provide different information on how a person is doing. Arguably, the majority of research thus far has focused on migrants' objective outcomes in destination countries. While informative, this omits migrants' subjective interpretation of their life in the destination country, which could provide different insights.

Second, existing research that considers migrants' subjective interpretation of their life emphasises the significant challenges migrants face on arrival. This materialises in worse SWB outcomes compared to individuals born in the country. However, such challenges are expected to erode over time, thus contributing to closing the gap in SWB between migrants and the local-born. As such, this thesis considers migrants' years of residence in the destination country as a central element in explaining differences between local-born and migrants' SWB.

The third is the focus on migrants' reason for migration. Literature reviewed in this section 2.2 indicates that why a person migrates in the first place is related to SWB in the destination country, and to what promotes SWB in the destination country. While migration reasons are proxied in different ways, this thesis explicitly focuses on migrants' self-reported reason for migration. The objective is to provide additional insight for those who migrated to seek asylum, for whom less empirical evidence is available.

With this in mind, Chapter 3 further develops the focus of this thesis, by situating these different elements within the UK context.

3 Setting the scene in the UK context

Following the conceptual and empirical reviews, this section sets the context of the thesis by characterising migration in the UK between 2012 and 2022. The first part focuses on policies regulating migrants' entry into the country, residence and work rights, and access to welfare support, based on whether they migrated to the UK for reasons of work (3.1), study (3.2), family (3.3) or seeking asylum (3.4). This part of the review highlights relevant immigration policies, including a discussion of the changes from January 2021 and the implementation of the new Brexit rules. The second part of the review then provides statistics describing the immigrant population in the UK between 2012 and 2022 (3.5).

3.1 Migrating for work reasons

This first section concerns migrants who came to the UK for work reasons. Before the implementation of the new Brexit rules in January 2021, there were important differences between migrants based on whether they migrated from EU or non-EU countries[8]. In a pre-Brexit era, EU-nationals benefited from freedom of movement in the UK. This meant they could enter and work in the UK without restrictions. There was also no requirement for EU-nationals to obtain a job at a certain skill level in order to enter the country. Once in the UK, EU-national migrants had equal access to welfare rights, benefits and access to public funds as UK-nationals, after 12 continuous months of work in the country (Migration Observatory, 2019).

With Brexit, policies applying to work immigration no longer differentiate between EU and non-EU nationals, thus ending freedom of movement and requiring visas for most non-UK-nationals moving to the UK for work reasons. This means that the requirements described in the following paragraphs apply to all work migrants, regardless of nationality.

[8] In the following discussion, EU-migrants include nationals from Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

In the UK, work visas are organised into tiers[9] and granted according to a Points-Based System (PBS). Points are awarded to a visa application based on factors such as skills level in the job offer, a minimum income level in the job offer, and the applicant's professional qualifications.

The first of these tiers, Tier 1, is the migration route to the UK for high skilled workers. After 5 years, Tier 1 visa holders can apply for permanent settlement or indefinite leave to remain (ILR), meaning migrants obtain similar welfare and residence rights to those of UK-nationals. Next, Tier 2 is the route for work migrants with a formal job offer from a licensed UK employer. This licensed employer sponsors their application. Points are also awarded on factors such as qualifications and prospective income in the job offer. Tier 2 migrants may apply for ILR after five years in the UK. Finally, Tier 5 is a more short-term work visa reserved for youths on mobility schemes and temporary workers. Importantly, it does not lead to permanent settlement in the UK.

For the duration of their visa, work migrants across these tiers have limited flexibility to change from their original sponsoring employer. Furthermore, if a work visa holder loses their job, there is only a short period of grace to find alternative employment. The duration of this grace period varies according to individual circumstances, such as ongoing legal or administrative processes, and the initial entry visa. Failure to secure employment within the specified timeframe could result in the visa being revoked and the requirement to leave the country.

While on a work visa, migrants typically have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The NRPF means that a person is not entitled to most welfare benefits and other public funds available in the UK. This NRPF condition has been linked with higher levels of deprivation among migrants in the country (Broadhead and Leon, 2023, Leon, 2023, Migration Observatory, 2023). The Home Office (2023) has stated in a Report on Public Funds that the NRPF condition '*is important in reassuring the public that immigration brings real benefits to the UK and that its finite resources are protected for British citizens and those who have lawfully settled here on a permanent basis*', which illustrates the rationale for

[9] A Tier not described in Chapter 3 is Tier 3. This work visa was originally intended for migrants in temporary and low-skilled occupations as a replacement for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme and Sectors Based Scheme. However, these were essentially suspended by the UK government from their inception in the 2008 PBS.

imposing such a condition on immigrants in the country. As suggested in the next sections, this restriction does not only apply to migrants on a work visa.

3.2 Migrating for study reasons

Next, this section focuses on study migrants. While most study migrants stay in the UK for the period in which they are studying, some may continue on to work in the country after their studies. In the pre-Brexit system, study migrants faced different requirements for their life in the UK based on whether they were EU or non-EU-nationals. Pre-Brexit, EU-nationals were considered '*home*' students. They could study in the UK without having to apply for any form of entry visa and paid the same tuition fees as UK-nationals. EU study migrants were allowed to work during term time and could access different forms of welfare support throughout their studies.

In contrast, non-EU-nationals are subject to stricter regulations to study in the UK. For the most part, these are the regulations that now apply to all study migrants regardless of nationality. For one, non-EU students must apply for a Tier 4 visa before entering the country, meaning they must have a formal offer to study from an educational institution. Tier 4 holders then have a caped number of hours they can work during term time, equivalent to a part-time job. Study migrants must also demonstrate sufficient funds to cover study fees and various living expenses, without recourse to public funds, as part of the application process.

Once their visa expires, Tier 4 study migrants are either required to leave the country, or to switch into another visa tier, such as family or work. While the majority of students eventually leave the UK, around 9% of Tier 4 holders switch into a work visa (Migration Observatory, 2024). In this process, the new Brexit rules re-introduced a two-year transition phase, suspended in 2012 and now rebranded the '*Graduate Route*', that allows study migrants to work in a job at any skills' level and without a formal sponsoring employer, before switching to a work visa.

3.3 Migrating for family reasons

This section focuses on those who migrate to the UK for family reasons. A person migrating to the UK for family reasons can include spouses, civil partners, fiancé(e)s, proposed civil partners; unmarried

partners (including same-sex partners); children; and, in a smaller number of cases, adult or elderly dependent relatives. When applying for a family visa, the type of visa obtained depends on whether family migrants are joining settled or non-settled members in the UK. The first case is typically referred to as family '*reunification*'. In the second, migrants are referred to as '*dependents*' of a non-settled family member in the UK. A person who is joining a family member with a refugee status in the country is also considered a family migrant.

There were large differences pre-Brexit in the requirements for family migrants to move to the UK, based on whether they were EU or non-EU-nationals. Now, these requirements are essentially collapsed to those imposed on non-EU-nationals. Since 2010, non-EU family migrants must demonstrate English language proficiency as part of their visa application. Family migrants can only apply for ILR after five years of residence in the UK. In 80% of cases, individuals will stay on and apply for permanent settlement (Migration Observatory, 2023). Until then, they have no recourse to public funds, which puts most of the emphasis on the sponsoring dependent in the UK to support their life in the country.

Indeed, one of the major requirements to be granted a family reunification visa is for the sponsoring dependent in the UK to demonstrate financial capacity to support migrating family members. For example, since 2012, the sponsoring dependent must meet an annual minimum income. The threshold increases if family migrants move with children or additional family members. This minimum income requirement is still in place under the new Brexit rules and has led the UK family migration policies to be considered among the most restrictive in EU countries (Sirriyeh, 2015, Sumption and Vargas-Silva, 2019).

3.4 Migrating to seek asylum

This final section focuses on those who migrate to the UK to seek asylum. Here, the focus is less on whether migrants are EU or non-EU-nationals, and rather whether migrants sought asylum directly in the UK or from another country.

In over 80% of cases, asylum migrants in the UK refer to individuals who apply for asylum inside the country. On average, 59% of these applications made within the UK will lead to a final positive decision

(Migration Observatory, 2019). It is difficult to gain insight into the trajectories of asylum seekers whose claims and appeals are rejected, and a part of whom are likely to remain in the UK. Indeed, the nature the UK's asylum policies means that a substantial number of individuals '*disappear*' with no obvious legal entitlements to resources and support in the country (Morris, 2002, Dwyer et al., 2016).

For asylum-seekers who obtain a positive decision, this can lead to different protection statuses. The first is the refugee status. The refugee status initially provides a temporary leave to remain, after which a person can apply for permanent settlement. During this period, refugees' access to the labour market and to welfare support is the same as for UK-nationals. Second, asylum applications can lead to different forms of humanitarian protection and discretionary leaves, when the applicant is judged not to qualify for refugee status but cannot be sent back to their home country. For these statuses also, access to welfare rights and employment is the same as UK-nationals. What varies from the refugee status is the number of years spent on these alternative statuses before the possibility of applying for permanent settlement.

There are a few further points worth highlighting to further characterise the UK's asylum system. First, while waiting for their application decision, asylum-seekers are typically dispersed across local authorities. This follows a policy introduced in 1999 aimed at alleviating the burden from London and authorities in the Southwest of England. Second, since 2002, those who are waiting on their asylum application are not allowed to work, except in occupations on the Shortage Occupation List. Even then, asylum-seekers have to wait before getting an authorisation to work in shortage occupations. These extended times away from the labour market have detrimental consequences for subsequent employment outcomes (Hainmueller et al., 2016, Marbach et al., 2018, Fasani et al., 2021) and associate with worsening general and mental health among asylum-seekers (Allsopp et al., 2014, Bakker et al., 2016, Phillimore and Cheung, 2021).

If an asylum-seeker obtains a refugee status, they are granted equal access to the labour market and governmental support as UK-nationals. In practice, however, refugees in the UK maintain higher levels of unemployment, economic deprivation and social exclusion relative to other migrants and the UK-born (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006 Bloch, 2008, Stewart and Mulvey, 2014, Dwyer et al., 2016, Clark

et al., 2019, Kone et al., 2019). Explanatory factors include limited formal systems to translate educational and professional qualifications to UK equivalents (Stewart, 2003, Bloch, 2004, Hurstfield, 2004), and the nature of this transfer of rights where refugees lack knowledge on how to navigate new and unfamiliar support services (Stewart and Mulvey, 2014, Mayblin and James, 2019, Karyotis et al., 2020). Research suggests that these challenging conditions aim to reduce the attractiveness of the UK to potential asylum-seekers (Sales, 2002, Stewart, 2005, Allsopp et al., 2014).

These conditions do not apply in the same way to migrants who obtain a protection status from abroad and are then resettled to the UK. For comparative purpose, in 2016 at the height of the refugee crisis, there were 40,000 new asylum claims submitted in the UK, while 5,000 individuals were resettled from abroad. Resettled refugees are selected by UN officials and obtain either a refugee status or automatic ILR upon arrival in the UK. Resettlement schemes typically focus on supporting nationals of specific countries. Between 2010 and 2021, the top five nationality of resettlement in the UK were nationals from Syria (68%), Iraq (7%), Somalia (6%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (6%) and Sudan (5%) (Migration Observatory, 2019). Resettled refugees have the same access to welfare rights as UK-nationals, but also benefit from several forms of community support, at least upon arrival (Mahdi et al., 2018, Phillimore et al., 2022). Since 2020, most resettlement programs have been collapsed into a single system, after their suspension in March of 2020 in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic[10].

3.5 Characteristics of the migrant population in the UK between 2012 and 2022

To conclude this review, the following section provides descriptive statistics on the immigrant population in the UK, between 2012 and 2022. These statistics are estimated using quarterly APS datasets, focusing on the working-age population of respondents surveyed for the SWB questions. The working age range is defined as 16 to 65 years old. SWB respondents represent about 45% of all APS

[10] Note that the UK is currently implementing substantial changes to its asylum policies. The Nationality and Borders Act of 2022 for example, criminalises the act of migrating to the UK to seek asylum without a prior visa. Among far-reaching consequences, this creates a two-tier system of protection relative to refugees resettled from abroad (Allen et al., 2023). While these changes are important to bear in mind, they largely fall outside the timeframe for this thesis.

respondents each year, sampled in such a way that these 45% match characteristics of the total population (ONS, 2018b).

3.5.1 Share of immigrants in the UK population

Table 3.1 below indicates the number of UK-born and immigrant respondents for the decade since SWB data is collected in the country.

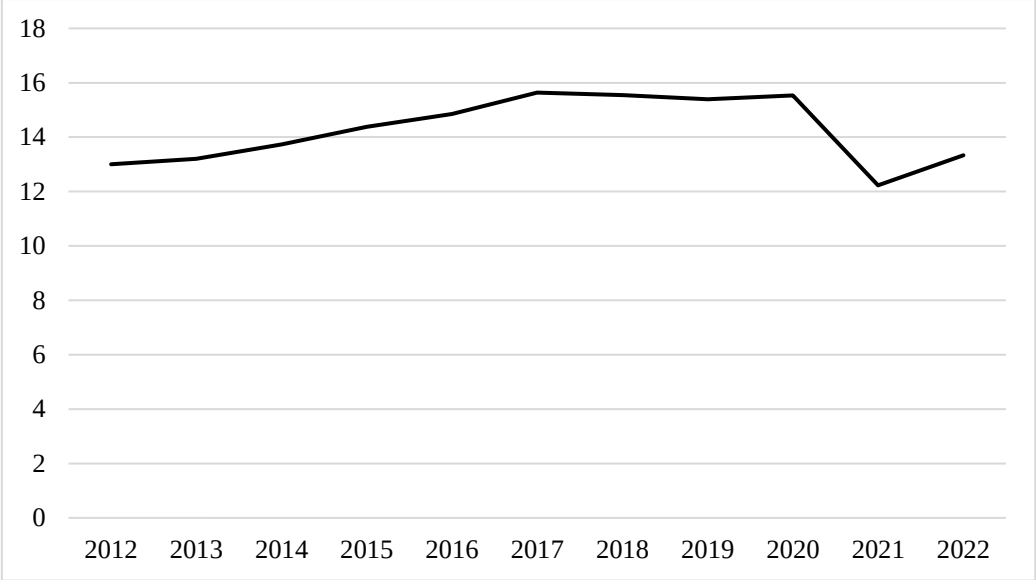
Table 3.1. Number of UK-born and migrant APS respondents, between 2012 and 2022

Survey year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
UK-born	98,300	109,302	108,053	56,234	99,387	91,303
Migrants	9,501	15,565	15,942	9,805	16,119	15,870
Observations	107,801	124,867	123,995	66,039	115,506	107,173
Survey year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
UK-born	92,241	87,834	82,880	63,829	59,712	
Migrants	15,872	15,085	14,507	8,437	8,895	
Observations	108,113	102,919	97,387	72,266	68,607	

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

On average, the percentage of migrant respondents in the APS between 2012 and 2022 is 14.45. As suggested in Figure 3.1 below, this increased from 13% in 2012 to 15.54% in 2020, years after which there was a decline to 13.34% by 2022. Different factors could explain this decline in the share of the immigrant population in the UK. One likely explanation is the Covid-19 crisis, when in March 2020, visas centres in the UK were shut down. Immigration to the UK, but also more globally, was largely suspended. While some estimates suggest that the share of migrants in the UK population dropped by 10% in 2020 alone, or 3 percentage points in Figure 3.1 below, accurate statistics for that period are not readily available (Sumption, 2021).

Figure 3.1. Percentage of migrants in the UK population (Y-axis), by year (X-axis)



Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

3.5.2 Share of EU and non-EU-nationals in the immigrant population

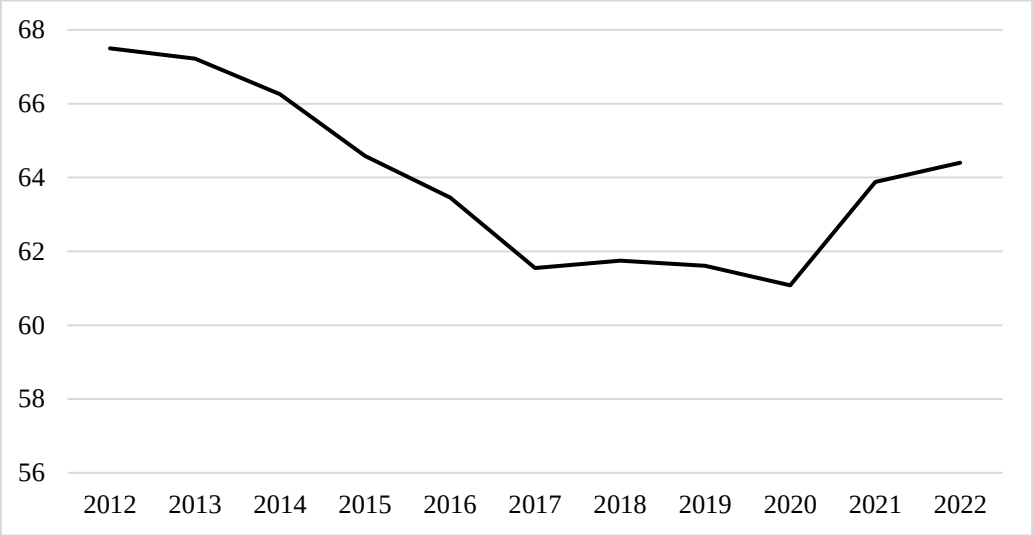
As discussed throughout this Chapter 3, the Brexit referendum in June 2016 brought substantial changes to the UK's immigration policies. These are summarised in preceding paragraphs as the end of free movement, and different regulations between migrants from EU and non-EU countries. Figure 3.2 below plots the share of non-EU-nationals among the total immigrant population, for the period 2012-2022. On average, non-EU-nationals account for 63.56% of the immigrant population. This percentage has declined from 67.5% in 2012 to 61.08% in 2020, before increasing again in the following years.

Note that the share of EU-nationals in the immigrant population in the UK experienced a steady increase in the timeframe before 2012. One explanation is the EU enlargement in 2004. At that time, the UK was one of few countries to grant automatic freedom of movement to nationals from new accession states. As a result, while the share of EU-national migrants who moved to the UK for at least a year was close to 22% between 1991 and 2003, this increased to 40% on average between 2004 and 2010 (Migration Observatory, 2023).

The recent decline in the share of EU-nationals among all immigrants in the UK, as evidenced in Figure 3.2, can be explained by a combination of factors. In the short term, this includes implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the longer term, these factors include a decline in the value of the pound, and

general uncertainty about the political and social situation for migrants from EU countries after Brexit (Benedí Lahuerta and Iusmen, 2021, Migration Observatory, 2023).

Figure 3.2. Percentage of migrants from non-EU countries in the immigrant population in the UK (Y-axis), by year (X-axis)



Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

3.5.3 Share of migrants by reason for migration to the UK

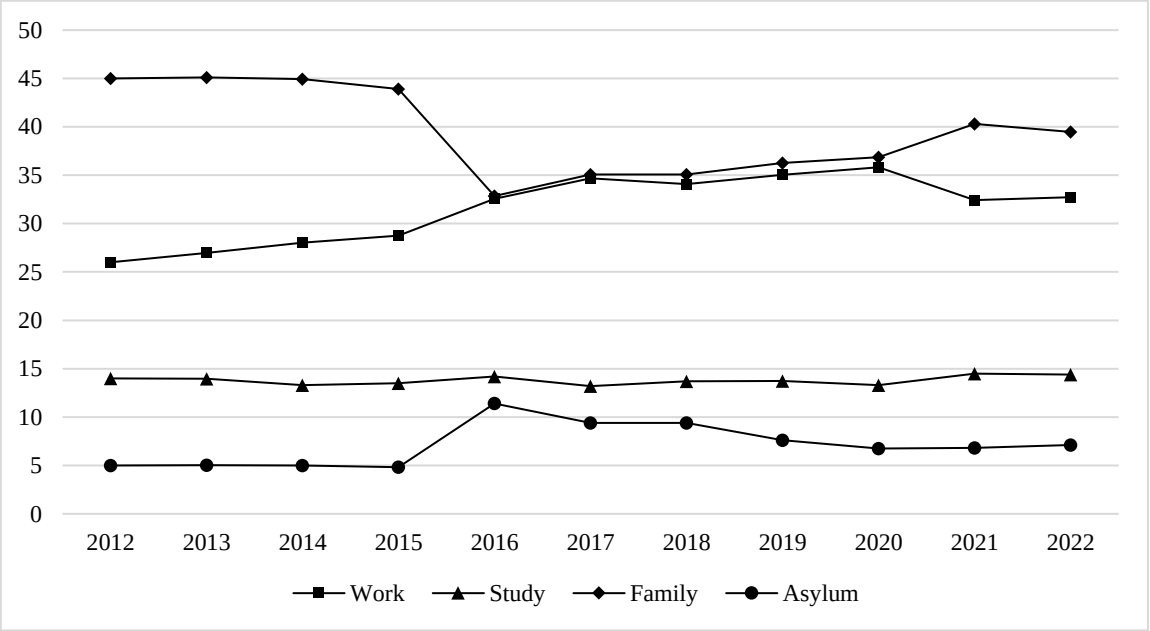
Next, Figure 3.3 plots the distribution of migrants by reason for migration to the UK between 2012 and 2022. Those who migrate for family reasons tend to represent the largest group of migrants in the UK, with a share of 40% on average between 2012 and 2022. While the share of family migrants dropped to 32.85% in 2016, it increased in the following years, back to 40% in 2022.

The smallest share of migrants in the UK is consistently represented by asylum migrants. The average between 2012-2022 is just over 7%. The APS data for Figure 3.3 illustrates the impact of the refugee crisis, with an increase to a share of 11% of all migrants in 2016, over double the figure for the previous year. This share has mostly declined since. Since the estimates for this section are drawn from APS datasets, asylum migrants here include those who came to the UK through resettlement schemes, alongside those who sought asylum directly in the UK.

For study migrants, the share has remained relatively stable, around the 14% average for the period 2012-2022. For example, the lowest share is 13.2% in 2017 and 14.5% in 2021.

For work migrants, the share has generally increased between 2012 and 2020. While the average is 31.5% for the period, this percentage increases by 10 percentage points from 26.96% in 2012 to 35.82% in 2020. In a broader timeframe, work migrants typically represented a larger share of the migrant population in the UK, around 38% between 2000 and 2012. This share has decreased for several reasons. A major reason is the financial crisis in 2008, and the declining value of the pound which makes work in the UK less valuable relative to work in other EU countries (Migration Observatory, 2019).

Figure 3.3. Percentage of migrants across different migration reasons (Y-axis), by year (X-axis)



Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

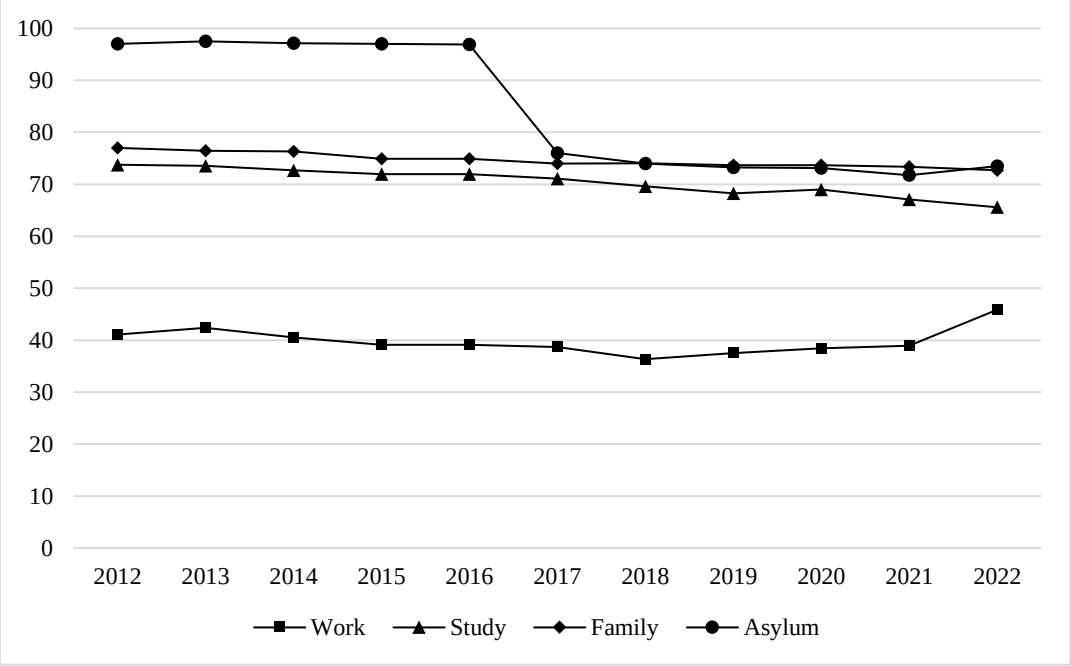
3.5.4 Share of EU and non-EU-nationals across the reasons for migration

As a final characterisation of the immigrant population in the UK, Figure 3.4 plots the share of non-EU-nationals for each of the migration reasons. This share is the largest among those who migrated to seek asylum. As mentioned in Chapter 1 and this Chapter 3, most asylum migrants in the UK come from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

For both study and family migrants, the share of non-EU nationals has slightly declined between 2012 and 2022, by 8 percentage points for study migrants and by 5 percentage points for family migrants.

Finally, non-EU-nationals represent just under 40% of all work migrants between 2012 and 2022. This is the smallest share across the migration reasons. Figure 3.4 below suggests that this share has declined until 2018, before increasing to a high point of 45.85% in 2022. Again, EU-nationals are significantly impacted by the changing regulations in the post-Brexit rules, which could explain this declining share among work migrants over time.

Figure 3.4. Percentage of non-EU migrants among APS migrant respondents by reason for migration (Y-axis) and by survey year (X-axis)



Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

As a final remark, while Chapters 5 and 6 provide more details on the socio-demographic characteristics of this immigrant population, across reasons for migration and using the same datasets, these broader statistics indicate a shifting composition in the immigrant population in the UK. For example, the share of work migrants has increased in the past decade. The APS estimates also suggest a shift towards more immigration from non-EU countries, and this is true for migrants coming to the UK for work reasons. Although it is difficult to attribute changes in migrant populations' characteristics to specific policies (Bijak et al., 2015), these changes could in part reflect important shifts in the UK's immigration and employment policies happening in the context of Brexit. This changing policy context constitutes the backdrop for the remaining chapters.

4 Understandings of Happiness and Life Satisfaction among Refugees in the UK

Abstract

Both qualitative and quantitative research draw increasingly from measures of life satisfaction and happiness to evaluate how refugees are faring in countries where asylum is obtained. However, existing evidence is limited, in that these two measures are included in research as either interchangeable or distinct components of SWB. After conducting semi-structured interviews with refugees based in the UK, this article presents three important contributions. First, life satisfaction is considered by refugees as a global assessment of key domains in their lives. Second, refugees define happiness not only as an emotion, but as a personal disposition towards experiencing emotions positively. This indicates that refugees' definitions of these SWB measures largely overlap with how they are conceptualised in broader literature. Third, however, there is a complex relational conditionality between these two components of SWB. While individual socio-demographics and experiences, including those of migrating to seek asylum, bring nuances to the findings, these have implications for measuring refugees' SWB in the UK and in countries of asylum more broadly.

Key words: happiness, life satisfaction, refugees, SWB, UK.

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4.1 Introduction

Life satisfaction and happiness are two components of how individuals perceive their life which are frequently assessed in SWB research (Diener, 1984, Veenhoven, 2013). Specifically, SWB is made up of different measurement components, each relating to the distinct ways in which individuals formulate judgments about their personal lives. First, evaluative well-being, often measured through life satisfaction, is a cognitive assessment of how one's life is going, all things considered (Pavot and Diener, 2008). Second, emotional well-being, which includes emotions such as happiness, captures SWB as experienced in the moment. To illustrate this distinction, Feldman (2010) describes the following scenario:

'*I am fully satisfied with the life I am leading; but I am very concerned about the lives that others are leading. (The victims of genocide in Africa, for example, are leading terrible lives. I think about these people all the time.) My concern for their misery makes me unhappy in spite of the fact that my own life is going quite well*.'

As highlighted by Hendriks (2015) and Hendriks and Bartram (2019), SWB measures are increasingly used to gain insight on migrants' lives in destination countries, in part because individuals may choose to migrate to increase their SWB. This said, some authors in these contributions use life satisfaction or happiness to qualify migrants' SWB overall (Grimes and Wesselbaum, 2019). Other authors explicitly differentiate migrants' happiness from their life satisfaction (Graham and Nikolova, 2018) which produces different evidence on how migrants are faring in such contexts.

Arguably, there is even less clear evidence on the SWB of those migrants who move to seek asylum, and in countries where asylum is obtained. In this article, I contribute insight on this specific gap, drawing from refugees' own perspectives on their happiness and life satisfaction in the UK. In the UK, a '*refugee*' refers to an individual who migrated for asylum reasons and who could hold various legal statuses (e.g. refugee status, humanitarian protection, ILR). Focusing on refugees in destination countries is important for multiple reasons. On the one hand, traumatic experiences to which refugees are exposed have long-lasting implications for well-being (Chan et al., 2016, Ambrosetti et al., 2021).

This is reflected in persistently high diagnoses of depression, anxiety, and important forms of PTSD which continue to manifest years after a legal refugee status is obtained (Blackmore et al., 2020). On the other hand, authors have suggested that refugees evaluate their lives in positive terms overall. This could be for different reasons, including that refugees feel better-off relative to those conditions that forced them to flee their home country (Fozdar and Torezani, 2018). Determining whether SWB concepts including happiness and life satisfaction help make sense of such findings is an overarching objective of this article.

When referring to host or asylum countries, the UK is a particularly important country to consider for several reasons. First, politicians in the UK have expressed the need to better understand how the population is doing and is, since 2011, one of few countries worldwide collecting systematic information on SWB through the APS. The rationale for incorporating measures of happiness and life satisfaction, alongside measures of anxiety and sense of worthwhile in this large scale data collection is that these constitute standard and comprehensive measures of SWB (Dolan et al., 2011). To date however, there is little evidence on whether SWB as measured by UK researchers and politicians resonates similarly with refugees living in the country. Second, the UK is implementing substantial changes to its migration and asylum system which have direct implications for how refugees perceive their life in the country (Guma et al., 2019). Life satisfaction and happiness could serve as insightful measures for future assessment of these changes, since they capture how positively individuals feel about their life.

In this context, I address two specific research questions. First, *how do refugees conceptualise life satisfaction and happiness?* Second, *what insights do refugees' happiness and life satisfaction provide on their SWB overall?* I explore these questions through 20 semi-structured interviews with refugees living in the UK, and the remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section provides the framework for these questions by drawing together important theoretical discussions of SWB (4.2). Then, I review empirical evidence on how SWB measures are implemented in research focusing on refugees (4.3). After discussing essential methodological components of this study (4.4), I turn to presenting the main results (4.5-4.7).

The results in this article provide a series of insights. First, life satisfaction is considered by refugees as a global assessment of important domains in their lives. These domains vary across individuals, and some changes in domains which contribute to life satisfaction are attributable to experiences of seeking asylum. Second, refugees define happiness not only as an emotion, but as a personal disposition towards experiencing emotions positively. Third, if this suggests that refugees identify happiness and life satisfaction as distinct components of SWB, there is a complex relational conditionality between the two: evaluating life satisfaction is affected by the capacity to feel positive emotions, including happiness; in parallel, restoring happiness plays a part in shaping satisfaction with life overall. Participants' experiences and socio-demographics bring nuances to these findings and are considered throughout the analysis. Nonetheless, the findings contribute to understanding how refugees subjectively assess their life following asylum seeking. The findings therefore open important avenues for future research, which explicitly differentiates these two interrelated but distinct components of SWB.

4.2 Measuring SWB through life satisfaction and happiness

4.2.1 What is SWB?

SWB measures how positively individuals rate the life they lead. The different ways in which individuals formulate judgments about their life translate into different SWB components (Diener, 1984, Ryan and Deci, 2001). Among important components, evaluative well-being refers to individuals' judgement about their life overall, which is often captured through life satisfaction (Pavot and Diener, 2008). In parallel, experienced or affective well-being relates to individuals' emotional states, which fluctuate on the short-term (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). Different components do not aggregate into a single measure but rather reflect the multiplicity of ways in which individuals formulate judgements on their SWB. SWB is increasingly used to inform policy design and appraisal, by monitoring how people are doing in their lives (Dolan et al., 2011). However, SWB concepts are also used in many other disciplines, such as neurosciences and economics, and evidence is available elsewhere which examines how these concepts are defined in such fields (Dolan et al., 2008, De Neve et al., 2013, Davidson and Schuyler, 2015).

4.2.2 What is life satisfaction?

Life satisfaction refers to the cognitive assessment a person conducts of their life, all things considered (Diener et al., 1985). In integrating a measure of evaluative well-being to national data collection, the UK's APS for example asks individuals '*Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays*?'. The subjective nature of life satisfaction measures is apparent, in that individuals are able to consider different domains in assessing how satisfied they are with their life. These different life domains typically include a person's social and family relations, employment status and general health, among others (Cummins, 2005).

There are several methodological considerations in measuring life satisfaction. First, how a person reports on their life satisfaction responds to changes in their life domains. As such, a person's overall satisfaction is not only reflecting stable elements of personality or internal dispositions, but also interpretations of changes to external life circumstances (Pavot and Diener, 2008). Second, many contextual and cultural factors influence the propensity for individuals to evaluate their life in more or less positive terms (Suh and Koo, 2008). From a methodological perspective, this highlights the importance of avoiding generalizations across cultures and contexts as to how life satisfaction translates the evaluative component of individuals' SWB.

4.2.3 What is happiness?

Individuals' experienced emotions also form part of their SWB. These emotions fluctuate on the short-term, as opposed to life evaluations carried out with a longer timeframe in mind (Kahneman et al., 2003, Kahneman et al., 2010). Emotions are qualified in positive and negative terms, and there are several perspectives on how the specific notion of happiness relates to emotional well-being. First, some research conceptualises happiness as one of the many positive emotions individuals experience, alongside, for example, joy, contentment, elation or high spirits (Haybron, 2016). Second, other research uses happiness as an overarching concept to encompass all positive emotions. This is the approach implemented in the UK's APS, where happiness is measured as '*how happy did you feel yesterday?*'. Negative and positive emotions are generally not considered as opposites on a continuum but as

relatively independent (Bradburn, 1969). In a Benthamite tradition, the objective is then to maximise happiness while minimising negative emotions (Crisp, 2006).

Third, happiness is sometimes described not only as a momentary experience, but as a disposition toward experiencing events as positive (Feldman, 2010, Haybron, 2013, Haybron, 2016). In relation to this dispositional approach, there is evidence that the more happiness is experienced, the more a person is likely to report positive and long-lasting emotional well-being, meaning happiness is generally not considered as a fixed personality trait, but a disposition which can be enhanced over time (Veenhoven, 2013).

In all three cases, measuring happiness as the emotional part of SWB is key since it is unlikely for a person to report a high sense of general SWB in the absence of daily positive moods and emotions (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006).

4.2.4 What is the relation between life satisfaction and happiness?

Research which considers measures of happiness and life satisfaction in conjunction and compares their respective correlates has revealed differences more often than similarities (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2004). For example, life satisfaction correlates more strongly with employment status, family status, and income (Jebb et al., 2020). In contrast, happiness correlates more strongly with self-reported health, leisure time, closeness of family and social relations (Kahneman and Deaton, 2010, Haybron, 2016).

As two important components of SWB, distinguishing happiness measures from those of life satisfaction gives room to examine the relation between the two. Current research in this direction provides mixed results. For example, happiness as the array of positive emotions correlates strongly and positively with life satisfaction (Pavot and Diener, 2008). However, reporting negative emotions, such as anxiety, does not always associate with lower life satisfaction (Headey et al., 1993). While there is little evidence on the relation between happiness and life satisfaction, some studies have also examined how these two components compare in their contribution to SWB overall (Kahneman et al., 2010).

The focus of this article on happiness and life satisfaction should not suggest that these comprehensively define SWB or matter the most to SWB. However, both life satisfaction and happiness are increasingly used to assess migrants' outcomes in host countries, including those who migrated to seek asylum (Hendriks and Bartram, 2019).

4.3 Evidence on refugees' life satisfaction and happiness

4.3.1 Changes to life satisfaction in destination countries

Alongside growing research on migrants' life satisfaction, there is little focus to date on refugees, despite evidence that life satisfaction in the destination country is influenced by the nature of the migration journey (Ambrosetti and Paparusso, 2021). Furthermore, available studies differ widely in their methodological approaches. For example, Ambrosetti et al. (2021) examine refugees' life satisfaction in Germany using the standard question '*How satisfied are you currently with your life in general?*'. In contrast, Colic-Peisker (2009) qualifies refugees' life satisfaction in Australia using mixed methods. Life satisfaction is first measured with two survey items, one of '*general life satisfaction*' and another of '*life back to normal*' which are combined into a single indicator. Second, upon discussing life satisfaction through in-depth interviews, the author assesses how aspects such as sense of discrimination and visibility in the community relate to satisfaction with life in Australia. This is similar to the mixed methodology used by Khawaja and Hebbani (2019).

Such studies provide limited evidence on refugees' life satisfaction as they do not address whether experiences of seeking asylum affect what life satisfaction means to refugees. There is evidence that this may have changed with Colic-Peisker (2009) and others, where refugees' life satisfaction relates to '*life going back to normal*'. These changes have important implications for comparing refugees' life satisfaction to that of other individuals, migrant and non-migrant alike.

4.3.2 Happiness as the absence of emotional distress or well-being overall

There is also scarce research which examines refugees' happiness in the country of asylum. Existing research includes different conceptualisations of happiness. First, happiness is sometimes measured in terms similar to broad life evaluations. For example, Hagstrom et al. (2019) measure refugees' happiness in Utica with two quantitative survey items, '*I am happy with my life in Utica*' and '*I am*

happy with my life in the United States'. Happiness is interchangeable with SWB overall in Wenning's (2019) qualitative study of refugees in the Gambia and the UK.

Second, some studies consider refugees' emotional well-being, without explicitly referring to happiness. There is extant evidence that refugees suffer from frequent and intense negative emotions as a result of cumulative traumatic processes occurring in home, transit and destination countries (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007, Lindert et al., 2009, Im et al., 2021). Such processes contribute to a majority of refugees being '*bothered by emotional problems such as feeling worried, stressed or depressed*' in countries where asylum is obtained, including in the UK (Campbell et al., 2018). However, there is no evidence as to whether and how these negative emotional states relate to refugees' happiness, specifically.

As such, research is needed which differentiates between refugees' happiness as general SWB on the one hand, and happiness as the absence of negative emotions and mental health challenges on the other hand. The fact that both approaches co-exist is pointed to by Blackmore et al. (2020) although not necessarily as a limitation in understanding what happiness means to refugees. This seems an important omission if refugees' happiness is in itself affected by experiences of seeking asylum.

4.3.3 Evaluative and emotional components of refugees' SWB

There is important research which assesses the relation between evaluative and emotional components of refugees' SWB. While the focus of this article is on the relation between life satisfaction and happiness, specifically, this evidence is still useful. For example, some studies present refugees' emotions and life evaluations as independent, by virtue of their variation according to different factors (Ambrosetti et al., 2021). Others suggest that emotional and evaluative components are inter-dependent, or predictors of each other, and therefore examine them in combination. For example, in a qualitative study of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Ayar and Karasu (2021) find that decreasing '*fear of happiness*', an aversion to happiness based on the expectation that it will be short lived, that it is not deserved, or that being happy will negatively impact relatives, improves refugees' sense of meaning in life. Similarly, Karaman et al. (2022) suggest a positive relation between refugees' emotional resilience, as the ability

to cope and manage stress and trauma, and life satisfaction. In both cases, the relation between different components of SWB is influenced by experiences of seeking asylum.

In all, evidence on the relation between refugees' life satisfaction and happiness is still limited. Specifically, while research highlights that refugees suffer from emotional distress on the long term, how this impacts their satisfaction with life has yet to be addressed. Furthermore, although some studies indicate that refugees evaluate their lives positively given the conditions which initiated the asylum seeking, described as '*relative gratification*' by Fozdar and Torezani (2018), whether and how this associates with happiness is also largely unknown. These various gaps are addressed in the remainder of this article.

4.4 Methodology

4.4.1 Developing partnerships with local organisations

This article draws from fieldwork I conducted between March and August 2022 in the UK. I started by developing partnerships with organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees, in Bristol and Oxford. In Bristol, Ashley Community Housing (ACH) is a social enterprise founded in 2008 with offices also in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton. The organisation supports over 2,000 new refugees and migrants each year. Its services are concentrated around providing safe accommodation, training and employment opportunities. In Oxford, the City Council works with several local organisations to support the resettlement and integration of refugees in the Oxfordshire region. With both organisations, the initial objective of the partnership was to develop robust methodologies to evaluate how refugees are doing in host communities. I presented the purpose of my research and explained that SWB could provide insight on this, and on the impact of initiatives aimed at supporting refugees' resettlement. ACH and the City Council agreed to help identify individuals who would be willing to discuss issues related to SWB. The idea was to gain a sound understanding of what SWB means to refugees, before starting to monitor different SWB outcomes within local organisations.

I became familiar with each interview participant through a snowballing process. In ACH for example, the first interviews were with refugees who initially came to the organisation for employment and housing support, and subsequently obtained permanent employment as ACH social workers. These

individuals had therefore obtained a legal refugee status sometimes close to a decade before this research. Initial participants then shared information about the research to other refugees they thought would be interested. The snowballing process was similar in Oxford, until I had conducted 20 interviews over the course of 6 months, 10 in each organisation. Although this represents a small number of respondents, I strived to avoid research fatigue on behalf of both participants and the supporting organisations with interviews which were both potentially time-consuming and emotionally demanding (Omata, 2020). Furthermore, after this 6-month period which was agreed upon, it was important to share research findings with my contact points in the two organisations. Since then, both have integrated SWB measures to assess how refugees are doing after taking part in different programs. The next steps in these partnerships include examining how sustainable changes in SWB appear over time.

4.4.2 Details of research participants

To take part in an interview, the only requirement was for participants to be over 18 years old and to have a refugee status. Beyond this, my objective was to reach a diversity of respondents in terms of their socio-demographics and experiences, since refugees in the UK represent a diverse group of individuals. For example, some refugees are resettled to the UK from abroad while others seek asylum from within the country. Some refugees are dispersed across the country while others remain in the local authority where they lodged their asylum claim. Without discussing these differences explicitly, they are nonetheless important in obtaining broad insight on refugees' SWB in the UK.

A brief explanation is needed on terms I use to refer to research participants. As suggested above, all participants have a refugee status. This said, some individuals refused being identified as a refugee because of having a legal refugee status in the country. In contrast, others preferred referring to their experiences as refugees. This was considered important to counter processes of othering, and to invalidate assumptions that being a refugee entails being defined by nothing else. In all, the notion of refugee occurred more infrequently during the interviews than did that of seeking asylum, thus referring to processes rather than fixed statuses or identities.

Next, I conducted all interviews in English. This implies a certain bias in terms of who accepted to take part in the research, which could be educational or cultural, among others and which is complex to fully identify. In the UK, Morrice et al. (2019) find for example that low language skills among refugees are typically reflective of social exclusion. Since experiences of social exclusion are particularly detrimental to SWB (Bellani and D'Ambrosio, 2011, VanderWeele et al., 2012), it is likely that those refugees whose SWB outcomes in the UK are lower on average, and for whom definitions of happiness and life satisfaction might be more negative than those of participants, are less represented in the study.

For illustrative purposes, Table 4.1 below compares participants' main socio-demographic characteristics to refugees in the UK as sampled in the APS, which aims to be representative of the population at large. The APS asks individuals born outside the country about their initial reason for migrating to the UK. This means that migrants who respond coming to the UK for asylum reasons may have obtained British citizenship by the time they are surveyed in the APS. As suggested in Table 4.1, participants in the study have been in the UK for less time than refugees sampled in the APS. This gives some confidence that the sampling for this article is not entirely excluding refugees who are more recent arrivals in the country.

Table 4.1. Comparison of participating refugees and APS respondents' socio-demographics

	APS respondents	Study respondents
Gender		
Male	39.4%	55%
Female	60.6%	45%
Age (years)		
18-30	25%	20%
30-50	59%	50%
50 and above	16%	30%
Country of origin		
Afghanistan	2.65%	10%
Cameroon	<1.5%	5%
Eritrea	<1.5%	5%
Iran	1.91%	10%
Kuwait	<1.5%	5%
Palestine	<1.5%	10%
Syria	<1.5%	40%
Taiwan	<1.5%	5%
Ukraine	<1.5%	10%
Main occupation in the UK		
Studying	13%	20%
Inactive/job searching	34%	15%

Employed	53%	65%
Years of residence in the UK		
Under 5 years	10.5%	55%
5-20 years	53%	40%
20 years and above	36.5%	5%
Observations	933	20

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS 2022 quarterly datasets.

4.4.3 Situating the discussion on SWB

With each participant, I set up an initial exchange by email or WhatsApp, to ensure that all important information relating to the interview could be discussed. Participants also decided whether they wanted to conduct the interview in person, online or over the phone. 12 of these interviews were in person, 6 online and 2 over the phone. The interviews lasted for an hour on average, ranging from 45 minutes to over 2 hours, and were semi-structured around three main themes. First, the interview would start along the lines of '*do you want to tell me a bit about yourself?*', and participants took the time to share parts of their life stories. Although much more could be said on each life story, I refer to them to the extent that these were advanced by individuals as influencing the main focus on happiness and life satisfaction. Second, we discussed subjective well-being, following with questions such as '*what do you think happiness means*' or '*what would you say is your definition of life satisfaction'*. Participants were not guided towards specific definitions, and all had different ways of proceeding, including translating key terms from their mother-tongue. One participant drew out the different brain parts which are activated when a person experiences changes in emotional versus evaluative well-being. Third, the exchange moved from definitions to the relation between happiness and life satisfaction.

A limitation to this methodological approach is that there is no qualitative insight on how other migrants in the UK and the UK-born understand life satisfaction and happiness. This would help identify what, if anything, in the experience of seeking asylum affects these understandings. To provide further contextual background, Table 4.2 includes descriptive statistics on the SWB of refugees, other migrants and the UK-born at the time of this research and as sampled in the APS. This helps situate how refugees compare to these other groups in their reported SWB, from a quantitative perspective. Both happiness and life satisfaction are measured on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is '*not at all*' and 10 is '*completely*'.

Table 4.2 suggests refugees report lower happiness and life satisfaction than other migrants in the UK, but slightly higher life satisfaction than the UK-born.

Table 4.2. Comparison of refugees' SWB in the UK to that of other migrants and the UK-born

	Refugees	Other migrants	UK-born
	Happiness: Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?		
	7.00	7.42	7.28
	2.14	2.00	2.04
	Life satisfaction: Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?		
	7.38	7.41	7.36
	1.86	1.77	1.78
Observations	933	12,689	105,386

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS 2022 quarterly datasets. First line is the sample mean. Second line is the sample standard deviation.

I transcribed and coded all interview material in NVivo (12). When including part of these transcripts, I refer to participants using pseudonyms to respect their anonymity. In addition, M indicates that the respondent was male, F that the respondent was female. I also include an indication of respondents' age, in years, at the time of the interview. Themes and results in the remaining sections are generated through a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Although not exhaustive, I interpret these themes as largely indicative of thoughts and ideas around which interviewees converged (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

4.5 While the meaning stays the same, what promotes life satisfaction changes with seeking asylum

4.5.1 Finding stability

The following paragraphs start by analysing how participants spoke about life satisfaction. This was prompted by talking about SWB overall, and progressively refining the discussion around something pertaining to broad life evaluations. Through these questions, I aimed to get a sense of whether, and to what extent, refugees understand life satisfaction similarly to how such questions are formulated in official UK surveys and in SWB research elsewhere. The interviews provided key insights on this.

First, discussions with participants highlighted the value of a life satisfaction measure where the underlying content, or domains of life, is abstracted. Indeed, most respondents found the process of

defining life satisfaction as some form of well-being quite challenging, with there being no other evident definition of life satisfaction than being satisfied with life. This challenge did not seem to translate a language or cultural barrier, however. In addition, this difficulty was frequently circumvented by reflecting on domains or areas of life which contribute to a general sense of satisfaction. This is reflected in the following extract from the interview with Antoni, a 28-year-old Iranian refugee living and working in the UK since 2020, when talking about life satisfaction:

> '*When I'm productive, when I sleep you know, and wake up early seven (...) when I have time to answer friends. So having a good balance between important things in my life.'* (Antoni, M, 28).

Antoni's notion of '*good balance*' is similar to the cognitive assessment which individuals are prompted to conduct in the APS and similar surveys, when asked about life all things considered. Here, Antoni is considering elements such as work, social time and rest in thinking about his own life satisfaction. In a similar direction, Phoebe (F, Early 30s), a refugee from Ukraine, spoke about '*feeling stable*' after re-establishing her clothing line for babies, taking care of her health and finding more time to be with her young daughter.

4.5.2 Balancing important areas of life

Second, there are notable similarities between life domains emphasized in broader SWB research and those discussed throughout the interviews. The most prominent domains included having a permanent job and secure financial resources, decent accommodation and family and friends to rely on.

From here, the life domains of importance reflected each participant's individual situation. For example, respondents with children, such as Phoebe, highlighted that satisfaction with life meant securing their children's education. Those respondents unemployed at the time of the interview considered finding employment as central to satisfaction with life. Some participants expressed their fulfilling of religious duties as particularly important. However, this did not alter the general sense among interviewees that life satisfaction means balancing these areas and finding stability.

4.5.3 Being satisfied by keeping a busy life

The objective of this article is not to discuss each of the different domains' relative importance, nor to suggest that those mentioned here are exhaustive. However, one point requires further attention. Throughout the discussions, participants often referred to the fact that what contributes to life satisfaction may have changed as a result of seeking asylum, and as one recurring example, the need to stay '*busy*'. This could take the form of actively needing to give back to the community, including through supporting newly arrived refugees and conducting various forms of voluntary work in the partner organisations. This is the case with Betty from Eritrea who used to work in the car industry and was now working, studying and volunteering all at the same time:

'*In the beginning my life was really not good. But I decided to kind of make myself busy so I started also translating for different charities.'* (Betty, F, 47).

This is similar to Cillian, a male refugee from Taiwan, now in his late 50s, who explained '*I need to stay active, I need to keep going'*. Although many authors explore this growing societal strive for busyness (Darrah, 2007, Darrah et al., 2011), those focusing on asylum-seeking individuals indicate that busyness in this instance serves a specific, functional purpose, of keeping negative thoughts at bay by keeping a busy head (Rotter, 2016, Wenning, 2019), something which transpired in these interviews.

In all, this understanding of life satisfaction shared by participants has several implications. First, the way most interviewees describe life satisfaction mirrors how such measures are conceptualised in research focusing on a broader population, as a cognitive assessment of those domains which matter in life. This is the case with how life satisfaction is measured in the UK's APS, for example. Methodologically, this facilitates life satisfaction comparisons between individuals with different lived experiences, including experiences of seeking asylum. Second, participants in this study mention similar important life domains to those emphasized in research elsewhere (Cummins, 2005, Jebb et al., 2020). Particularly recurrent themes in these interviews include family, housing and employment status, and participation in the community. This indicates that gaps in refugees' life satisfaction, relative to other migrants and non-migrants in a destination country, could focus on domains which are likely to

be affected by asylum seeking. For example, Sachs et al. (2018) highlight that refugees' life satisfaction in Germany converges neither to that of other migrants, nor to that of German-born individuals, despite improvements in domains such as language skills, employment and health status. It is likely that other life domains take on additional importance in explaining refugees' life satisfaction, including this need to stay '*busy*'.

4.6 Seeking asylum affects the disposition to experience happiness

4.6.1 Happiness is a positive emotional state

The next paragraphs detail how refugees conceptualise happiness. In this part of the interviews, participants progressively directed their thinking from general SWB to how SWB relates with how one feels, and all discussed notions of happiness in doing so.

Specifically, participants' responses highlighted a distinction between happiness as a subjective feeling, and objective elements which characterise happiness. Indeed, most participants shared their thoughts on happiness by using first person formulations such as '*happiness for me is*' or '*I think happiness is'*. I also encouraged this, in so far as it is their own perspective on happiness which I aimed to identify. This said, various elements appeared as consistently relating to happiness. For one, regardless of individual socio-demographics and experiences, interviewees defined happiness as something positive, something pleasant. Some participants referred to *'the moments when you are smiling*', and those physical and mental responses to when something good happens. Furthermore, part of these interviews paralleled the concept of objective happiness advanced by Kahneman et al. (2003) where happiness is a moment-based experience that is temporary in nature. This was highlighted by Oscar, who worked in humanitarian logistics in Cameroon before fleeing his country in 2019:

'*I'll define happiness as that feeling of being joyous, being contented, being fulfilled, at a particular moment in time. Because happiness is not some permanent state. It's more or less fleeting, sometimes you're happy, sometimes you're sad. You can't be happy all your life, so that is my definition of happiness.*' (Oscar, M, 39).

These shared features of happiness are noteworthy since participants ranged in age, gender, country of origin, all factors which are found to affect happiness (Myers and Diener, 2018, LeFebvre and Huta, 2021). Another similarity is the mood change at this stage of the interviews: often, participants would share smiles and appear to relax when talking about their happiness.

4.6.2 Happiness is contingent on negative emotions

As highlighted in the previous extract from Oscar's interview, interviewees often supported the definition of happiness by referring to negative emotions. This materialised in different ways. First, some participants considered happiness as the momentary absence of negative emotions, qualified with terms such as anxiety, depression, unhappiness or distress. Wilson (M, 27) who was dispersed to Birmingham, referred to his happiness as '*at least it's when not the trauma feelings*'. For him, part of the trauma resulted from being placed in an unfamiliar city with no ties to rely on, and he related this to how unhappy he had felt until he found ways to rebuild connections in the community.

Second, some participants suggested that happiness is contingent on the acknowledgement that these negative emotions exist. The shift is from considering happiness as the absence of negative emotions, to defining happiness as the acknowledgment that in the moment, one is not experiencing negative emotions. This idea was particularly strong in the conversation with Johanna, 23 years old at the time of the interview, who was forcibly displaced from Syria with her family as a young adolescent. Johanna and her family spent months internally displaced before fleeing the country:

'*I have also another mindset that if we actually didn't feel sadness, we wouldn't feel happiness. Like we wouldn't know what happiness is unless we experienced sadness. Which is not a bad thing, it's actually better because with depression, depression is when you actually lose emotions, you lose the feeling of happiness and lose the feeling of sadness.*' (Johanna, F, 23).

The inter-dependence of positive and negative emotions in this extract resonates with studies showing implications of PTSD for PTG (Tedeschi et al., 1998, Calhoun and Tedeschi, 2014). This association is also pointed to in research focusing on asylum seeking, where positive PTG occurs when refugees find ways to make sense of traumatic experiences (Chan et al., 2016, Umer and Elliot, 2021). By explaining

that she now has '*another mindset*', Johanna suggests that her sense-making relates to experiencing the absence of both positive and negative emotions as a worse outcome still than the experience of sadness. While PTG is often pointed to as resulting from PTSD, Johanna is rather indicating that happiness and sadness co-exist.

4.6.3 Happiness is a state that is vulnerable to negative life events

Finally, two participants moved from defining happiness as a positive emotion, related in one way or another to negative emotions, to happiness as the frame of mind which enables the feeling of positive emotions. Importantly, it appeared in both these interviews that the specific experiences associated with seeking asylum influenced this distinction. Christoph, an academic in his early 40s resettled from Afghanistan and Fleur, 36 years old, who worked as a journalist in Palestine and Syria before seeking asylum in the UK in 2017, both expressed a desire to reconnect with a former self, before seeking asylum, that had a stronger inclination for happiness. This is important in light of research suggesting happiness encompasses positive feelings and the absence of, or balance with, negative emotions, alongside dispositions towards being able to experience happiness at all (Haybron, 2016). Both participants were distressed at the state of their daily emotions, since this was not the disposition that they typically identified with:

'*Before you know, people they couldn't handle me more than two hours. To be honest because of my sense of humour. I never had a serious conversation, I was always positive. But even my friends I haven't seen them for one year or two years. They saw me. They told me what happened to you? You're not you anymore. We never knew you super serious. I never used to be anxious all the time. That I wish I could change.*' (Christoph, M, Early 40s).

In other research, authors refer to the concept of '*hedonic treadmill*' (Knight and Gunatilaka, 2012), which captures the idea that even major life changes only temporary modify individuals' emotional states. Czaika and Vothknecht (2014) describe this in the case of migration as a major life event. This said, the excerpt from Christoph's interview indicates a change in emotions which is experienced as long-lasting, here at least since '*one or two years*'. Determining whether significant life events, such as

those experienced with seeking asylum, can effectively reduce individuals' disposition for happiness on the long-term has implications for hedonic treadmill theories more broadly.

4.7 Relational conditionality between happiness and life satisfaction

4.7.1 When knowing that happiness exists conditions satisfaction with life

The final insight from these interviews pertains to the relation between life satisfaction and happiness. This relation was easier to identify once participants had provided insight on both concepts throughout the interviews. In the context of this article, refugees defined happiness as an umbrella term to describe positive emotions, in and of themselves, but also the absence of negative emotions, and the disposition for events to be experienced as positive. For life satisfaction, refugees reflected on the different domains which shape a general sense of balance, of stability.

From here, I start by characterising the relation directed from happiness to life satisfaction, or how changes in happiness affect interviewees' sense of satisfaction with life. In the conversations with some participants, reflecting on life satisfaction was prevented by not being able to think about life generally, beyond the unhappiness of the present moment. Although the factors causing unhappiness were not always described, Phoebe stressed how lack of safety in her present living conditions and vis-à-vis her future in the UK maintained this state, beyond traumatic experiences she suffered throughout asylum seeking. At one point, Phoebe explained '*I can't think about my life this you say when I don't know about even just today*' This is noteworthy, given substantial evidence that conditions in destination countries often compound or worsen refugees' general state of well-being (Henkelmann et al., 2020, Walther et al., 2020).

In other instances, the lack of happiness experienced after seeking asylum explicitly caused individuals to re-assess what could promote a sense of life satisfaction: being satisfied with life in these instances appeared as conditional on restoring the disposition for positive emotions to be experienced at all, as was suggested by Fleur and Christoph. This is also highlighted in the following extract of the discussion with Tobias, where he discussed how moving forward with life in the UK had been conditional on re-gaining a sense of emotional stability. Tobias lived close to a decade in Lebanon, working informally

in numerous sectors unrelated to his professional background as an architect, before being granted asylum in the UK:

'*When I came, I was battling with a lot of suicidal thoughts, negative thoughts, and I am just about able to actually work on my thoughts enough to start thinking about my life again.*' (Tobias, M, 31).

4.7.2 When a satisfied life means a life where happiness is in the realm of possible emotions

Next, I describe this relational conditionality as directed from life satisfaction to happiness. In some cases, participants described happiness and positive emotions as secondary to life evaluations. The preoccupation with those domains which are foundational to global life evaluations, such as permanent housing, employment and family, meant that refugees considered the notion of happiness, or being happy, as secondary, at least at the time of the interview. In other cases, thinking about life satisfaction explicitly included positive emotions as an important domain. This could transpire as '*I'll be satisfied with my life when I manage to experience happiness again*'. Below, Johanna illustrates this by including happiness in reflecting on her life in the future:

'*My short term plans it's just changing my personality specifically. Trying to go back to how I was before everything happened. I've met my friend from 10 years. (...). She told me that it's she's like meeting a very different person. Like I'm not the same Johanna that she knew back then, that my energy is very, very down. So that's why I'm now trying to get back to how I used to be. I registered in a gym, I'm trying to be happier in my life, to start actually taking care of myself. I also adopted kitten yesterday.*' (Johanna, F, 23).

In many ways, this is similar to the interview with Christoph referenced above, where he explains how he '*wishes*' he could revert to his positive self, before migrating to seek asylum. Here, Johanna also explicitly makes a connection with achieving a sense of satisfaction with life.

4.7.3 Seeking asylum strengthens the interrelation between happiness and life satisfaction

As such, there was no single characterisation of the relation between life satisfaction and happiness, but rather evidence of many ways in which these components interact with each other. This is described here as relational conditionality, in that happiness and life satisfaction are not independent but rather

reinforce and relate to each other in a multiplicity of ways. What transpires in many of these interviews is that changing connections between life satisfaction and happiness related to experiences of seeking asylum. Particularly, that restoring the capacity for happiness could increase life satisfaction seemed to result from long-lasting damages to emotional well-being throughout traumatic asylum journeys.

Finally, the interviews highlighted how inter-connected happiness and life satisfaction are in shaping participants' general sense of SWB. With this in mind, further research could explore whether both happiness and life satisfaction are positive, desirable outcomes in and of themselves, in their interaction, but also in contributing to SWB overall, as has been suggested in research elsewhere (Diener et al., 2002).

4.8 Discussion

In conclusion, this article explores what life satisfaction and happiness mean to refugees in the UK, and how these two components of SWB relate to each other. Importantly, refugees described life satisfaction as a '*good balance*' between different life domains, which is similar to how life satisfaction is conceptualised and measured in the UK and in SWB research more broadly (Pavot and Diener, 2008, Diener et al., 2013). In addition, refugees highlighted the significance of domains similar to those in broader research, such as social and family relationships, and a secure employment status. However, the interviews suggested that domains promoting life satisfaction may shift after seeking asylum, such as towards an active need to stay busy. While this does not modify refugees' understanding of life satisfaction as a balance between those things which matter in life, the nature and extent of this shift offers an important avenue for further research.

Next, all participants, regardless of individual socio-demographics and experiences, defined happiness as a positive emotion. In connecting with broader SWB research, two participants, Fleur and Christoph, formulated understandings of happiness as the disposition for positive emotions to be experienced at all. This brings a certain nuance to how happiness is measured in the UK's APS for example, as a general positive emotion experienced in the moment.

Finally, participants referred to complex, multi-dimensional relations between life satisfaction and happiness, sometimes reciprocal, sometimes conditional and described in this article as a relational conditionality. This is important for several reasons. First, these findings suggest there is value in specifying what component of SWB is being referred to in drawing conclusions about how refugees are doing in asylum countries. Using life satisfaction and happiness interchangeably is dismissing important nuances between the two components. Second, conflating happiness and life satisfaction misses the potential to explore the numerous ways in which SWB components relate to each other. This is evident in Tobias' concluding remarks in his interview:

'I am satisfied with my life but it makes me really sad to see other people that need support. The kind of support that I can give I try, like with a podcast where other refugees can voice their experience.'

(Tobias, M, 31).

4.9 Implications

While this study is based on a small number of respondents, and cannot be generalized to refugees more broadly, the findings have implications for how refugees' SWB is currently assessed in countries of asylum. Studies in this area have pointed to a SWB paradox. In these, there is a notion that refugees' happiness becomes adaptable to adverse conditions, such that even in the absence of factors typically essential in promoting happiness, refugees develop resources for '*living well*' and therefore still report high happiness (Agbo et al., 2012, Wenning, 2019). Similarly, research suggests that refugees experience high satisfaction with life, despite traumatic experiences which have negative repercussions long after asylum is obtained (Fozdar and Torezani, 2018). An implication for future research would be to determine whether such results, presented as paradoxical, or out of the ordinary, change when using understandings of life satisfaction and happiness as discussed by refugees in these interviews.

4.10 Declarations

4.10.1 Acknowledgements

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4.10.2 Data availability statement

This study includes statistical data accessed via the ONS Secure Research Service. The use of this data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates. Data sharing is not applicable to this article as the data is confidential and only available via the ONS Secure Research Service.

5 Differences in Migrants' Reason for Migration and Subjective Well-being: Not So Different After All

Abstract

This article uses 2012-2022 UK survey data to explore differences in SWB (i.e., happiness, anxiety, life satisfaction, and having a worthwhile life) between those born in the UK and migrants who migrated for different reasons to the country (i.e., work, study, family, and asylum). Previous literature looking at objective indicators such as employment rates and health suggests that migrants' reasons for migration relate to major differences across groups in these types of well-being indicators. In contrast, our analysis suggests that differences in SWB with the UK-born are relatively similar across those who migrated for different reasons to the country. Moreover, across reasons for migration, there is a clear pattern of convergence to the SWB levels of the UK-born as length of residence in the UK increases. This differs from studies looking at objective well-being indicators, in which some groups, such as those who migrated for family or asylum reasons, take longer to converge to the levels of those born in the country.

Keywords: migration, reason, SWB, UK.

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5.1 Introduction

There is a large literature exploring characteristics of migrants' life in destination countries, providing insight on how migrants are faring in areas such as employment, housing and health (Schneeweis, 2011, Malmusi, 2015, Brell et al., 2020). Some of these studies consider differences in outcomes which relate to migrants' reason for migration and highlight that while certain migrants do converge to objective well-being levels of individuals born in the destination country, this is not the case for others (Connor, 2010, Aydemir, 2011, Diaz et al., 2015, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018).

While the contribution of this literature exploring objective indicators by reason for migration is valuable, it largely ignores the interpretation that individuals make of their own living conditions. This is particularly important in the case of migrants as there could be discrepancies between the dynamics of objective and subjective well-being. For instance, Stillman et al. (2015) point to a '*paradox*' whereby migration causes linear improvements in areas such as employment and income, but more complex changes in SWB. A comparison of objective well-being indicators alone, such as employment status, misses these differences in migrants' subjective appreciation of their well-being in destination countries (Hendriks and Bartram, 2019). There are other illustrations, including in the lead up to the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup, which sparked significant controversy concerning migrant workers' working conditions in the country (Millward, 2017). While the FIFA President claimed immigrant workers should feel a sense of pride and accomplishment for their contribution to a prestigious sporting event, one of these workers stated to a New York Times reporter that '*for me, work and money is more important than football*' (New York Times, 2022).

As such, the focus of this article is on differences in SWB between individuals born in the country and migrants, focusing on the role of initial reason for migration. We place particular attention on reason for migration as a factor that reflects broader differences across migrants, which range from pre-migration (Bilodeau, 2008, Bürgelt et al., 2008) to post-migration experiences, including expectations about and opportunities for having a fulfilling life in the destination country and social and legal

constraints migrants face when making lifestyle choices (De Jong, 2000, Cangiano, 2014, Castelli, 2018).

In this framework, SWB refers to how positively individuals rate the life they lead, and we focus on measures that are widely used in related research. First, on happiness and anxiety as two affective measures, that is, to quantify emotions and feelings of SWB that fluctuate over a short period of time (e.g., yesterday). Second, on life satisfaction and sense that things in life are worthwhile, as, respectively, evaluative and eudaimonic measures of SWB. Both capture global assessments individuals make of how their life is going (Diener, 2009).

While there is growing research exploring SWB indicators among migrants (e.g. Safi, 2010, Bartram, 2011, Hendriks, 2015, Hendriks and Bartram, 2019), there has been less emphasis on differences in SWB dynamics across reasons for migration. This is the main contribution of this article. In particular, the analysis draws on UK survey data, covering the period from 2012 to 2022 to explore the two following questions. First, *what are the differences in subjective well-being between those born in the UK and migrants who migrated for different reasons?* Second*, how does length of residence in the UK relate to subjective well-being for migrants who migrated for different reasons?* The interest for this last question is in determining whether there is a pattern of convergence or divergence to the UK-born SWB.

The UK is an important case study to explore these key questions. The country is a major destination for migrants coming for a multitude of reasons (Rienzo and Vargas-Silva, 2022) and is currently redesigning its migration policy priorities as part of the Brexit process (Sumption, 2017b, 2019, Portes, 2022). Moreover, the UK is one of few countries collecting nationally representative data on SWB for over a decade, with the stated intention of using SWB evidence for policy purposes (Dolan et al., 2011, Allin, 2021). Finally, while studies similar to ours highlight that migrants' SWB is adaptable to conditions in each destination country (Hendriks and Bartram, 2016, Helliwell et al., 2020), there is little evidence on the UK, specifically.

In this context, the remaining sections are organised as follows. Section 5.2 presents key definitions of SWB and a discussion of the current evidence on migrants' well-being outcomes. Section 5.3 describes methodological components of this article, while Section 5.4 discusses the main results. After presenting results from three robustness checks in Section 5.5, Section 5.6 concludes and suggests implications of these findings.

5.2 Conceptual considerations and previous findings

To situate this research, we discuss two strands of the conceptual and empirical literature. The first relates to objective measures of migrants' well-being, as both differences in objective outcomes across reasons for migration (5.2.1) and changes related to length of residence in the destination country (5.2.2). The second focuses on SWB, including a conceptual discussion of related measures (5.2.3) and evidence on migrants' SWB in destination countries (5.2.4). We conclude this section by specifying our contribution to the literature (5.2.5).

5.2.1 Reason for migration and objective well-being outcomes

The conceptual underpinning of the literature exploring the implications of initial reason for migration on objective well-being outcomes has two components. First, that well-being relates strongly to basic human needs (Kanbur et al., 2018, Martela et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to measure objective indicators in areas such as employment and health to understand how people are doing in their life (Dolan et al., 2008). Second, that each reason for migration reflects a series of factors such as preparedness for migration, experiences during travel to the destination country, legal rights, skills match with the destination labour market, networks, and location in the destination country, among others, that influence how migrants fare in destination countries (Connor, 2010, Zwysen, 2019, Demireva and Zwysen, 2020, Kanas and Steinmetz, 2021). Each destination country's migration system imposes different selection criteria across categories of migrants, amplifying differences in objective outcomes across reasons for migration (Aydemir, 2011, Cangiano, 2014).

A recurring finding in high-income countries is that those who migrated for work or study reasons tend to have better objective outcomes than those who migrated for family or asylum reasons (Brell et al., 2020, Fasani et al., 2022). This is observed on the labour market, for example. In the UK, those who

migrated for family reasons have a 15-percentage points employment gap relative to the UK-born. This gap increases to 19-percentage points for asylum migrants. In contrast, there is no statistically significant difference on this outcome between those who migrated for employment reasons and the UK-born (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018). Evidence that those migrating for asylum have worse labour market outcomes is pointed to in many destination countries as a result of cumulative processes occurring in home and destination contexts, such as lengthy asylum procedures and uncertain residence statuses (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2014, Hainmueller et al., 2016, Brell et al., 2020).

These differences in objective well-being outcomes by reason for migration are not limited to the labour market (Chiswick et al., 2008, Kaur et al., 2021). In relation to health, Giuntella et al. (2018) estimate that those who migrated to the UK for work, family and study reasons report better outcomes than the UK-born, while those of asylum migrants are consistently worse. Here, in the same way that different migration routes affect migrants' objective outcomes in the destination country, coming through different routes to the destination country impacts migrants' access to important healthcare services and subsequent health outcomes (Chiswick et al., 2008, Makarova et al., 2015, Elstad, 2016).

5.2.2 Convergence in migrants' objective well-being outcomes over time

This literature also considers how differences in migrants' outcomes across reason for migration change as length of residence in the country increases. For migrants, increasing time spent in the destination country associates with positive outcomes such as familiarity with the labour market (Clark and Lindley, 2009), improved language skills (Dustmann and Fabbri, 2003) and expanded networks (Raghuram et al., 2010). Among other factors, these help to explain the observed convergence in migrants' outcomes to those of the local-born as length of residence in the destination country increases.

However, this convergence tends to be faster for those who migrated for work or study reasons, while the gap with asylum migrants takes longer to disappear (Bevelander, 2020, Brell et al., 2020). In the case of labour market outcomes, this convergence typically means higher wages and employment rates for migrants, while in terms of health, convergence materialises as a deterioration in migrants' health over time (McDonald and Kennedy, 2004, Antecol and Bedard, 2006).

5.2.3 The components of SWB

Our interest is in those subjective reports of well-being of an individual's conditions that have no direct objective counterparts. The subjective part of well-being considers individuals as '*the best judges of their own conditions*' (Stiglitz et al., 2009b).

It is common to separate SWB into different components, such as evaluative, eudaimonic, and experienced components, which capture the different ways in which individuals think about how their life is going and which are used in much research in the UK and beyond (Schimmack, 2008, Diener, 2009, Waldron, 2010). Evaluative well-being refers to a cognitive assessment a person conducts on their life, all things considered (Diener et al., 1985, Pavot and Diener, 2008). In parallel, eudaimonic well-being captures how worthwhile individuals consider their life. Although this is also a life evaluation, a conceptual distinction is that eudaimonia is typically considered independently of any notion of pleasure or satisfaction (Deci and Ryan, 2008, Huta and Ryan, 2010, Huta and Waterman, 2014).

Finally, experienced or affective well-being relates to individuals' emotions, which fluctuate on the short term, and are qualified in both positive terms, such as joy, happiness, and negative terms, such as sadness, anxiety (Feldman, 2010). Positive (e.g. happiness) and negative (e.g. anxiety) aspects of emotional well-being are generally not considered as opposites of a continuum, but rather as relatively independent (Watson and Clark, 2013). Moreover, while positive emotions are strongly correlated, this is less the case for negative emotions. For example, it is possible to feel sadness, but no anxiety (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, OECD, 2013). This further indicates that positive and negative affect function as two separate facets of emotions. In Section 5.3, we explain how we operationalise indicators from our data to represent each of these components.

5.2.4 Migrants' SWB

There is a growing literature that considers these SWB outcomes for migrants in destination countries (Bartram, 2011, Stillman et al., 2015)[11]. An important motivation for this literature is to explore how

[11] Some studies focus on differences in SWB between migrants and those residing in their own country of birth and argue that migrants typically have higher SWB outcomes than those individuals who stayed back home (Bartram, 2013). There is also a literature exploring whether the act of migrating in itself is associated with SWB gains (Hendriks, 2015). Although informative, these comparisons of migrants' and stayers' SWB, or migrants' pre

migrants' SWB changes as a result of migration and to compare migrants' SWB to that of the local-born as length of residence in the destination country increases.

From a conceptual perspective, there are several reasons to expect changes in the migrant-local-born SWB gap over time. First, as explained in this Section 5.2, indicators of migrants' objective well-being, such as employment likelihood, converge towards that of the native-born. Yet, positive convergence in employment outcomes is often accompanied by a deterioration in other objective outcomes, such a health, and this could lead to a decrease in SWB.

Second, given that many migrants are employed in low-skill jobs in destination countries, this could lead to a deterioration of their SWB. This effect could be aggravated by the cumulative experiences of exclusion and discrimination, which persist across migrant generations and have particularly detrimental implications for how migrants consider their life overall (Safi, 2010, Melzer and Muffels, 2017, Hendriks and Burger, 2020).

Most studies suggest that migrants report lower levels of SWB than the local-born in early years of residence (Obućina, 2013, Hendriks and Burger, 2020). Reviewing 51 cross-sectional studies comparing SWB of migrants and the local-born, Hendriks (2015) reports a negative SWB gap for migrants in 30 of these. For example, the life satisfaction of immigrants in France is 0.24 points of the 0 to 10 point scale lower than that of the French-born (Safi, 2010). Similarly, immigrants in the Netherlands report 0.21 points lower life satisfaction relative to those individuals born in the Netherlands. This difference decreases to 0.14 for second generation migrants, but remains significant (De Vroome and Hooghe, 2014). Finally, these studies generally indicate that migrants' SWB converges towards that of the local-born. While this materializes as an upward convergence with years of residence, migrants' SWB never fully matches that of the local-born (Sachs et al., 2018, Helliwell et al., 2020).

and post migration SWB, are different from the purpose of this study, which entails a comparison of the SWB of migrants who move for different reasons to the SWB of residents in the destination country.

5.2.5 The link between reason for migration and SWB: our contribution to the literature

Having discussed key literature on reasons for migration and SWB, we conclude this section by explaining our contribution to the literature. Overall, the evidence highlights significant differences in migrants' objective well-being outcomes based on reason for migration to the destination country. While this literature is extensive, there has been less emphasis on linking reason for migration with SWB. This omission is important as objective outcomes capture only part of individuals' well-being.

Next, considering evidence on migrants' SWB, we find scarce insight on whether patterns of convergence towards the native-born SWB differ for migrants who move for different reasons to the destination country. This perspective would complement well current evidence on migrants' objective well-being outcomes described above, which points to stark differences across migrant groups that persist over time. Therefore, the current study fills a gap in the literature looking at reason for migration and the literature looking at migrants' SWB.

5.3 Data and methods

5.3.1 Data

The empirical analysis relies on data from the secured version of the APS, provided by the Secure Research Service of the ONS. The APS is a nationally representative, cross-sectional and continuous household survey, with the largest coverage among all household surveys in the UK. The APS, which combines 2 waves of the main UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) and national local sample boosts, includes around 320,000 individuals each year. 45% of APS respondents are surveyed for the SWB questions. APS datasets are weighted by the ONS to reflect the size and composition of the general population, using the most up-to-date official population data. (ONS, 2018a).

Since 2010, a question in the APS asks all foreign-born respondents about their main reason for coming to the UK. The categories available are work, study, family unification, seeking asylum, and other. Note that this question refers to initial reason for migration as opposed to current legal status. For instance, someone who initially migrated for study reasons could be working full-time by the time they are surveyed. As shown in Table 5.1, most of those in the sample were born in the UK (87%). In this article,

those whose country of birth is outside the UK are referred to as migrants. The largest migrant group is accounted for by those who migrated for family reasons (35%), followed by work (33%) and study (16%). Those who migrated for asylum reasons account for just under 7% of all foreign-born.

While other surveys in the UK, such as Understanding Society, include some information on SWB and migration status, the APS has the largest coverage of surveys in the UK. For instance, we have 7,775 observations for those who migrated to seek asylum, the migrant category in our sample with fewer observations. This is particularly important in identifying SWB trends for different groups of migrants, and across different years of residence in the UK.

Table 5.1. Sample distribution

	Observations (N)	Share (%)
UK-born	770,028	87.14
Migrants	113,689	12.86
Total observations	883,717	100.00
	Migrants by reason for migration	
Work	37,766	33.22
Study	18,175	15.99
Family	39,893	35.09
Asylum	7,775	6.84
Other	10,080	8.86
Total observations	113,689	100.00

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

Since 2011, the APS includes four SWB questions, referring to the different components described in Section 5.2. The empirical analysis in this article covers an entire decade for which SWB data is available, from April 2012 to April 2022. SWB questions in the APS all use a 0 to 10 categorical scale where 0 is '*not at all*' and 10 is '*completely*'. Specifically, these questions are formulated as follows:

- *Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?*
- *Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?*
- *Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?*
- *Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?*

These four questions reflect, respectively, positive affect, negative affect, evaluative and eudaimonic well-being. The scales are harmonised and are used in numerous other surveys worldwide (Veenhoven

et al., 1993, Diener, 2009, Oishi et al., 2009). These SWB questions are not aggregated into a single measure as each reflects a distinct component of what it means to be well.

In all cases, we re-arrange responses such that higher values indicate higher levels of SWB across all variables, hence, facilitating the interpretation of results. In particular, this means that high values of anxiety reflect a positive well-being outcome, in the same way that high values of happiness suggest a positive well-being outcome. Table 5.2 reports the mean values for the SWB indicators. There are important average SWB differences across migrants based on reason for migration. For instance, the life satisfaction of those who migrated for work reasons (7.71) is higher than that of the UK-born (7.52). In contrast, asylum migrants' average life satisfaction in our sample is 7.43, which is not only lower than other migrant groups but lower still than the UK-born. In the estimations explained below we explore whether unconditional differences across groups are still present once we control for important covariates.

Table 5.2. Mean of dependent variables

		Migrants by reason for migration			
	UK-born	Work	Study	Family	Asylum
Happiness	7.34	7.66	7.49	7.46	7.41
	(2.14)	(1.79)	(1.99)	(2.15)	(2.22)
Anxiety	6.94	7.18	6.81	6.92	6.96
	(2.88)	(2.71)	(2.78)	(2.87)	(2.87)
Life satisfaction	7.52	7.71	7.56	7.53	7.43
	(1.80)	(1.59)	(1.64)	(1.85)	(1.95)
Worthwhile	7.79	7.85	7.85	7.80	7.68
	(1.71)	(1.54)	(1.56)	(1.73)	(1.84)
Observations	770,028	37,766	18,175	39,893	7,775

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. First line is mean. Standard deviation in parentheses. The scale for Anxiety is reversed (i.e. higher values indicate less anxiety).

5.3.2 Methods

The empirical analysis consists of a series of regressions along the following lines:

$$y_i = \alpha_c + \sum_{l=1}^{5} \beta_l R_i + \beta_5 O_i + \partial X_i + L_j + T_t + \varepsilon_i \quad (5.1)$$

$$y_i = \alpha_c + \sum_{k=1}^{5} \theta_k A_{ki} + \partial X_i + L_j + T_t + \varepsilon_i \quad (5.2)$$

In this case, y_i is one of the four SWB indicators presented in Table 5.2 (i.e. happiness, anxiety, life satisfaction and worthwhile life). R_i indicates one of the reasons for migration (i.e. work, study, family,

asylum) with the base category representing the UK-born (or zero for UK-born respondents). α_c is the country of birth dummy. Among the variables we control for, country of birth is important since there are cultural and contextual differences in how individuals report SWB (Suh and Koo, 2008, Oishi, 2018). This could affect SWB differences between migrants and the local-born, which we would otherwise conflate with our main focus on reason for migration. X_i are a series of individual characteristics and L_j represents the respondent's local authority of residence in the UK. Historically, there are significant variations across local authorities in numerous aspects such as ethnic diversity, unemployment, and access to health services, which are important to control for (Murray et al., 2016, Lymperopoulou, 2020). T_t is time dummy indicating the quarter and year in which a respondent took the survey. Furthermore, we cluster standard errors by survey year throughout the analysis, to reduce the likelihood that our estimates are biased by pooling a decade of survey data. Finally, A_{ki} are dummies indicating years of residence in the UK. Annexe Table 5.1 for this article provides a detailed description of the construction of each variable.

In equation (5.1), the focus of the discussion is on the estimated coefficients for β_l. These provide information on differences in self-reported SWB between the UK-born and migrants by reason for migration. In the discussion of the results from estimating equation (5.2), the focus is on θ_k which captures information on changes in SWB as length of residence in the UK increases. Equation (5.2) is estimated for each of the groups in turn (i.e. by reason for migration) relative to the UK-born, in order to facilitate the interpretation. Results of this estimation are presented in graphical form.

Table 5.3 reports the means for the main independent variables included in the estimations (X_i). The controls include gender, age, education, household composition and self-reported health among others[12]. Importantly, one of the controls is employment status which has been identified as a key factor in explaining individuals' SWB (Clark and Oswald, 1994, Lucas et al., 2004). Hence, we are exploring differences in SWB by reason for migration as we hold constant a key objective well-being outcome

[12] We include these controls in so far as they have been shown to affect individuals' SWB (Rumbaut, 1994, Inglehart, 2002, Helliwell, 2003, Bruni and Porta, 2005), such that these effects are held constant as we estimate those relating to migration reason.

(i.e. employment status). This is particularly important in light of evidence reviewed in Section 5.2 where migrants' objective outcomes, such as employment, also change over time. Note that the APS does not include data on income, but we include important proxies such as employment status and education in all estimations.

Table 5.3 confirms the differences in objective outcomes discussed in Section 5.2. For instance, while the employment rate of those who migrated for work reasons is 87%, this is only 61% for those who migrated for asylum. Furthermore, while 45% of those who migrated for work rate their health as very good, this is only around 35% for those who migrated for family or asylum reasons.

Table 5.3. Percentage of respondents across categories of independent variables included in the estimations

		Migrants by reason for migration			
	UK-born	Work	Study	Family	Asylum
		Socio-demographics			
Female (female = 1, male = 0)	57.00	46.17	52.40	65.34	61.12
Age (years)	45.81	39.85	36.99	42.95	41.40
Dependent children (number)	0.65	0.88	0.76	1.02	1.16
Age left education (years)	17.99	20.72	22.32	19.26	19.06
Employed (yes = 1, no = 0)	72.12	87.30	70.00	65.35	61.24
		Marital status (baseline single)			
Married	47.33	53.37	45.10	56.08	56.87
Divorced	10.17	5.61	4.82	7.95	6.98
Widowed	2.06	0.86	0.81	2.11	2.10
Other	0.24	0.27	0.31	0.20	0.15
		Religion (baseline no religion)			
Christian	54.00	64.03	42.87	43.47	40.22
Buddhist	0.24	1.06	3.13	1.55	1.72
Hindu	0.28	6.60	7.45	6.93	8.95
Jewish	0.31	0.48	0.55	0.61	0.41
Muslim	1.16	6.36	15.50	20.40	28.44
Sikh	0.30	0.74	1.01	2.86	1.98
Any other religion	1.87	2.17	2.39	2.47	2.61
		Ethnicity (baseline white)			
Mixed/multiple ethnicities	0.73	1.34	1.94	1.82	1.88
Asian/Asian British	1.86	17.62	32.10	32.72	32.82
Black/Black British	0.90	5.76	14.72	11.03	19.26
Arab	0.03	0.80	3.63	1.15	3.21
Other ethnicity	0.17	5.54	7.94	4.85	8.61
		Health (baseline very bad)			
Bad	5.59	2.10	1.62	4.80	4.98
Fair	16.56	8.62	8.82	15.85	16.16
Good	39.92	43.93	42.26	42.28	42.21
Very good	36.24	44.83	46.86	35.63	34.78
		Years of residence in the UK (baseline under 5 years)			

5-9 years		27.22	18.80	12.08	13.93
10-14 years		25.63	20.05	12.80	20.79
15-19 years		12.87	15.11	10.51	12.99
20 years and over		15.41	27.13	58.41	43.93
Observations	770,028	37,766	18,175	39,893	7,775

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

In the remaining sections, we estimate the model using ordinary least squares (OLS), as this is standard in the SWB literature. This literature argues that it is possible to approximate cardinal indicators to continuous indicators in the OLS framework (see for example, Helliwell et al., 2020, Hendriks and Burger, 2020).

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Differences in SWB are similar across reasons for migration

Table 5.4 reports the main results from our analysis, which estimates differences in SWB by reason for migration. First, we observe a positive migrant-UK-born gap across reasons for migration for the happiness and worthwhile life indicators. However, none of the coefficients of reason for migration are statistically significant for these indicators. Moreover, while there is some variation, coefficients are for the most part similar in size, around 0.10 points in the 0 to 10 scale.

In contrast, the coefficients for anxiety and life satisfaction are negative for all reasons for migration. In the case of the anxiety indicator, the coefficient is statistically significant for those who migrated for work, study and family reasons, while the point estimate for asylum migrants is just below the 10% cut-off significance level. Since we reverse score the anxiety scale, this indicates that migrants report significantly worse anxiety relative to the UK-born.

This anxiety gap is consistent across reasons for migration, but largest in absolute value for those who migrated for study reasons. This group reports worse anxiety outcomes by 0.31 points lower of the 0 to 10 scale. Even in this instance, the differences remain small compared to the unconditional average value of the indicator, which is around 7 for all migrant groups (see Table 5.2). It is possible to estimate effect sizes for these SWB differences between migrants and the UK born. This is important since significant point estimates do not necessarily indicate an effect large in magnitude (Vacha-Haase and

Thompson, 2004, Fritz et al., 2012). Following a regression analysis, for example, Cohen's *d* can be used to interpret the effect size of a predictor variable on the outcome. Cohen's *d* essentially quantifies the difference in the means of the dependent variable across two groups in terms of standard deviations. More specifically, it is estimated as:

$$d = \frac{\beta}{Sp} \qquad (5.3)$$

Where β is the coefficient of interest comparing two groups, and Sp is the pooled standard deviation[13]. As a rule of thumb, the effect size is small if d <0.2, medium if 0.2<d <0.5 and large if d>0.8 (Cohen, 1988, Cohen et al., 2013). With this in mind, the largest *d* from Table 5.4 below is for study migrants' anxiety (d=0.112), but even here, the effect size can be interpreted as quite small.

Table 5.4. Association of reason for migration with SWB indicators

		Happiness	Anxiety	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile
Reason for migration:	Work	0.125	-0.183*	-0.023	0.086
		(0.092)	(0.090)	(0.100)	(0.082)
	Study	0.060	-0.313**	-0.054	0.083
		(0.091)	(0.100)	(0.099)	(0.090)
	Family	0.111	-0.151*	-0.001	0.110
		(0.098)	(0.085)	(0.097)	(0.085)
	Asylum	0.078	-0.112	-0.045	0.047
		(0.080)	(0.086)	(0.067)	(0.107)
Individual controls		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local Authority dummies		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country of birth dummies		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations		883,717	883,717	883,717	883,717

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. The scale for Anxiety is reversed (i.e. higher values indicate less anxiety).

5.4.2 There is downward convergence in migrants' SWB with years of residence

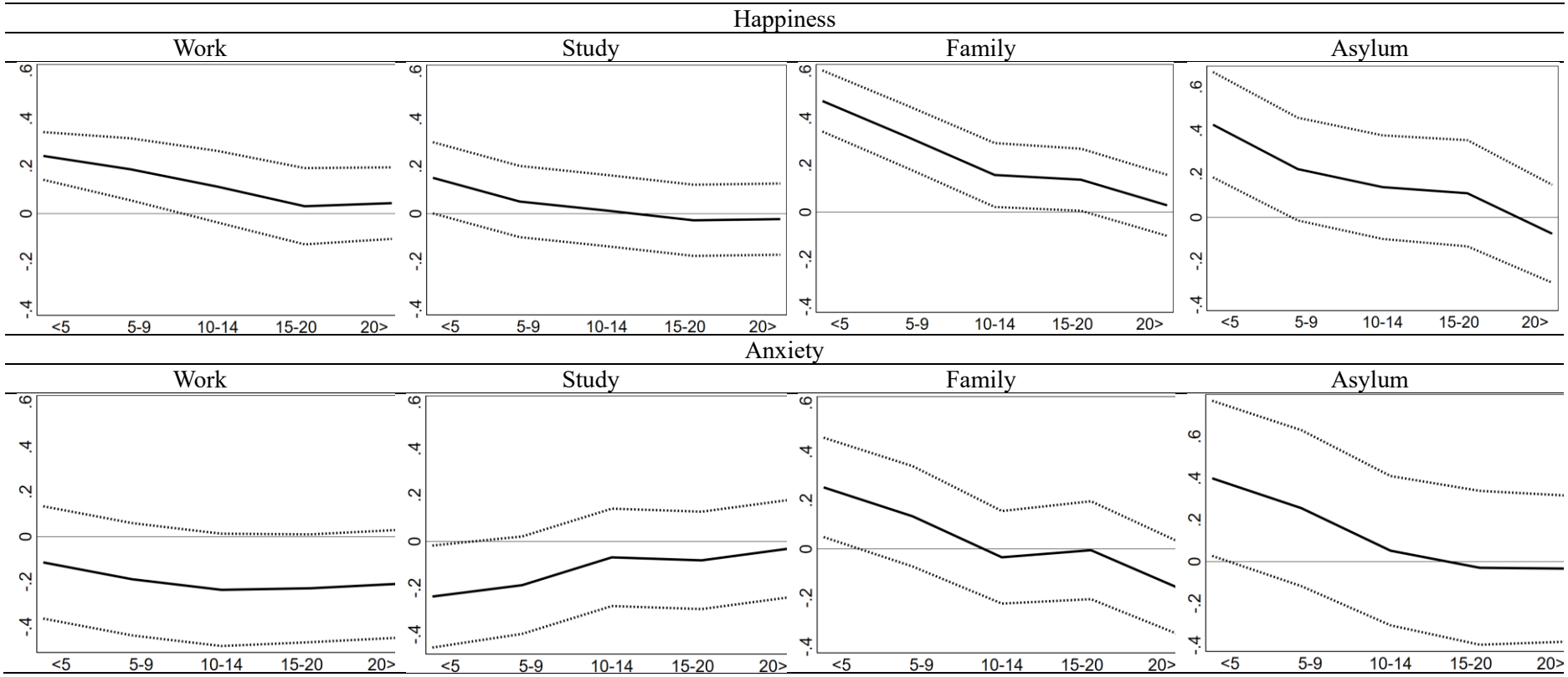
Next, Figure 5.1 presents how these dynamics evolve as length of residence in the UK increases for the different groups. In all cases, those born in the UK (zero line) represent the base group. There are several important dynamics from Figure 5.1. First, we observe an initial, positive gap in happiness across all

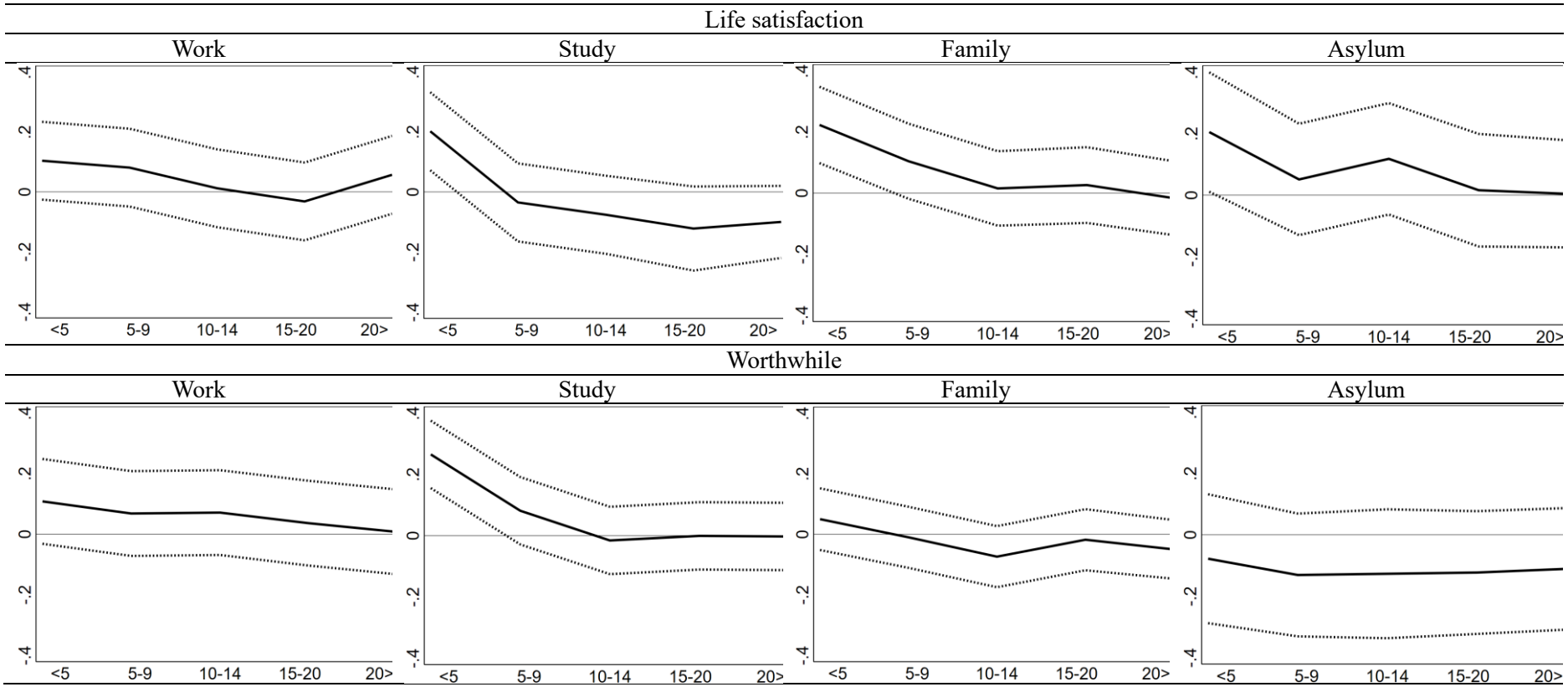
[13] $Sp = \sqrt{\frac{(n_1-1)s_1^2+(n_2-1)s_2^2}{n_1+n_2-2}}$, where n_1 and n_2 are the sample sizes of the two groups. If comparing the UK-born and work migrants, for example, $n_1$is 37,766 and n_2 is 770,028 as per Table 5.1.

migrant groups, and a similar pattern of convergence towards happiness levels of the UK-born. This same dynamic is present for life satisfaction and also to a large degree for the worthwhile life indicator. The only exception for having a worthwhile life concerns those who migrated for asylum. In this case, there is no convergence towards the UK-born over time, but all coefficients are statistically insignificant.

Second, we observe more variation regarding the anxiety indicators. The point estimates for both family and asylum migrants are initially higher, before converging towards anxiety levels of the UK-born. Those who migrated for study reasons also converge to anxiety levels of the UK-born, but start from a lower value in the indicator of anxiety, before converging to the UK-born. We do not see convergence in terms of anxiety for those who migrated for work reasons, but the coefficient is statistically insignificant at all points in time.

Figure 5.1. SWB gap between migrants and the UK-born (Y-axis) for different lengths of residence in the UK (X-axis), by reason for migration





Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors clustered by survey year. The scale for Anxiety is reversed (i.e. higher values indicate less anxiety). Dotted lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

That migrants' SWB converges towards that of the local-born is a trend which has been found in research elsewhere (Melzer and Muffels, 2017, Sachs et al., 2018, Helliwell et al., 2020). However, these studies generally indicate an upward convergence. This is not what we observe in Figure 5.1 where migrants are disaggregated by reason for migration.

As such, our estimates are surprising given evidence reviewed in Section 5.2 indicating strong gaps in objective well-being outcomes between migrants and native-born residents in the country, based on initial migration reason. We find that this does not translate in SWB outcomes, since there are not only few average SWB differences across migration groups relative to the UK-born, but also similar patterns of downward convergence over time.

5.5 Robustness checks

5.5.1 Analysis excluding Covid-19 years

Before concluding, this section presents the results of three robustness checks. In the first check, the analysis is conducted with data up to 2019 only to avoid including the Covid-19 period. There are numerous reports that Covid-19 has substantial implications for individuals' SWB (Brand et al., 2020, Yıldırım and Arslan, 2020, Möhring et al., 2021). These impacts could be more marked for certain groups of the population such as migrants, who are overrepresented in essential occupations with higher risk of infection (Basso et al., 2022, Bossavie et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant here, given evidence we discussed that reason for migration is strongly related to labour market outcomes in the destination country, including occupation. As shown in Table 5.5, limiting the analysis to the pre-Covid-19 period does not have a major impact on the main results. It is still the case that the only significant SWB indicator is that of anxiety, and that the coefficient is negative and similar in size across the different reasons for migration.

Table 5.5. Association of reason for migration with SWB indicators: Excluding Covid-19 period

		Happiness	Anxiety	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile
Reason for migration:	Work	0.121	-0.156	0.005	0.050
		(0.105)	(0.100)	(0.116)	(0.110)
	Study	0.049	-0.286**	-0.031	0.115
		(0.106)	(0.103)	(0.119)	(0.118)
	Family	0.102	-0.143	0.018	0.073

	(0.113)	(0.086)	(0.115)	(0.116)
Asylum	0.060	-0.111	-0.043	-0.028
	(0.082)	(0.114)	(0.071)	(0.098)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local Authority dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country of birth dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	624,429	624,429	624,429	624,429

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. The scale for Anxiety is reversed (i.e. higher values indicate less anxiety).

5.5.2 Analysis excluding EU-nationals

In the second check, the sample is restricted to non-EU-nationals, in order to show that the findings hold when excluding those who had freedom of movement prior to Brexit. Evidence suggests that the Brexit process has affected the SWB of EU-nationals in the UK (Martynowska et al., 2020, Benedí Lahuerta and Iusmen, 2021). This could influence the estimated results given the size of the EU migrant population in the UK. This said, our results are also consistent when excluding EU-nationals from the analysis. In Table 5.6, the anxiety coefficients are the ones that stand out as statistically significant, thus suggesting a negative SWB gap with the UK-born when using this indicator.

Table 5.6. Association of reason for migration with SWB indicators: Excluding EU-nationals

	Happiness	Anxiety	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile
Reason for migration: Work	0.135	-0.170*	-0.007	0.122
	(0.094)	(0.089)	(0.103)	(0.079)
Study	0.064	-0.322**	-0.055	0.151
	(0.087)	(0.097)	(0.094)	(0.089)
Family	0.099	-0.143	-0.005	0.104
	(0.099)	(0.084)	(0.094)	(0.086)
Asylum	0.065	-0.109	-0.069	0.022
	(0.077)	(0.096)	(0.062)	(0.007)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local Authority dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country of birth dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	841,331	841,331	841,331	841,331

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. The scale for Anxiety is reversed (i.e. higher values indicate less anxiety).

5.5.3 Analysis using a high SWB threshold

In the third check, we explore whether small, average SWB differences across migration reasons relative to the UK-born are concealing significant differences for those with more extreme SWB outcomes. To do so, we generate a set of dummy variables to indicate that a person provided a response in the top quartile of the sample distribution for each SWB question, thus suggesting having a high level of SWB. Dummy variables for the anxiety question are interpreted in the same direction as dummy variables for happiness, life satisfaction and having a worthwhile life. In Annexe Table 5.2, we show the distribution of respondents across SWB indicators before and after transformation.

Our main findings are also consistent with estimates in Table 5.7 using high SWB outcomes. First, there are few differences between migrants and the UK-born in reported SWB, even at this more extreme point of the SWB distribution. Second, differences are most marked in relation to anxiety, but these differences are relatively homogenous across migration reasons. In particular, estimates in Table 5.7 suggest that migrants have a lower likelihood of reporting low levels of anxiety. This gap ranges from 5.4 percentage points (those who migrated for study reasons) to 4.5 percentage points (those who migrated for employment reasons) relative to the UK-born.

Table 5.7. Association of reason for migration with indicators of high SWB

	Happiness	Anxiety	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile
Reason for migration: Work	0.017	-0.045***	-0.012	-0.003
	(0.024)	(0.011)	(0.024)	(0.023)
Study	0.007	-0.054***	-0.025	-0.009
	(0.025)	(0.010)	(0.021)	(0.023)
Family	0.006	-0.049***	-0.012	-0.005
	(0.026)	(0.009)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Asylum	0.004	-0.047***	-0.017	-0.003
	(0.017)	(0.010)	(0.021)	(0.024)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local Authority dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country of birth dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	883,717	883,717	883,717	883,717

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. The scale for Anxiety is reversed (i.e. higher values indicate less anxiety).

5.6 Conclusion

This article explores differences in SWB between those born in the destination country and migrants who migrated for different reasons. The analysis thus departs from the substantial evidence on differences in objective well-being indicators by reason for migration (Aydemir, 2011) and increasing research on migrants' SWB in destination countries (Hendriks and Bartram, 2019), but which does not consider the role of reason for migration.

There are many reasons to expect SWB differences across groups of migrants. In particular, the literature on objective well-being, including evidence for the UK, suggests that reason for migration is a key differentiating factor across migrants which persists along years of residence (Giuntella et al., 2018, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018, Kone et al., 2020).

In contrast, our results suggest that the gap in SWB between the UK-born and migrants is fairly similar across different reasons for migration. Notably, there is no statistically significant gap regarding indicators of happiness, life satisfaction and having a worthwhile life, while there is a negative anxiety gap, regardless of reason for migration. That is, migrants across all reasons for migration have worse anxiety outcomes than the UK-born. Exploring these patterns as length of residence in the UK increases, we see mainly a convergence of migrants to the SWB indicators of the UK-born, regardless of reason for migration. Excluding Covid-19 years and EU-nationals in the context of Brexit, or focusing on a more extreme point of the SWB distribution, does not affect this main finding.

Our results are puzzling in that they reveal more commonality across migrant groups in terms of SWB than objective well-being. The results also suggest that there is faster convergence in SWB for migrants compared to objective well-being measures. In all, our analysis highlights the importance of considering SWB indicators in assessing migrants' living outcomes in destination countries as they clearly provide distinct information. This is particularly important in light of the increasing tendency of governments to change policy objectives from measures of economic production (e.g. GDP), to new measures developed for the purpose of measuring individual well-being (Costanza et al., 2009, O'Donnell and Oswald, 2015).

Finally, our findings open avenues for further research on the higher levels of anxiety reported by migrants across reasons for migration compared to the UK-born. While there is a substantial literature exploring anxiety for refugees given the traumatic experiences lived by many individuals in this group (Lindert et al., 2009, Henkelmann et al., 2020), our analysis suggests higher levels of anxiety across all reasons for migration.

5.7 Limitations

For space reasons, this article discusses fully conditional regression models, that is, those for which all controls are already included. A limitation to this approach is that it omits a broader discussion of how control variables are expected to (and indeed may well) affect the substantive relationship of interest between reason for migration and SWB.

This said, a growing body of SWB scholars has contributed to indicating how research conclusions can be biased by the inclusion of certain controls (Morgan and O'Connor, 2017, Bartram, 2021, Bartram, 2022). Importantly, “bad” controls, in the sense of Angrist and Pischke (2009), are those which do not affect the main dependent and independent variable, and hence their relation, but which themselves are affected by the focal dependent variable. Bartram examines this in the much-studied relationship between age and SWB, showing that controlling for health biases the estimates by teasing or "netting" out one of the main channels through which age likely affects SWB: through the deterioration of health (Bartram, 2024).

Importantly, while the controls included in this article are expected to affect reason for migration, and not vice versa, in such a way that would bias the relation between reason for migration and SWB, a more in-depth discussion of this would be beneficial. In many instances, this expectation stems from existing empirical evidence. For example, gender affects migration and the choice of migration channel. It is unlikely that reason for migration affects gender. Similarly, country of origin is more likely to predict reason for migration than the reverse. Nonetheless, providing estimates with and without these controls would add transparency, as would a more in-depth discussion of the expected implications of

control variables for the substantive relation between reason for migration and SWB. In all, this opens an important avenue for further research.

5.8 Declarations

5.8.1 Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank members of the Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Oxford, who provided invaluable feedback when initial results for this paper were presented.

5.8.2 Authors' contributions

The authors are equally responsible for the contributions of this article. Both authors have approved and are accountable for the final submitted version.

5.8.3 Data availability statement

This study was produced using statistical data accessed via the ONS Secure Research Service. The use of this data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates. Data sharing is not applicable to this article as the data is confidential and only available via the ONS Secure Research Service.

5.8.4 Declaration of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

5.8.5 Funding

This study did not receive any funding.

5.9 Annexe tables

Annexe Table 5.1. Description of variables included in the estimations

Variables	Definition
	Marital status (Single is the baseline category)
Married	Married =1, otherwise = 0.
Divorced	Divorced =1, otherwise = 0.
Widowed	Widowed =1, otherwise = 0.
Other marital status	Other marital status =1, otherwise = 0.
	Religion (No religion is the baseline category)
Christian	Christian =1, otherwise = 0.
Protestant	Protestant =1, otherwise = 0.
Buddhist	Buddhist =1, otherwise = 0.
Hindu	Hindu =1, otherwise = 0.
Jewish	Jewish =1, otherwise = 0.
Muslim	Muslim =1, otherwise = 0.
Sik	Sik =1, otherwise = 0.
Other religion	Other religion =1, otherwise = 0.
	Ethnicity
Mixed/multiple	Mixed/multiple = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Asian/Asian British	Asian/Asian British = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Black/Black British	Black/Black British = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Arab	Arab = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Other ethnicity	Other ethnicity = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
	Other demographic/social/household
Female	Female = 1, Male = 0.
Age	In years.
Dependent children	Number of dependent children in household aged under 19.
Education	Age when completed full time education.
	Employment status
Employed	1 = In Employed, Out of Employment = 0. Out of respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.
	Migration related (UK-born is the baseline category).
Employment	Migrated for employment = 1, otherwise = 0.
Study	Migrated for study = 1, otherwise = 0.
Family	Migrated for family = 1, otherwise = 0.
Asylum	Migrated for asylum = 1, otherwise = 0.
Other reason migration	Migrated for other reason = 1, otherwise = 0.
Years since migration	Dummy variables indicating 0-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-14 years, 15-19 years, and 20 years and above since migration to the UK.
	Health (Very bad is the baseline category.)
Bad health	Bad health = 1, otherwise = 0.
Fair health	Fair health = 1, otherwise = 0.
Good health	Good health = 1, otherwise = 0.

Very good health	Very good health = 1, otherwise = 0.
	Subjective well-being
Happiness – Full scale	Original question in the APS is "How happy did you feel yesterday? (where nought is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy')".
Happiness – High well-being scale	Original question in the APS is "How happy did you feel yesterday? (where nought is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy')". Dummy variable = 1 for respondents in top quartile, otherwise = 0.
Anxiety – Full scale	Original question in the APS is "How anxious did you feel yesterday? (where nought is 'not at all anxious and 10 is 'completely anxious)".
Anxiety – High well-being scale	Original question in the APS is "How anxious did you feel yesterday? (where nought is 'not at all anxious and 10 is 'completely anxious)". Dummy variable = 1 for respondents in top quartile, otherwise = 0.
Life satisfaction – Full scale	Original question in the APS is "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? where nought is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'".
Life satisfaction – High well-being scale	Original question in the APS is "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? where nought is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'". Dummy variable = 1 for respondents in top quartile, otherwise = 0.
Worthwhile – Full scale	Original question in the APS is "Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile? where nought is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'".
Worthwhile – High well-being scale	Original question in the APS is "Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile? where nought is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'". Dummy variable = 1 for respondents in top quartile, otherwise = 0.
	Other
Local authority	Dummy variables for each 201 local authority identifier.
Survey quarter x year	Dummy variables for each of the 4 survey quarters (January-March, April-June, July-September, October-December) for every year of survey data (2012-2022).
Country of birth	Dummy variable for each of the 250 countries of birth listed in the APS.

Annexe Table 5.2. Distribution of SWB responses before and after transformation of the variables

	Happiness	Anxiety	Life satisfaction	Worthwhile
	Full scale			
0 *(Not at all)*	9,536	19,275	6,188	4,302
1	7,189	19,135	3,183	2,132
2	16,533	46,989	7,747	5,668
3	21,257	52,869	12,070	8,905
4	31,161	52,815	19,654	14,294
5	74,561	91,925	66,531	50,686
6	76,415	58,728	68,335	60,476
7	148,305	83,279	173,68	159,623
8	217,961	122,620	291,664	284,991
9	143,573	82,608	125,276	149,861
10 *(Completely)*	137,226	253,474	109,384	142,779
	High level of SWB			
0 (Lower 75% of sample distribution)	602,918	630,243	649,057	740,938
1 (Higher 25% of sample distribution)	280,799	253,474	234,660	142,779
Observations	883,717	883,717	883,717	883,717

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

6 Working Your Way to Remain: Subjective Well-Being Implications of Employment for Migrants in the UK

Abstract

This article explores the SWB implications of employment for migrants, based on their initial reason for migration (i.e., work, study, family and asylum reasons). While there is a literature on the impact of employment on migrants' SWB, the role of reason for migration has largely been ignored. Using data from the APS in the UK between 2012 and 2022, the analysis provides several key insights. First, individuals who migrated for work and study reasons report significantly higher happiness when employed, compared to those who migrated for family reasons. Second, differences between migrant groups by reason for migration further materialise in how employment contributes to SWB across years of residence. Notably, study migrants are the only group for whom positive implications of employment for SWB increase with years of residence. Characteristics of immigration and employment policies in the UK, such as the link between migrants' employment status and residence rights, provide a key framework to interpret these findings.

Keywords: employment, happiness, life satisfaction, migration, residence, SWB, UK.

6.1 Introduction

The benefits of employment for individuals' SWB are well documented (Frey and Stutzer, 2002, Bayer and Juessen, 2015). Employment increases individuals' SWB through a multiplicity of channels, such as ensuring financial stability (Frijters et al., 2004), providing opportunities for self-fulfilment (Warr, 2011) and satisfying societal norms and expectations regarding labour market participation (Clark, 2003, Stam et al., 2016). Importantly, the benefits from employment go beyond what is captured by the benefits of higher income alone (Bolton and Laaser, 2013). For example, experiments found more positive effects of having a job on SWB, relative to cash transfers with an equal amount of money (Hussam et al., 2022). This evidence differs from the neoclassical economics framework in which employment is seen as a net disutility (i.e., a reduction in leisure time) and only increases well-being via its effect on income.

There is also evidence that employment contributes in different ways to the SWB of individuals in a population. This is the case for migrants, who for the purpose of this article refer to individuals born outside their country of current residence. Evidence suggests that migrants are more likely to be exposed to the negative implications of being out of employment, relative to the local-born, as they do not have access to the same resources and supporting networks (Bartram, 2011, Leopold et al., 2017, Shen and Kogan, 2020). The central argument of this article is that focusing on migrants' initial reason for migration (i.e. work, study, family or asylum) is likely to bring further insight on the nature of this association between migrants' employment status and their SWB in destination countries.

There are several reasons to expect initial reason for migration to play a key role. First, for those who migrated for work reasons, expectations about life in the destination country are intrinsically tied with participation in the country's labour market, while this link could be weaker for those migrating for family, asylum and study reasons (Zikic and Richardson, 2016, Leopold et al., 2017). Second, the support available for periods without employment, in terms of networks in the country and government assistance, varies substantially across migrant groups. For instance, family migrants move as part of a family unit that can provide emotional, financial, and other forms of support in the event of unemployment (Herman, 2006, Haug, 2008).

As such, this article assesses the relationship between migrants' SWB and employment, disaggregating migrant groups by initial reason for migration. The focus is on migration to the UK, an important case study for several reasons. First, the UK is one of few countries collecting systematic SWB data since 2011 in the APS, with the explicit purpose of using the data to inform policy (Dolan et al., 2011, Hicks et al., 2013, Allin, 2021). Second, the country has implemented substantial changes to its immigration and employment policies in recent years, which affect migrants differently based on their reason for migrating to the country, and which could therefore associate with differences in SWB (Sumption, 2017b, 2019, Portes, 2022).

The analysis for this article focuses on two indicators of SWB. First, on self-reported happiness, an emotional state that fluctuates in the short-term. Second, on life satisfaction, a more stable evaluation of how one's life is going. Based on these indicators, the results confirm notable differences in the implications of employment status for SWB across reasons for migration. Those who migrated for work and study reasons have significantly higher happiness if employed, while the effect of employment on self-reported happiness is negative and not statistically significant for those who migrated for family reasons. For life satisfaction, the effect of employment is negative and statistically significant for those who migrated for family reasons, only, meaning the impact of employment on their life in the country clearly functions differently to what is estimated for other migrant groups.

The article then explores how these dynamics change as length of residence in the UK increases. Those who migrated for work and asylum reasons gain more in SWB from employment during their initial years in the UK, but this effect disappears over time. Those who migrated for study reasons gain little from employment in terms of SWB during initial years in the UK, but this changes as length of residence increases. Certain characteristics of immigration and employment policies, at the forefront of which employment being a requirement for legal residence in the country, help explain the variation in the SWB implications of employment across migrant groups, since these requirements apply differently to individuals based on their initial entry route into the UK.

The remainder of the article is as follows. Section 6.2 provides an overview of the relevant conceptual and empirical literature, as well as the main hypotheses. Section 6.3 outlines the data and methodology. Section 6.4 presents descriptive statistics, and Section 6.5 describes the main results. Section 6.6 reports the results of two robustness checks. Section 6.7 concludes.

6.2 Conceptual and empirical literature

This section discusses two different strands of the literature in order to inform the posterior analysis: first, on the overall relationship between employment and SWB (6.2.1); second, on the relationship between employment and SWB for migrants (6.2.2). Then, findings from both strands are used to specify the main hypotheses in the UK context (6.2.3).

6.2.1 Employment and SWB

SWB measures how positively individuals rate the life they lead (Veenhoven, 2011, Myers and Diener, 2018). Two key components of SWB are evaluative and experienced well-being (Kahneman and Riis, 2005, Waldron, 2010). Different SWB components do not aggregate into a single measure but rather indicate that there are different ways in which a person reflects on how their life is going.

Evaluative well-being is a cognitive assessment a person makes about how their life is going, all things considered (Diener et al., 2013). In reflecting on their sense of satisfaction with life, individuals factor in a number of key domains, which include employment, family, and health, among others (Cummins, 2005, Dolan et al., 2008). In parallel, experienced well-being refers to individuals' emotional states, which fluctuate in the short-term (Kahneman et al., 2003, Haybron, 2016). These emotions could be positive, such as happiness and excitement, or negative, such as anxiety and sadness. Although correlated, positive and negative emotions are considered as relatively independent (Diener and Emmons, 1984, Watson and Clark, 2013).

As highlighted in Section 6.1, literature exploring the link between employment and SWB suggests a positive association between the two (Frey and Stutzer, 2002, Bayer and Juessen, 2015, Hussam et al., 2022). A key related debate is whether employment increases SWB, or whether higher SWB increases the likelihood of employment. Several studies using cross-sectional and longitudinal data suggest a

relation directed from employment to SWB, with less support for reverse causality (Creed and Evans, 2002, Shields and Price, 2005). This explains the focus of this article, which is on presenting implications of individuals' employment status for SWB. Also, while there is also a growing body of literature showing a relation between higher SWB and different indicators of employment performance (e.g., productivity), these studies are beyond the scope of this research (Oswald et al., 2015, Bellet et al., 2023).

In parallel, there is much evidence that the strength and nature of the association between employment and SWB is contingent on numerous other factors. These include individuals' socio-demographics, such as age (Clark et al., 1996, Shields and Wailoo, 2002), gender (Artazcoz et al., 2004, Lucas et al., 2004, Paul and Moser, 2009) and educational attainments (Clark and Oswald, 1994, Cuñado and De Gracia, 2012). These also include contextual factors such as culture (Huppert et al., 2009, Sarracino, 2013) and local and national levels of employment (Clark, 2006, Clark and Senik, 2010, Davis and Von Wachter, 2011).

6.2.2 Implications of migration status for the association between employment and SWB

Migration status can be considered as a factor which affects the SWB implications of employment, in so far as these implications accrue differently to migrants and the local-born population (Olgiati et al., 2013, Knies et al., 2016, Kogan et al., 2018, Holtum et al., 2022). However, empirical evidence on this is mixed, providing different explanatory channels. On the one hand, the local-born are expected to experience greater SWB implications from their employment status relative to migrants, because they tend to have higher employment rates as a group than the migrant population. The higher employment rates of the local-born reference group (i.e. the local-born population) and the processes of social comparison, increase the importance of employment for their SWB (Clark, 2003, Clark and Senik, 2010).

On the other hand, there is also an argument that migrants experience greater SWB implications of employment. Migrants do not have the same resources, networks and support systems as the local-born to provide support during periods without employment (Bartram, 2011, Leopold et al., 2017), and are

less likely to have access to government benefits (Sumption, 2019, Sumption and Kierans, 2019). This would explain higher SWB implications of employment relative to the local-born.

In addition, many destination countries condition migrants' right to residence in the country on their employment status (Chauvin et al., 2013, Könönen, 2019, Shen and Kogan, 2020). This means that loosing employment does not only translate into a short-term loss of income but has major implications for migrants' long-term prospects in the country.

6.2.3 Reason for migration, employment and SWB

The central motivation of this article is that, based on the discussion above, the reason why a person migrated to a country in the first place will affect the implications of employment for their SWB. This section develops the argument in the UK context. In general, those who migrated for work reasons have employment as the main reason for moving across countries, a major life decision. Lack of employment can signal a failure in their life plans (Zikic et al., 2010, Zikic and Richardson, 2016, Frank and Hou, 2018, Fernando and Patriotta, 2020). In the UK, those who migrated for work reasons also tend to have higher employment rates than the local-born and other migrants (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018), meaning there could be greater social pressure to maintain employment when comparing themselves to other work migrants. Moreover, most migrants who arrive in the UK via employment routes depend on having a valid work visa (e.g. Tier 2 or Skilled Visa) to remain in the country. This type of visa only allows short periods without employment.

In contrast, those coming via study, family and asylum routes have less pressure in keeping employment from a visa perspective and their move to another country relates to other aspects (e.g. joining family members, getting an education or escaping persecution). Some of these groups also tend to have greater networks of support. Those coming for family reasons are joining (or accompanying) a family member, which can provide various forms of support in the destination country (Herman, 2006, Haug, 2008). In the UK, for instance, family migrants need to be sponsored and the sponsor needs to show the financial capacity to support the family member (Sumption and Vargas-Silva, 2016, 2019). For those coming via the asylum route, there is access to different sources of government and civil society support during the asylum application process and afterwards. This support differs from that which is available for other

migrants in the UK (Mahdi et al., 2018, Mayblin and James, 2019, Phillimore, 2020), and would suggest lower SWB implications of employment status, at least in early stages when this support is available. Importantly, while the UK Government has recently proposed major restrictions on asylum rights (Home Office, 2022), these occurred after the end of the analysis period for this article.

This discussion in the UK context leads to the first hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 6.1: the positive implications of employment for SWB are greater for those who migrated for work reasons, relative to those who migrated for study, family or asylum reasons.*

In other words, the hypothesis suggests that all migrants benefit from employment in terms of SWB. For instance, even study migrants might need work some hours to cover their educational expenses (Könönen, 2019). The assumption, however, is that work migrants in the UK are likely to benefit more.

The next hypothesis is that implications of employment status for SWB change with migrants' length of residence in the UK. There are several reasons why this is likely to be the case. First, in most destination countries, migrants can apply for permanent settlement status after several years of residence, which breaks the link between employment status and right of residence. Permanent settlement status also often provides access to more government support during periods without employment. This is the case in the UK, where most migrants on work, family and asylum visas can apply for permanent settlement (e.g. ILR) after residing for five continuous years in the country. For study migrants, this may take longer as years spent on a student visa do not contribute to the requirements for permanent settlement.

In the UK and elsewhere, there is also evidence of other changes in migrants' living outcomes with length of residence. These include better language skills, more information about government support and the creation of support networks, all which could reduce the implications of employment status for SWB in the country (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014, Kearns and Whitley, 2015, Föbker and Imani, 2017).

This discussion leads to the second hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 6.2: the positive effect of employment for migrants' SWB (across all reasons for migration) decreases as length of residence increases.*

6.3 Methodology

6.3.1 Data

The empirical analysis uses data from the secured version of the APS provided by the ONS. The APS is a nationally representative, cross-sectional and continuous household survey. It combines two waves of the main UK LFS and local sample boosts, including around 320,000 individuals each year. Since 2011, the APS includes a comprehensive set of SWB measures and around 45% of all APS respondents are surveyed for these SWB questions. APS datasets are weighted by the ONS to reflect the size and composition of the general population, using the most up-to-date official population data (ONS, 2018b). The analysis covers the decade from April 2012 to April 2022 for which the data is available. Specifically, both happiness and life satisfaction questions are included as the emotional and evaluative components of SWB, respectively, as described in Section 6.2. Both SWB questions are measured on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is '*not at all*' and 10 is '*completely*' and are formulated as follows:

- *Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?*

- *Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?*

These are standard questions in assessing individuals' SWB and are used in numerous other contexts (Diener et al., 1985, Veenhoven et al., 1993, Oishi, 2018). The full scale of responses is used as the main dependent variables. In SWB research, it is accepted that OLS models with continuous scale variables are close approximations of ordered logistic regressions using cardinal scales, as is often the case with SWB metrics (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters, 2004). As a result, most SWB literature approximates cardinal indicators to continuous indicators and conduct OLS estimations (e.g. Bartram, 2011, Helliwell et al., 2020 or Hendriks and Burger, 2021), which is the approach taken in this article.

Since 2010, a question in the APS asks all those respondents born outside the UK about their main reason for coming to the country. The categories available are: work, study, family, seeking asylum, and other reasons. The analysis focuses on the first four categories. As highlighted in Table 6.1, the UK-born constitute the majority of APS respondents (88%). The remaining 12% are migrants. The largest migrant

group is accounted for by those who migrated for family reasons (35%), followed by work reasons (32%). Those who migrated for asylum reasons account for just under 7% of all migrants.

Table 6.1. Sample distribution

	Observations (N)	Share (%)
UK-born	743,093	87.98
Migrants	101,979	12.02
Total observations	845,072	100.00
	Migrants by reason for migration	
Work	32,957	32.32
Study	17,262	16.93
Family	36,246	35.54
Asylum	6,900	6.77
Other	8,614	8.45
Total observations	101,979	100.00

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022.

6.3.2 Method

The first part of the analysis focuses on differences in SWB implications from employment between migrants based on initial reason for migrating to the UK. These differences are estimated as follows:

$$y_i = \sum_{l=1}^{5} \mu_l R_{li} + \beta E_i + \sum_{l=1}^{5} \nu_l R_{li} * E_i + \partial X_i + L_j + T_t + \varepsilon_i \quad (6.1)$$

Here, y_i is the indicator of happiness or life satisfaction. R_i are dummies indicating each of the reasons for migration included in the APS (i.e. work, study, family, asylum, and other), using those born in the UK as the baseline category. As suggested in Section 6.2, the initial reason for migration reflects a person's initial entry route into the country, as opposed to their current immigration status. E_i is an employment dummy where 1 indicates that the respondent is in employment (0 otherwise). In Equation (6.1), the main discussion is therefore on the coefficients ν_l. These provide information on differences in SWB implications of being in employment for migrants who came to the UK for different reasons. X_i are a series of individual socio-demographics detailed in the next section 6.3.3, with further information in Annexe Table 6.1 on how these variables are constructed. L_j is a series of dummies for each of the 201 local authorities in the APS. These dummies control for characteristics of the local area. This includes, for instance, whether the local area is one in which particular groups of the population, including possible reference groups, have historically high employment rates. T_t are a series of time

dummies capturing survey quarter and year fixed effects. These dummies control for any period specific factors, including employment rates at the national level for that quarter.

A second set of estimations considers how the association between employment and SWB varies with years of residence for different migrant groups. To do so, the employment status is interacted with a set of dummies A_{ki}, indicating years of residence in the UK, as shown in Equation (6.2):

$$y_i = \sum_{k=1}^{5} \theta_k A_{ki} + \beta E_i + \sum_{k=1}^{5} \gamma_k A_{ki} * E_i + \partial X_i + L_j + T_t + \varepsilon_i \quad (6.2)$$

These estimations are conducted limiting the sample to each migration reason in turn and the UK-born, which serves as the baseline group in all cases. The focus is on coefficients γ_k, which provide information on SWB differences between in and out of employment migrants with different lengths of residence. Results of Equation (6.2) are presented in graphical form for ease of interpretation. All other variables are the same as in previous estimations and in all estimations, standard errors are clustered by survey year to account for potential biases resulting from the pooling of survey years.

The analysis is descriptive in nature and cannot provide evidence of causality between SWB and employment running in one or another direction, but rather of the strength of the statistical relationship between the variables. This is still an important empirical contribution given lack of evidence on the role of reason for migration as a mediator in this relationship.

6.3.3 Independent variables

Table 6.2 reports the distribution of respondents across categories of the controls included in X_i. These controls are used in other studies focusing on the SWB of migrants and include gender, marital status, education, ethnicity, religion and self-reported health, among others (e.g. Bartram, 2011, Kóczán, 2016, Hendriks et al., 2016, Frank and Hou, 2018, Helliwell et al., 2020). Importantly, the analysis controls for country of birth, since country of birth not only predicts the likelihood of a certain migration reason (this is obvious in the case of migrating to seek asylum), but country of origin also likely associate with culture variation in SWB, making it a relevant control in this context[14].

[14] Note that Annexe Table 6.2 presents the main estimates with and without the country of birth dummies, to ensure that this is nonetheless not concealing meaningful variation in the analysis.

As a reminder, the focus of this article is on expanding previous research on the relation between migrants' reason for migration to the UK and SWB (Pollenne and Vargas-Silva, 2024), by considering the role of employment status in this relation. As such, the control variables included are those which are expected to affect the substantive relation of interest, between reason for migration and SWB, as opposed to those that could affect the extent to which employment contributes to SWB. This is an important distinction, as existing research on the relation between employment and SWB sometimes includes controls which effectively "net out" part of the effect, by controlling for the channel through which employment affects SWB. An example of this is income. Controlling for income assumes that income is constant in the relation between employment and SWB, such that its effect can be teased out. However, it seems more likely that the relation between employment and SWB is partly driven by income gains which come with having a job (Bartram, 2021).

In this context, an important control is that of respondents' Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). The APS' SOC categorises occupations into 9 levels, based on the required qualifications, training and past experiences (ONS, 2020). Annexe Table 6.1 explains the construction of these categories, with further information in Annexe Table 6.3 on the distribution of respondents in and out of employment across these occupational levels. The reason for including these is explicitly to tease out a relation directed from migrants' initial occupation towards their reason for migration. For example, work visas in the UK explicitly select migrants based on skills and occupation, meaning initial occupation is likely to affect the channel through which one can migrate to the UK. Since this article focuses on the implications of moving to the labour market for the substantive relation between reason for migration and SWB, occupational classification is important to control for. This is especially true in the absence of a more direct measure of migrants' occupations before migrating to the UK.

Table 6.2. Percentage of respondents across categories of independent variables included in the estimations

		Migrants by reason for migration			
	UK-born	Work	Study	Family	Asylum
	Socio-demographics				
Female (baseline = male)	57.32	46.17	51.70	64.77	60.33
Age (in years)	45.75	39.89	36.93	42.79	41.35
N Dependent children	0.65	0.86	0.74	1.02	1.15

	Marital status (baseline = single)				
Married	47.47	53.02	44.99	55.29	56.36
Divorced	10.06	5.28	4.76	7.81	6.93
Widowed	2.04	0.08	0.07	2.12	1.96
	Religion (baseline = none)				
Christian	54.53	63.00	42.58	43.15	39.46
Buddhist	0.25	0.11	0.31	0.15	0.17
Hindu	0.29	0.71	0.76	0.71	0.94
Jewish	0.32	0.50	0.54	0.60	0.45
Muslim	0.11	0.62	15.36	20.12	28.26
Sikh	0.30	0.73	1.01	2.89	2.49
Other	1.88	2.10	2.42	2.45	2.49
	Ethnicity (baseline = white)				
Mixed	0.74	1.32	1.86	1.80	1.88
Asian/Asian British	1.77	17.17	23.36	31.10	30.90
Black/Black British	0.90	0.52	14.33	9.96	18.10
Chinese	0.11	1.30	9.21	1.63	0.22
Arab	0.003	0.79	3.52	1.16	3.29
Other	0.02	5.34	7.85	4.76	8.68
	Self-reported health (baseline = very bad)				
Bad	1.66	0.51	0.42	1.39	1.94
Fair	16.32	8.51	8.78	15.46	16.09
Good	39.91	43.68	42.13	42.31	42.03
Very good	36.64	45.26	47.10	36.08	35.16
	Education				
Age left full-time education (years)	18.05	20.86	22.39	19.33	19.17
	Years of residence in the UK (baseline = Under 5 years)				
5-9		23.36	19.04	11.82	12.95
10-19		37.90	35.35	23.10	33.90
20 and over		16.07	26.92	59.04	44.99
Observations	743,093	32,957	17,262	36,246	6,900

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. The marital status category "other" is not displayed for identification reasons.

6.4 Descriptive statistics

6.4.1 Happiness and life satisfaction

Table 6.3 reports the UK-born and migrants' mean happiness and life satisfaction, disaggregating migrants by reason for migration. On average, the UK-born report a happiness of 7.34 on the 0 to 10 scale. This is lower than all migrant groups. Asylum migrants have the lowest mean happiness among migrants, followed by family, study, and work migrants, respectively. Asylum migrants report a life satisfaction level of 7.44 on the 0 to 10 scale, which is the lowest among migrant groups and lower still than the average 7.51 life satisfaction reported by the UK-born. This is followed by family, study and work migrants, respectively. This is notable since most studies point to lower, if modestly so, SWB for

migrants relative to the local-born when considered as a single group (Obućina, 2013, Hendriks, 2015, Helliwell et al., 2020).

Table 6.3. Descriptive statistics of main SWB indicators

		Migrants by reason for migration			
	UK-born	Work	Study	Family	Asylum
Happiness (0 to 10)	7.34	7.68	7.50	7.46	7.41
	(2.15)	(1.97)	(1.98)	(2.15)	(2.22)
Life satisfaction (0 to 10)	7.51	7.71	7.55	7.53	7.44
	(1.80)	(1.59)	(1.64)	(1.85)	(1.93)
Observations	743,093	32,957	17,262	36,246	6,900

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. First line is sample mean, standard deviation in parenthesis.

6.4.2 Employment outcomes

Table 6.4 reports on respondents' main employment outcomes. For the purpose of this article, the focus is on being in employment. This is compared to being out of employment, which includes both those inactive and those seeking employment. There are marked disparities in migrants' employment rate according to initial reason for migration. While the UK-born employment rate is 71.82, this rate is higher still among those who migrated for work reasons (87.20). Study, family and asylum migrants have lower employment rates than the UK-born, but the gap is largest for asylum migrants. Table 6.4 also highlights that progress in employment rates across years of residence is the slowest for asylum migrants, for whom this rate is 65 even after 20 years or more in the UK. That asylum migrants have worse employment outcomes than other migrants is evidenced in many other studies, which also outline the different reasons why this may be the case (Hainmueller et al., 2016, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2018, Brell et al., 2020, Fasani et al., 2021).

Table 6.4. Employment rate for the UK-born and different groups of migrants

	UK-born	Migrants by reason for migration			
		Work	Study	Family	Asylum
Employed	71.82	87.20	70.03	65.31	61.24
		By years of residence			
Under 5 years		89.95	30.48	39.36	33.02
5 to 9 years		89.46	67.24	51.11	45.69
10 to 19 years		89.59	83.74	58.49	55.08
20 years and more		76.44	80.02	67.32	65.35

Observations	743,093	32,957	17,262	36,246	6,900

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. The reference category for employed respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.

6.5 Main results

6.5.1 There are marked differences between work and family migrants, less so with other migration reasons

Table 6.5 below presents the first set of results. These refer to Equation (6.1) and estimate whether there are differential SWB implications of employment for migrants in the UK, based on the reason for which they migrated to the country. The first 5 rows estimate the main differences in SWB between out of employment UK-born and migrants. While the estimates suggest higher happiness and lower life satisfaction for out of employment migrants, none of these differences relative to the UK-born are statistically significant. This corresponds to other evidence on the topic for the UK, including in estimations controlling for respondents' employment status (Pollenne and Vargas-Silva, 2024).

In contrast, when focusing on the main effect of employment estimated for the UK-born, Table 6.5 highlights that employment associates with a 0.094 decrease in the 0 to 10 scale of happiness and with higher life satisfaction by 0.085. While most literature also finds that employment contributes positively to SWB, especially when focusing on the evaluative component (Stiglitz, 2002, Lucas et al., 2004), the negative point estimate for happiness could be reflecting other changes, such as the drop in leisure time, which come with labour market participation and which negatively affect daily emotions (Knabe et al., 2010, Krueger and Mueller, 2012).

Table 6.5. Association of migration reason and employment status with SWB indicators

	(1) Happiness	(2) Life satisfaction
Reason for migration: Work	0.072	-0.076
	(0.087)	(0.092)
Study	-0.023	-0.068
	(0.090)	(0.100)
Family	0.095	-0.028
	(0.089)	(0.098)
Asylum	0.023	-0.072
	(0.082)	(0.057)
Employment status: Employed	-0.094***	0.085***
	(0.012)	(0.013)
Work x Employed	0.055*	0.057
	(0.026)	(0.034)

Study x Employed	0.094***	-0.018
	(0.017)	(0.022)
Family x Employed	-0.006	-0.077***
	(0.023)	(0.018)
Asylum x Employed	0.064	0.023
	(0.100)	(0.061)
Individual controls†	Yes	Yes
Local authority dummies	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	845,072	845,072

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors are clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. †Controls are country of birth, age, gender, marital status, number of dependent children, ethnicity, religion, self-reported health, age completed full-time education, occupational sector. UK-born is the reference category for the reasons for migration. The reference category for employed respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.

Turning to the main coefficients of interest, the interactions of employment and reason for migration, the coefficient is positive and statistically significant for work and study migrants when estimated with the happiness indicator. The coefficient is also positive for asylum migrants, with a point estimate larger than that of work migrants but falling just below the 10% significance level. On the other hand, the coefficient for family migrants (-0.002) is substantially different from other groups. This provides mixed evidence for Hypothesis 6.1, which indicated that the positive implications of employment for SWB are greater for those who migrated for work reasons, relative to other migrants. This seems to be the case when compared to family migrants, but not the case for study migrants and (arguably) asylum migrants.

Looking at the interactions in the estimation in which the life satisfaction indicator is the dependent variable, the estimates confirm different SWB implications from employment when considering those who migrated for family reasons. Here the point estimate is negative and statically significant (-0.077), indicating that being in employment for family migrants associates with a decrease in life satisfaction, relative to being out of employment. Finally, while life satisfaction gains from employment for work migrants is positive, and more positive than the coefficients for other groups, the coefficient is statistically insignificant. Hence, this first part of the analysis highlights a positive gap in the effect of employment on SWB for work migrants relative to family migrants only.

At this stage, it is worth commenting on effect sizes for these differences between migrants and the UK born in SWB implications from employment. In particular, significant point estimates do not necessarily

indicate an effect large in magnitude (Vacha-Haase and Thompson, 2004, Fritz et al., 2012). While hypothesis 6.1 highlights that the focus of this article is on the direction of differences between migrants and the UK-born in SWB implications from employment, and in particular, whether migrants do indeed benefit more from employment relative to the UK-born, effect sizes can help complement this analysis with an indication of the magnitude of these differences. Following a regression analysis, for example, Cohen's *d* can be used to quantify the difference in the means of the dependent variable across two groups in terms of standard deviations. More specifically, Cohen's *d* is estimated as:

$$d = \frac{\beta}{Sp} \qquad (6.3)$$

Where β is the coefficient of interest comparing two groups, and Sp is the pooled standard deviation[15]. As a rule of thumb, the effect size is small if d <0.2, medium if 0.2<d <0.5 and large if d>0.8 (Cohen, 1988, Cohen et al., 2013). Calculating effect sizes confirms a positive life satisfaction gap for work migrants, relative to the UK, since the associated *d* is larger in magnitude than the positive gap estimated using happiness as the main dependent variable, despite the point estimate being just below conventional significance levels in the case of life satisfaction. In both cases, these effects are small however (for happiness, d =0.028; for life satisfaction, d=0.036). As a final remark for Table 6.4, the largest *d* corresponds to differences between the UK-born and family migrants in life satisfaction implications from employment. This confirms the need for further research on why life satisfaction implications from employment are negative for this group of migrants, contrary to hypothesis 6.1.

6.5.2 The SWB implications of employment as length of residence increases differs among migrants groups

Figure 6.1 plots the estimates from Equation (6.2) which illustrate how the SWB implications of employment evolve for migrants with different lengths of residence in the UK. According to Hypothesis 6.2, the importance of employment for SWB should decrease as length of residence increases. Across

[15] $Sp = \sqrt{\frac{(n_1-1)s_1^2+(n_2-1)s_2^2}{n_1+n_2-2}}$, where n_1 and n_2 are the sample sizes of the two groups. If comparing the UK-born and work migrants, for example, $n_1$is 32,957 and n_2 is 743,093 as per Table 6.1.

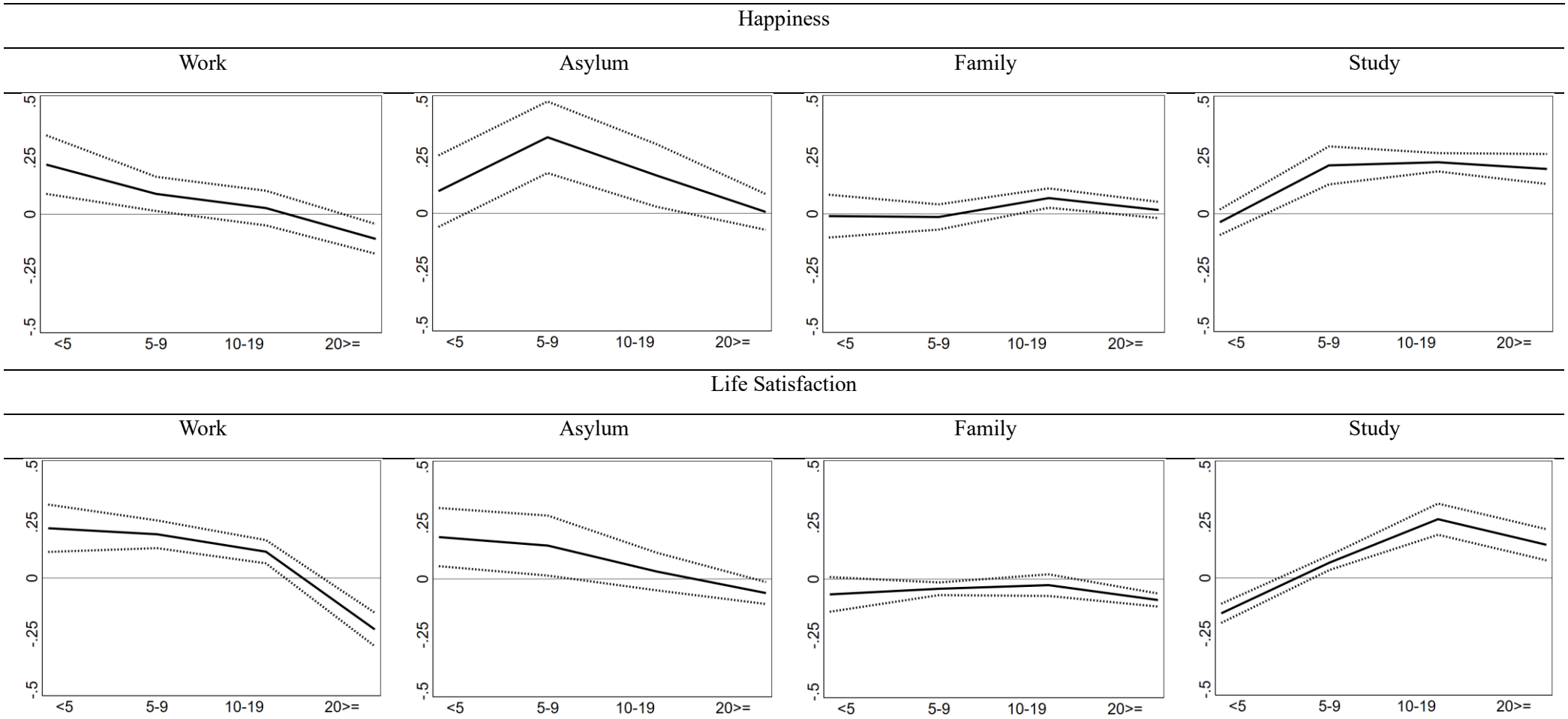
all groups, this would materialise as a pattern of convergence to the zero line in Figure 6.1, which is effectively where there is no SWB gap between in and out of employment migrants.

This broad pattern of convergence is present for work and asylum migrants. There is an initial positive effect of employment on SWB before convergence to the zero line. In the case of work migrants, employment is even associated with lower SWB for those who have spent 20 years or more in the country. Neither of these scenarios provide clear support for the explanation of employment rate in the reference group, since, as highlighted in Table 6.4, migrant workers' employment rate is relatively high and stable over time, while it consistently increases in the case of asylum migrants.

The pattern differs substantially for study migrants. For this group, the estimates suggest that the association of employment and SWB increases with length of residence. Years on a study visa do not contribute to achieving permanent settlement in the UK, and it is possible that this explains why SWB implications of employment only start declining after several decades in the country. A further explanation lies in the continuous increase in study migrants' employment rate over time, from 30% under 5 years of residence, to at least 80% after a couple of decades in the country.

SWB differences between in and out of employment family migrants are consistently close to the zero line. This could be reflecting both that family migrants' right to remain is independent from their employment status, regardless of years of residence in the UK, and that family migrants have access to more support to buffer any negative SWB implications of being out of employment.

Figure 6.1. SWB gap between migrants in and out of employment and the UK-born (Y-axis), for different lengths of residence in the UK (X-axis), by reason for migration



Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors clustered by survey year. Controls are country of birth, age, gender, marital status, number of dependent children, ethnicity, religion, self-reported health, age completed full-time education, occupational sector. UK-born is the reference category for the reasons for migration. The reference category for employed respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents. Interaction coefficients, 95% confidence intervals in dotted lines.

6.6 Robustness checks

6.6.1 Excluding Covid-19 years

Before concluding, Section 6.6 discusses two robustness checks. The first excludes survey years from 2020 onwards, which cover the Covid-19 period. There is evidence that migrants in destination countries were disproportionately affected by Covid-19 relative to the local-born. This includes being more likely to lose employment but also having jobs that were more exposed to Covid-19, which could alter the implications of employment for SWB (Guadagno, 2020, Fasani and Mazza, 2023). Results for this check in Table 6.6 are broadly consistent with the main findings. While the point estimate for work migrants' happiness gains is no longer statistically significant, it is larger in magnitude than the estimate for the full sample, and this is true for asylum migrants too. It is still the case that life satisfaction implications from employment are significantly different, and negative, for family migrants.

Table 6.6. Association of migration reason and employment status with SWB indicators, excluding Covid-19 period

	(1) Happiness	(2) Life satisfaction
Reason for migration: Work	0.064	-0.041
	(0.106)	(0.109)
Study	-0.037	-0.042
	(0.107)	(0.129)
Family	0.095	0.050
	(0.103)	(0.121)
Asylum	-0.038	-0.094
	(0.075)	(0.060)
Employment status: Employed	-0.107***	0.079***
	(0.010)	(0.017)
Work x Employed	0.060	0.048
	(0.036)	(0.046)
Study x Employed	0.096**	-0.038**
	(0.024)	(0.010)
Family x Employed	-0.021	-0.092**
	(0.031)	(0.026)
Asylum x Employed	0.141	0.053
	(0.135)	(0.078)
Individual controls†	Yes	Yes
Local authority dummies	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	624,308	624,308

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2019. Standard errors are clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. †Controls are country of birth, age, gender, marital status, number of dependent children, ethnicity, religion, self-reported health, age completed full-

time education, occupational sector. UK-born is the reference category for the reasons for migration. The reference category for employed respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.

6.6.2 Excluding EU-nationals

The second check excludes migrants who are EU-nationals. Before the implementation of the new Brexit rules in 2021, EU and non-EU migrants faced significantly different requirements for employment and residence in the country, with EU-nationals enjoying freedom of movement in the UK (Sumption, 2017a). In other words, the right to stay in the UK was not as strongly linked to continuous employment status for EU-nationals compared to many non-EU-nationals. If, as suggested above, immigration policies explain some of the dynamics across reasons for migration, in particular, a stronger effect for work migrants, then the estimated effect should be even stronger when EU-nationals are removed from the estimation.

Table 6.7 provides the results excluding EU-nationals in the estimation. For the happiness indicator, as expected, the coefficient of the interaction is larger for all migrants and largest in the case of work migrants (0.100 vs 0.055). Estimates for life satisfaction indicate a similar dynamic, with the coefficient for work migrants now also statistically significant. Hence, while excluding EU-nationals leads to small differences in the results, the changes are in the expected direction.

Table 6.7. Association of migration reason and employment status with SWB indicators, excluding EU-nationals

	(1) Happiness	(2) Life satisfaction
Reason for migration: Work	0.046	-0.084
	(0.103)	(0.105)
Study	-0.039	-0.086
	(0.081)	(0.093)
Family	0.072	0.015
	(0.091)	(0.100)
Asylum	-0.001	-0.104*
	(0.075)	(0.047)
Employment status: Employed	-0.094***	0.084***
	(0.013)	(0.014
Work x Employed	0.100**	0.081**
	(0.043)	(0.031)
Study x Employed	0.125***	0.005
	(0.034)	(0.024)
Family x Employed	0.016	-0.065**
	(0.026)	(0.026)

Asylum x Employed	0.085	0.037
	(0.117)	(0.082)
Individual controls†	Yes	Yes
Local authority dummies	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	800,530	800,530

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors are clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. †Controls are country of birth, age, gender, marital status, number of dependent children, ethnicity, religion, self-reported health, age completed full-time education, occupational sector. UK-born is the reference category for the reasons for migration. The reference category for employed respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.

6.7 Discussion

While there has been much interest on the links between employment and SWB, including for migrants, the role of the initial reason for which individuals move across countries has remained largely unexplored. The main contribution of this article is to explore this role. One of the hypotheses developed in this article suggested that SWB differences between in and out of employment migrants should be positive for all migrants, but largest for those migrating for work reasons, as this is the group for which migration is more strongly linked to labour market participation in the destination country. The nature of immigration policies in the UK, which require nearly constant employment for many work migrants, reinforces this effect. However, the results are not entirely in line with this hypothesis, as the only clear statistical difference is with family migrants. This suggests that employment also plays a key role in the SWB of other migrant groups, such as study and asylum migrants, particularly when looking at short-term measures of SWB such as happiness.

The second hypothesis suggested that as length of residence in the UK increases, there should be a decrease in the importance of employment for SWB. Residence in the country means that migrants expand their support networks and change their legal status, making work less essential to their life in the country. The expectation was that this effect should be present for all migrant groups. Once again, the results did not fully back this hypothesis. For work and asylum migrants there is a clear decrease in the importance of employment for SWB. For study migrants, however, the importance of employment for SWB increases with length of residence, while for family migrants the effect is close to zero for different lengths of residence. This could be explained by the fact that study migrants remaining in the

country after finishing their studies may switch into a work visa, for which they need to remain continuously employed. In the case of family migrants, this is the group more likely to have stronger networks upon arrival as they move as part of a family unit (or to join one), which could explain these differential SWB implications from employment.

Overall, the main finding from this article is that disaggregating migrants by their initial reasons for moving brings new insights on the link between employment and SWB for a major part of a destination country's society. In particular, this suggest that studies which consider migrants as a homogenous group of individuals are likely concealing differences by reason for migration, with potentially multiple channels sustaining these differences. With this empirical evidence, an avenue for further research would therefore be to determine what sustains the association between employment and SWB for different migrant groups among those which are advanced in this article, such as policy requirements, personal life projects and availability of supporting networks. The results also have important implications for immigration and employment policies in the UK, as it is clear that the interaction of these two policy areas relate to migrants' SWB, even decades after their arrival into the country.

6.8 Declarations

6.8.1 Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank members of the International Society for the Quality-of-Life Studies (Rotterdam, August 2023), INSEAD Stone Centre and Gender Initiative (Fontainebleau, October 2023) and the Well-Being, Public Policies and Sustainable Human Development Conference (Paris, January 2024) where earlier versions of this article were presented. Thank you also to Mariña Fernández-Reino for her invaluable feedback at several stages of the analysis.

6.8.2 Data availability statement

This study was produced using statistical data accessed via the ONS Secure Research Service. The use of this data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates. Data sharing is not applicable to this article as the data is confidential and only available via the ONS Secure Research Service.

6.8.3 Funding

Research for this article did not receive any funding.

6.9 Annexe tables

Annexe Table 6.1. Description of variables included in the estimations

Variables	Definition
	Marital status (Single is the baseline category)
Married	Married =1, otherwise = 0.
Divorced	Divorced =1, otherwise = 0.
Widowed	Widowed =1, otherwise = 0.
Other marital status	Other marital status =1, otherwise = 0.
	Religion (No religion is the baseline category)
Christian	Christian =1, otherwise = 0.
Protestant	Protestant =1, otherwise = 0.
Buddhist	Buddhist =1, otherwise = 0.
Hindu	Hindu =1, otherwise = 0.
Jewish	Jewish =1, otherwise = 0.
Muslim	Muslim =1, otherwise = 0.
Sik	Sik =1, otherwise = 0.
Other religion	Other religion =1, otherwise = 0.
	Ethnicity (White is the baseline category)
Mixed/multiple	Mixed/multiple = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Asian/Asian British	Asian/Asian British = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Black/Black British	Black/Black British = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Chinese	Chinese =1, otherwise =0. White is the baseline category.
Arab	Arab = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
Other ethnicity	Other ethnicity = 1, otherwise = 0. White is the baseline category.
	Other demographic/social/household
Female	Female = 1, Male = 0.
Age	In years.
Dependent children	Number of dependent children in household aged under 19.
Education	Age when completed full-time education.
	Employment outcomes.
Employed	1 = In Employed, Out of Employment = 0. Out of respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.
	Occupational sector (Managers, directors and senior officials are the baseline category).
Professional occupations	Professional occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).
Associate professional occupations	Associate occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).
Administrative and secretarial occupations	Administrative occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).
Skilled trades occupations	Skilled occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	Caring occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).
Sales and customer service occupations	Sales occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).
Process, plant and	Process occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).

machine operatives	
Elementary occupations	Elementary occupations=1, otherwise =0. (Managers are the baseline category).
	Migration related (UK-born is the baseline category).
Work	Migrated for work reasons = 1, otherwise = 0.
Study	Migrated for study reasons = 1, otherwise = 0.
Family	Migrated for family reasons = 1, otherwise = 0.
Asylum	Migrated for asylum reasons = 1, otherwise = 0.
Other reason for migration	Migrated for other reasons = 1, otherwise = 0.
Years since migration	Dummy variables indicating 0-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-19 years, 20 years and above since migration to the UK.
	Health (Very bad is the baseline category.)
Bad health	Bad health = 1, otherwise = 0.
Good health	Good health = 1, otherwise = 0.
Very good health	Very good health = 1, otherwise = 0.
	Subjective well-being
Happiness	Original question in the APS is "How happy did you feel yesterday? (where nought is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy')".
Life satisfaction	Original question in the APS is "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? where nought is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'".
	Other
Local authority	Dummy variables for each of the 201 local authority identifiers.
Survey quarter x year	Dummy variables for each of the 4 survey quarters (January-March, April-June, July-September, October-December) for every year of survey data (2012-2022).
Country of birth	Dummy variables for each of the 250 countries of birth in the APS.

Annexe Table 6.2. Association of migration reason and employment status with SWB indicators, with and without country of birth dummies

	(1) Happiness	(2) Happiness	(3) Life satisfaction	(4) Life satisfaction
Reason for migration: Work	0.100***	0.072	-0.023	-0.076
	(0.031)	(0.087)	(0.037)	(0.092)
Study	-0.011	-0.023	-0.013	-0.068
	(0.028)	(0.090)	(0.021)	(0.100)
Family	0.087***	0.095	0.078***	-0.028
	(0.016)	(0.089)	(0.028)	(0.098)
Asylum	0.025	0.023	-0.013	-0.072
	(0.090)	(0.082)	(0.068)	(0.057)
Employment status: Employed	-0.094***	-0.094***	0.086***	0.085***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Work x Employed	0.075***	0.055*	0.063	0.057
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.035)	(0.034)
Study x Employed	0.085***	0.094***	-0.033	-0.018
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Family x Employed	-0.015	-0.006	-0.088***	-0.077***
	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.018)
Asylum x Employed	0.052	0.064	0.007	0.023
	(0.106)	(0.100)	(0.059)	(0.061)
Country of birth dummies	No	Yes	No	Yes
Individual controls†	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local authority dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey quarter x year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	845,072	845,072	845,072	845,072

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Standard errors are clustered by survey year. * p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. †Controls are age, gender, marital status, number of dependent children, ethnicity, religion, self-reported health, age completed full-time education, occupational sector. UK-born is the reference category for the reasons for migration. The reference category for employed respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.

Annexe Table 6.3. Percentage of respondents across categories of employment indicators included in the estimations

		Migrants by reason for migration			
	UK-born	Work	Study	Family	Asylum
Employed	71.82	87.20	70.03	65.31	61.24
		Among those in employment			
Standard occupational classification:					
Manager, Director, Senior Official	10.47	8.24	10.39	9.56	8.31
Professional	20.88	25.43	35.99	20.87	18.05
Associate Professional	14.86	9.61	14.04	13.08	11.53
Administrative, Secretarial	11.73	6.45	8.13	10.50	8.90
Skilled Trades	8.50	9.66	3.75	6.17	5.93
Caring, Leisure, Service	10.31	5.47	8.03	11.70	13.89
Sales, Customer Service	7.14	4.76	5.61	7.63	8.13
Process, Plant, Machine Operatives	5.27	11.25	3.49	6.58	8.40
Elementary	8.52	17.23	8.10	11.52	14.82
Other	2.33	1.92	2.47	2.39	2.04
		Among those out of employment			
Standard occupational classification:					
Manager, Director, Senior Official	4.75	5.11	3.54	3.48	2.76
Professional	9.52	10.44	12.13	7.57	7.25
Associate Professional	6.44	7.03	7.17	5.15	4.02
Administrative, Secretarial	7.96	5.58	5.43	6.60	5.17
Skilled Trades	4.64	6.17	1.64	2.87	2.80
Caring, Leisure, Service	7.29	6.90	4.60	6.12	6.17
Sales, Customer Service	6.43	4.36	4.67	5.79	4.38
Process, Plant, Machine Operatives	3.79	6.82	1.05	2.69	3.05
Elementary	9.52	21.71	5.84	8.50	9.19
Other	29.87	14.79	6.99	21.61	19.20
Never had a job	9.81	11.11	46.93	29.62	36.02
Observations	743,093	32,957	17,262	36,246	6,900

Notes: ONS weighted sample of personal well-being respondents, using APS datasets April 2012 to April 2022. Out of employment respondents includes inactive and job-seeking respondents.

7 The Place of Safety in Refugees' Subjective Well-Being

Abstract

This article explores the place of safety in refugees' SWB. Different references to safety already feature in research on refugees' well-being in destination countries. However, these tend to restrict the meaning of safety to the absence of important threats, such as financial, emotional and physical threats. Furthermore, many of these threats are considered resolved once a person seeking refuge is in a safe country. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with refugees in the UK, I identify a distinct concept of *safeness*, which refers to refugees' subjective sense of safety and which shares structural similarities with existing components of SWB identified by the literature. Safeness, a positive and continuous feeling, is characterised by a sense of peace with oneself in both present and future temporalities and is not entirely relatable to objective indicators of refugees' current safety conditions. This concept of safeness helps capture more comprehensively what it means to be well from refugees' perspective. As such, understanding safeness has implications for how we conceptualise and promote refugees' SWB and for SWB research more broadly.

Keywords: refugees, safeness, safety, SWB, UK.

7.1 Introduction

In the context of interviews with refugees in the UK on their experiences and understandings of SWB, one participant stated that '*for me being well is like a sense of safety*'. A person is granted a refugee status when they have a recognised need for safety from persecution and threats to livelihood in their home country (UNHCR, 1951). Thereof, refugees are often considered safe by virtue of having a legal protection status and being in a safe country (Burchett and Matheson, 2010, Costello, 2016, Fine, 2019, Hathaway, 2021). This said, there is much evidence that for those fleeing their country to seek asylum, safety concerns occur not just in home settings and onward journeys but also in destination countries, with negative implications for how refugees perceive their lives long after a protection status is obtained (Ryan et al., 2008a, Bjørneseth et al., 2019, Gleeson et al., 2020, Williams et al., 2021). In this context, I explore how identifying this concern for a '*sense of safety*' adds to our understanding of what being well means for refugees in destination countries.

Other research in the UK assesses whether refugees' understanding of different components of SWB identified in the literature, such as happiness and life satisfaction, overlap with broader theories in which these components are grounded (Wenning, 2019, Pollenne, 2023). The objective of this article is to explore the boundaries of what SWB means, the potential expansiveness of these boundaries from refugees' perspectives. To do so, I follow principles of engaged philosophy, which stands in parallel to applied philosophy (Wolff, 2018). In the latter, pre-established theories and concepts are used to structure our thinking about key societal issues, such as well-being. In the former, engaging with individual voices helps identify the usefulness and limitations of pre-established theories and concepts in addressing key societal issues, such as well-being. In this article, I therefore draw from refugees' thoughts on SWB to propose a concept of safeness, that captures this subjective '*sense of safety*'. Safeness, a positive and continuous feeling, is characterised by a sense of peace with oneself in both present and future temporalities, and of possibility to explore one's personal boundaries. Importantly, safeness is not entirely related to refugees' current safety conditions.

That there exists a positive and continuous form of safety in SWB is hinted to in a few studies on the well-being of asylum-seekers and refugee youths. For asylum-seekers, well-being is more strongly

related to safety with self, given protracted experiences of limbo and lack of legal status in destination countries (Carswell et al., 2011, Phillimore and Cheung, 2021). As for youth, both asylum-seeking and refugees, a sense of safety is featured as central to SWB because of the concomitant fragilized self in the transition occurring between youth and adulthood (Björnberg, 2012, Chase, 2013, 2021, Dromgold-Sermen, 2022). That this form of safety still relates to the SWB of adults, who have a legal refugee status, is something this article contributes to highlighting.

To do so, Section 7.2 briefly defines SWB, identifying the different ways in which safety generally relates to this concept, and reviewing how the relation between safety and SWB features in research on refugees' SWB in destination countries. Section 7.3 summarises this article's methodological design. Section 7.4 details the main findings, describing the safeness concept at length, and highlighting nuances brought by the socio-demographics and experiences of interview participants. I conclude in Section 7.5 and discuss implications of these findings.

7.2 Theoretical and empirical review: SWB and safety

This section briefly reviews literature in two areas: first, on the conceptualisation of SWB (7.2.1) and how safety is positioned within these conceptualisations, both as a neutral condition of SWB (7.2.2) and as a process of safeguarding SWB (7.2.3); second, on research focusing on refugees' lives in destination countries and evidence on the association between SWB and safety in these instances (7.2.4).

7.2.1 The structure of SWB

SWB aims to capture how positively individuals perceive and interpret the life they lead (Diener, 2009). This approach suggests that individuals are best equipped to report on how they are doing in their lives, providing insight that cannot be derived from objective indicators of well-being and quality of life alone (Stiglitz et al., 2009a, Graham, 2010). Diener (1984) posits that a person's SWB is composed of their general life evaluations (e.g., life satisfaction) and their daily emotions (e.g., happiness). These different components of SWB share three characteristics: they capture subjective feelings, which are positive in nature, and which relate to a person's global assessment of how their life is going (Diener, 1984, Şimşek, 2009). Aspects such as life satisfaction or happiness can be thought of as components of SWB, in that

they compose a person's SWB, contributing in unique and different ways to what it means to be well (Kahneman et al., 2010).

7.2.2 Safety as a neutral condition of SWB

There are several ways in which notions of safety have been related to individuals' SWB. First, safety materialises as a basic need that is necessary to achieve higher-order forms of well-being. This is reflected in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, for example, where safety is situated at the base of a pyramidal structure. Safety as a basic need is mostly thought of in objective terms, such as physical, financial, and material safety (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002, Sleet and Mercy, 2003, Chen et al., 2015, Vansteenkiste et al., 2020, Vandepitte et al., 2022). Further research examines how the satisfaction of these basic needs contributes to individuals' SWB across different contexts and cultures (Alkire, 2003, Graham, 2008, Jaron and Galal, 2009). For example, safety is likely more central to the SWB of individuals in lower-income countries, where lack of safety in different areas, such as food, finance, housing, and physical safety, is more widespread than in high-income countries (Pacek and Radcliff, 2008, Oishi et al., 2009, Tay and Diener, 2011).

Second, safety is considered an independent domain of life, in the same way that domains such as employment status and health contribute to how a person perceives their life overall (Hsieh, 2003, Cummins, 2005). In most cases, safety is considered a social domain, as it relates to individuals' SWB also through how they feel in their neighbourhood or their community (Sirgy and Cornwell, 2002, Grillo et al., 2010, Robinette et al., 2021, Manning et al., 2022). What changes here is that the contribution of safety to SWB varies in importance, rather than representing a fixed, lower-order need. For example, the Personal Well-being Index developed by Cummins et al. (2003) integrates a dual notion of safety as satisfaction with present safety, or '*how satisfied are you with how safe you feel?*', and satisfaction with future security, or '*how satisfied are you with your future security?*' in characterising a person's SWB. Importantly, the index also highlights that safety comprises individuals' subjective perceptions of the latter (Wridt, 2010, Webb and Wills-Herrera, 2012). This is noteworthy given evidence that subjective perceptions of safety and actual safety threats are not orthogonally related, nor are they orthogonally

related to well-being (Powdthavee, 2005, Johnson et al., 2009, da Palma et al., 2011, Manning et al., 2022).

In both of these instances, however, safety is conceptualised as a state of neutrality: it is only the absence of safety, financial, physical, material, and the subjective perception thereof, that matters because of its negative implications for how individuals view their life overall. This is formally expressed by Cummins (2011) who finds that '*while high satisfaction with relationships is a positive, constantly reinforcing experience, high satisfaction with safety is neutral*'.

7.2.3 Safety as the process of constructing opportunities and safeguarding SWB

In addition, safety is tied to individual well-being in different theories of human development and security (Haq, 1995, Sen, 1999, Jolly and Ray, 2017)[16]. In these theories, safety is understood as the continuous construction of safeguards and opportunities for individuals to develop their strengths, aspirations, and well-being overall (Ogata, 2005, Sen, 2013). Specifically, safety equates with '*protecting the vital core of all humans' lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment*' (Commission on Human Security, 2003). The shift in such theories is that the concept of safety acquires a quality that is positive in and of itself, which is very similar to how SWB components are conceptualised (González et al., 2012).

In all, safety in human development theories relates to SWB as the process of improving individuals' living outcomes in both objective and subjective terms. In other words, safety relates to what enables individuals to be fully functioning (King and Murray, 2001, Anand and Gasper, 2007, Gasper et al., 2008, Fukuda-Parr and Messineo, 2012, Jolly and Ray, 2017). Authors have added that it relates to individuals' perceptions that such processes are also safely there for them in the future (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007, Nussbaum, 2011). In both cases, however, these definitions of safety are different from considering safety as an integral component of SWB.

[16] In their work on *Subjective Well-being and Security* (2012), Webb and Wills-Herrera suggest that the concepts of safety and security are often considered interrelated and could be used interchangeably. This is the approach adopted throughout this article.

7.2.4 Safety and asylum-seeking

This consideration for safety in the future is an important place to start from in reviewing literature on safety and asylum-seeking. The UN Refugee Convention (1951) guarantees individuals' right to seek protection, to seek safety from persecution in the home country. This means that individual safety concerns are often considered resolved as soon as a person obtains a legal refugee status or has left their home country (Burchett and Matheson, 2010, Costello, 2016, Fine, 2019, Hathaway, 2021). Although this does not leave much room to determine what safety means for refugees' SWB in destination countries, both in the present and with years of residence, there are at least 3 different ways in which refugees' safety and SWB are suggested as relating to each other in existing research.

First, some authors have defined '*emotional*' safety as the part of refugees' SWB that signals the absence of threats to emotional well-being (Steel et al., 2006, Chan et al., 2016). This is in line with much research on refugees' well-being. Such research generally focuses on the prevention of negative outcomes including depression, anxiety and symptoms of PTSD, as opposed to the promotion of positive outcomes (Tay et al., 2015, Turrini et al., 2019, Blackmore et al., 2020, Henkelmann et al., 2020). In developing the Adaptation and Development after Persecution and Trauma (ADAPT) scale, Silove (2013) thus poses the diagnoses of negative emotions as the '*barometer*' for whether lack of emotional safety is hindering refugees' SWB. In such research, safety has the neutral undertone identified by Cummins (2011) in that it matters for refugees' SWB only as an indicator of persisting emotional threats.

Second, research which focuses on positive dimensions of refugees' well-being includes safety in terms similar to those outlined throughout Section 7.2. Safety concerns relate to satisfying basic needs in a variety of dimensions: physical, material, economic, financial, emotional, among others, and refugees' subjective perception thereof (Horn, 2010, Rasmussen and Annan, 2010, Campion, 2018, Bjørneseth et al., 2019, Diop-Christensen and Diop, 2022). In the UK for example, Ager and Strang (2008) suggest that safety is a necessary '*facilitator*' for successful integration. In this framework, safety is measured as both violence reports and refugees' subjective perceptions of violence threats. Similarly, Sicobo (2008) proposes a SWB framework composed of 11 different domains, two of which measure refugees' satisfaction with their safety. The first domain is satisfaction with physical safety, as the ability to remain

free from physical harm. The second refers to refugees' satisfaction with safety of family and children. This second item aims to reflect that there are differences across countries and cultures in how individual and collective concerns contribute to SWB (Suh and Koo, 2008, Steele and Lynch, 2013, Mikucka, 2014).

Third, and finally, several qualitative studies in destination countries indicate a more expansive definition of safety, constructed around refugees' thoughts on what it means to be well (Stathopoulou et al., 2019, Ziersch et al., 2020, Williams et al., 2021). In Wenning's (2019) research, for example, refugees mention an internal '*sense of safety and peace*' when discussing their SWB. Refugees participating in Borwick et al.'s (2013) study suggest that sense of safety is an '*existential*' value in their SWB. In both cases, safety materialises as some separate form of well-being, in parallel to the resolving of important safety concerns, and in a sense that this article aims to specify.

7.3 Methodology

7.3.1 Developing partnerships with local organisations

For this article, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with refugees in the UK. The methodological approach is centred around engaged philosophy, where engaging with individual voices offers important insight on established concepts, such as safety and SWB (Wolff, 2018). I do so, in awareness that voices I was able to listen to as part of the research are representative of only a select fraction of refugees in the UK.

The interviews took place between March and August 2022. I became familiar with the 20 participants by working alongside two organisations. The first, ACH, is based in Bristol and provides employment, housing and social support to newly arrived migrants in the city. The second, the Oxford City Council, supported the development of several partnerships with local organisations working directly with asylum-seekers and refugees in the Oxfordshire region. Some of these organisations focus on therapeutic services. Others provide a range of services including legal advice, education and employment support. These partnerships were developed with the objective of understanding how refugees are doing in their lives in different destination settings. I highlighted that research on SWB could provide a framework to

do so. In this context, contact points within both organisations shared details of the research to potential participants and I was able to conduct 10 interviews via each organisation.

7.3.2 Description of individual participants

Participants took part in an interview on a voluntary basis. Depending on each individual's preference, these interviews were held either in person, online or over the phone. Twelve interviews took place in person, six online and two over the phone. The only requirements were that each individual had legal refugee status in the UK, be over 18 years old and comfortable conducting the interview in English.

In many ways, these requirements are indicative of the selection of the 20 respondents. For example, refugees with lower English fluency are more likely to be more recent arrivals in the UK, more at risk of social exclusion and of experiencing challenges to their well-being (Morrice et al., 2019, Tip et al., 2019, Kosyakova et al., 2022). Although this selectivity is complex to fully identify, that a '*sense of safety*' still features in discussions on SWB for individuals with higher English fluency and who, in one way or another, have access to support through local organisations, is already a contribution of the interviews.

Table 7.1 below presents information on participants' socio-demographics and their migration journeys to the UK. There is much evidence that characteristics, such as gender, age, culture, affect one's conception of SWB (Myers and Diener, 2018, LeFebvre and Huta, 2021). I therefore aimed to reflect diversity in such characteristics. As for details relating to refugees' asylum-seeking journeys, specifically, UK government officials at the time of the interviews were expressing preferences for resettlement routes over spontaneous arrivals, as '*safer*' pathways to obtaining a legal refugee status[17]. In blunter terms, seeking asylum upon arrival in the UK was being increasingly criminalised (Haglund, 2012, Dwyer et al., 2016, Bosworth and Turnbull, 2017, Bosworth and Vannier, 2020)[18]. Talking to individuals with both experiences seemed important.

[17] See for example the use of '*safer*' in Rishi Sunak's address to the House of Commons, 2022 and in the Home Office's New Plan for Immigration, 2022.
[18] For a recent review of the issue, see Taylor's (2024) report '*No such thing as justice here'.*

Table 7.1. Summary of participants' main socio-demographics and migration experiences

Socio-demographics	
Gender	
Male	55%
Female	45%
Age (years)	
18-30	10%
30-50	40%
50 and above	50%
Country of origin	
Afghanistan	10%
Cameroon	5%
Eritrea	5%
Iran	10%
Kuwait	5%
Palestine	10%
Syria	40%
Taiwan	5%
Ukraine	10%
Main occupation in the UK	
Studying	20%
Inactive/job searching	15%
Employed	65%
Migration experiences	
Years of residence in the UK	
Under 5 years	55%
5-20 years	40%
20 years and above	5%
Asylum route to the UK	
Resettlement	30%
Non-resettlement	70%
Observations	20

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and were structured in a similar way. I started by presenting myself and describing the purpose of the research. Then, I asked participants whether there was anything they wanted to share before we started. From here, I centred the discussion around what SWB means, or what it means to be well, emphasising that personal intuitions, experiences, opinions were encouraged as a way to approach the question. Participants' use of '*I think*', '*In my opinion*' or '*Well I don't know, but for me*', provides some evidence that responses reflected individual voices. Finally, I asked all participants if there was anything they wished to add, before debriefing and concluding together.

7.3.3 Additional methodological considerations

Throughout the research, I recorded audio material and transcribed this in NVivo (12), using an inductive thematic approach to analyse the material and identifying themes recurrently mentioned by participants (Bowen, 2006). It is in this instance that references to a sense of safety seemed to gravitate towards some unidentified form of SWB, resonating across participants. Analysing the context in which participants referred to this and circulating back to existing theories and evidence allowed me to specify this as safeness, a component described in the next Section 7.4.

I obtained ethical approval for the interviews by following approved procedures for conducting research with adult refugees (CUREC, 2019). The methodological design, shared from the outset with participants, was explicitly put in place to ensure informed consent and continuous opting-in. Participants were informed that this extended after the formal interview, in that they could request the suppression and modification of recorded conversations, for example. Finally, to respect participants' anonymity and safety, I use pseudonyms in the remaining sections. These aim to reflect nothing else but participants' gender. Each quote is also accompanied by an indication of participants' age at the time of the interview.

7.4 Findings on safeness

In this section, I start by identifying the neutral quality of safety within refugees' discussions of SWB (7.4.1) in order to differentiate this from the concept of safeness. I then define safeness as integral to refugees' SWB. To do so, I first provide evidence on shared structural characteristics between safeness and other components of SWB (7.4.2). Then, I highlight the content which makes it a unique component of what it means to be well: safeness is a sense of present peace with mind and self (7.4.3), of possible adjustment to the future (7.4.4) and of the capacity to explore the boundaries of oneself (7.4.5).

7.4.1 Neutralising safety concerns

To start with, it is noteworthy that across a range of experiences relating to seeking asylum, and a range of experiences relating to life in the UK, the notion of safety appeared as a recurrent feature of participants' thoughts about SWB. More specifically, participants described safety as the lack of any and all threats to their SWB. These threats revolved around key aspects, including physical safety, secure

accommodation and the safety of family and community members. Nigel, who fled Syria when military conscription was being enforced on all men in the country, indicated that his physical safety related to a broader sense of satisfaction with life:

'*The most important thing that has changed when I evaluate the things that matter in my life is not having to think about safety. Not being persecuted for my opinions.*' (Nigel, M, 30).

For Nigel, the importance of safety threats in how he perceived his life overall became particularly salient following his experience of fleeing from Syria to the UK through Kurdistan, Turkey, and Greece, where each context brought about new and compounding threats to his safety.

Taking the example of physical safety, Margot (37) clearly expressed the need to resolve existing threats in order to achieve some form of well-being:

'*How can you be well when your security is not guaranteed, in the place you came to look for a safety area? It doesn't make sense. I will give you an example. It's so important especially for us women, the fact that there is always always the risk of harassment, and that is a new trauma that I didn't think about before.*' (Margot, F, 37).

Margot is a Syrian journalist who reported on political repression in her country and Palestine. The fact that she did not consider her safety to the same extent '*before*' suggests that this heightened importance of safety for SWB results in part from her experiences of seeking asylum. That such threats accrue more to female asylum-seekers and refugees has been highlighted in much research elsewhere (Freedman, 2016, Bjørneseth et al., 2019, Van der Boor et al., 2022) and was very much present in these conversations.

As a final example, several participants mentioned persisting safety concerns relating to individuals back in the home country, being concerned with how '*to stop war for everyone back home'*. This is important for several reasons. First, this resonates with literature described in Section 7.2 where refugees' safety extends to that of family members and close ones. Second, this helps foreground that how safe participants felt was not only related to their experiences and living conditions in the UK, at the time of

the interview. This was also connected to more distal factors, such as those in the home country (Al-Ali et al., 2001, Schweitzer et al., 2006, Phillimore, 2011, Keita and Schewe, 2021).

It is beyond the scope of this research to determine the extent of concerns that shape refugees' safety (other important studies on this are Horn, 2010, Rasmussen and Annan, 2010, Campion, 2018, Bjørneseth et al., 2019). While such concerns matter in their own right, these all contributed to SWB in the neutral sense identified by Cummins (2011), and which Nigel translates as '*not having to think about safety*'. Furthermore, these were not entirely sufficient to understand what refugees meant by a '*sense of safety*' at the time of the interview.

7.4.2 Defining safeness as a subjective and positive state of mind

In defining safeness as a component of refugees' SWB, the first characteristic is that this was also described as a subjective state of mind, meaning each participant's current level of safeness could not be inferred from objective indicators of safety alone. Safeness depended on individual situations, including physical safety and that of close ones, but extended beyond these. For example, Margot had only recently left temporary accommodation, shared with other asylum-seekers, with no locks on her doors at the time of the interview, while Agnes, a 47-year-old refugee from Eritrea, had been living for years in her own house with her daughter. Yet both referred to a '*sense of safety*' in discussing their SWB, with Margot formulating this simply as '*for me being well is like a sense of safety*'.

The second characteristic of safeness that participants indicated was that it comprised a positive and continuous state, something '*you just like it there, you know?*'. This contrasts with different elements of safety which participants listed above as items that could be achieved, realised and hopefully forgotten. In the extract below, Stuart juxtaposed adjectives such as '*safe*' and '*normal*', indicating that safeness for him was more than the absence of multiple threats to his safety, threats which characterise many of refugees' experiences. Rather, it was a positive feeling and an integral component of being well. This relates to the third and final characteristic, which is that safeness related to how refugees perceived their life, from a global perspective. Stuart lived in Lebanon for a decade, working informally, before being granted asylum in the UK, and illustrates this as follows:

'*In Lebanon, we are used to feel you are the refugees. We help you, and you are not allowed to do this and that. So in your mind, you are always feel like okay, but, you are a human and I am human. People here in the UK, there is no difference between me and them. Only then I'm feeling safe, I feel I live like a normal life.*' (Stuart, M, 31).

As such, safeness comprises a SWB component in and of itself in these discussions, in that the underlying '*feeling*' or sense of safety that participants evoked shares structural characteristics with other components described in Section 7.2.

7.4.3 Safeness as peace with mind and self

Next, I clarify the content of safeness, by highlighting recurrent features, towards which participants converged. The first was that safeness materialised as internal '*peace of mind*'. This formulation was used by many participants when developing what they meant by a sense of safety, or a feeling of safety. Many explained this as feeling that they could be themselves fully, in a continuous sense. Ophelia, who was 23 at the time of the interview, described this state as being at '*peace with (her)self*''. For her, this was a central aspect of being well that she felt deprived of when becoming an adolescent, while internally displaced in Syria. This resonates with research elsewhere pointing to the centrality of peace with self in asylum-seeking and refugee youth's SWB, specifically (Chase, 2013, 2021).

In parallel, Agnes referred to challenging asylum interviews that put her sense of identity and self into question. Other participants, such as Fergus, noted that it was the lack of safety in expressing their own ideas and state of mind, that heightened the place of '*peace of mind*' in SWB. Fergus, who was an academic in his country Afghanistan, was resettled with his family in 2022 as part of the UK's Afghan Resettlement Scheme:

'*I would say that the most important now is getting a sense of safety again. Having a taste of democracy, which is what we were prohibited from in Afghanistan. Once you know your rights, and freedoms, and somehow yourself, you know that that is what really is this well-being.*' (Fergus, M, Early 40s).

Fergus' use of the word '*freedom*' resonates with other research which has described refugees' SWB with terms such as '*freedom from fear*' (Dromgold-Sermen, 2022, Van der Boor et al., 2022). However, Fergus refers to freedom in a positive sense, as opposed to freedom '*from*'. As such, the present conversations benefit from being put into perspective with research on SWB in, broadly speaking, Eastern cultures. Such research identifies a '*peace of mind*', a sense of having a '*free*' mind, as an essential component of a person's well-being (Lu et al., 2001, Henry, 2012). For example, Lee et al. (2013) find elements relating to peace of mind in several ancient Eastern philosophies, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

7.4.4 Safeness as adjustment to the future

The second defining feature of safeness was that it encompassed the feeling that one could adjust to and position oneself within the future. There are already indications that refugees' safety concerns extend in time and place, beyond the type of safety that is derived from obtaining a legal refugee status or by virtue of being in a safe country. This expansiveness in time was particularly salient in the discussion with Fergus when he reflected on his journey to the UK through the Resettlement Scheme:

'*For those who come as an asylum seeker, I think there's that additional sense of uncertainty, what will happen next. You never know what will happen. So there's this tension that comes with asylum because you arrive in an unknown place where other people decide of your future. It's impossible to work on your own core values when they will be decided by other people. You can no longer shape your future self.*' (Fergus, M, Early 40s).

What Fergus was referring to are the typical experiences of asylum-seekers in the UK, over which they have no agency, such as being transferred to different temporary accommodations, facing risk of being returned to their home country, all of which mean having no way of shaping '*your future self*'. While not the direct focus of this article, these differences between refugees who sought asylum in the UK, those resettled from abroad, and implications for safeness, would benefit from further research.

There are elements to Fergus' thoughts which reflect eudaimonic components of well-being identified in other literature, such as '*environmental mastery*' (Ryff, 1989, Ryan and Deci, 2001), since knowing '*your future self*' partly rested on having some control on the environment. In specifying safeness as a

separate SWB concept, however, there is other evidence highlighting forms of SWB which manifest as feeling in harmony with one's environment. Joshanloo (2014) explains the distinction between '*harmony*' and '*control*' as a distinction between '*adjustment*' to and '*change*' in the future, respectively. Safeness is constructed here as the feeling of harmonious, as opposed to controlled, adjustment to one's future self. That a component of SWB capturing individuals' thoughts and feelings about the future, and themselves in that future, is currently missing from widespread SWB theories has been highlighted by many authors (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, Zimbardo and Boniwell, 2004, Şimşek, 2009)[19].

7.4.5 Safeness as exploring the boundaries of oneself

The third and final feature of safeness related to participants' feeling that they could safely explore their own boundaries, that they could try and fail, and take risks. This took on different forms in participants' discussions, such as feeling safe while going about a new community despite certain differences. This was specified through various examples, such as religious, linguistic, or cultural differences, as Stuart was mentioning above. In the conversation with Nicholas, an Iranian activist now working in the media industry in London, he referred to a sense of safety as being able to explore the boundaries of his personality and new life in the UK without an obstructing fear of failure:

'*That's why I don't identify with being a refugee. I think I'm a person who is looking for protection, not permanent, but just temporary protection. But for sense of safety, for me is knowing that I can be the same Nicholas as before, who was always trying trying new things and was free to make mistakes.*'

(Nicholas, M, 28).

In Nicholas' mind, there was a distinction between needing temporary safety and wanting permanent safeness. The concept of '*psychological safety*' helps to specify this last feature of safeness (Edmondson, 1999). Psychological safety emerges from theories of organisational and workplace culture and describes a team-level culture where individuals consider it safe to speak up, to take risks, and more broadly to be themselves even if disruptive to the status quo. Nicholas highlighted that this was a central

[19] In the context of this article, it is notable that the future temporality is the only one not included in how policy-makers and researchers conceptualise SWB in the UK context, alongside explicit references to '*yesterday*' (past) and '*nowadays*' (present, see ONS, 2018b).

feature of his safeness by referring to the freedom '*to make mistakes*', thus describing this form of safety as an individual level state of mind.

7.5 Discussion and implications

In conclusion, refugees who took part in the interviews brought about a concept defined here as safeness, a positive and continuous part of their SWB. Safeness materialised in these discussions as internal peace with mind and self, adjustment to the future and the potential to explore the boundaries of oneself. This was a key element of refugees' SWB, in so far as safeness enabled them to take risks, make mistakes, and therefore keep learning about themselves. Next, safeness was only partially related to other more tangible aspects of individuals' safety, such as physical safety and that of close ones. For example, participants often referred to being concerned for the safety of members back in the home country, even when these were not closely related, and to the extent that it affected how they experienced their own safety in the UK. As such, alongside a growing literature on positive dimensions of refugees' well-being, it is important to note the significant place of this '*sense of safety*', which matters beyond receiving legal protection status and residing in a safe country.

I conclude this article by providing some thoughts on the implications of safeness for broader SWB research. A recurring criticism of the SWB measures commonly used in Western countries, such as happiness and life satisfaction, is their hyper-emphasis on hedonic understandings of SWB, or the pursuit of some form of pleasure (Uchida et al., 2004, Bastian et al., 2012). Many authors have suggested that a more comprehensive understanding of SWB, from a cross-cultural perspective, should include components that reflect lower arousal forms of well-being (Lu and Gilmour, 2004, Joshanloo and Weijers, 2014, Oishi, 2018). Safeness as constructed through these interviews partly captures this missing SWB component, of homeostasis, of peace within one's mind, with one's environment, and with one's future, therefore offering a promising avenue for further research.

7.6 Declarations

7.6.1 Acknowledgements

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7.6.2 Declaration of interest

The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article. No funding was received for conducting this study.

8 Conclusions

8.1 Limitations

In drawing this thesis to a close, Chapter 8 takes the opportunity to reflect on some limitations of the research. These limitations overarch the four main chapters and are discussed in two parts: the first relate to conducting research in the field of SWB (8.1.1); the second relate to research on migrants' SWB in destination countries (8.1.2).

8.1.1 Limitations in SWB research

From the outset, one of the arguments for using subjective measures of well-being is that there is a part of well-being which cannot be approximated with objective indicators, and for which individuals are the best judges. Is this truly the case? Are we the best judges of our own well-being? A source of concern in this field of research is our reliance on different heuristics to formulate subjective judgements. How we report on SWB is affected by different factors, such as internal, stable personality dispositions (Vittersø, 2001, Cummins et al., 2002, Weiss et al., 2008, Magee and Biesanz, 2019) and contextual and cultural primers (Suh, 2007, Suh et al., 2008, Lee et al., 2016). To this effect, Schwarz and Strack (1999) indicate that measures of SWB generally:

'*do not reflect a stable inner state of well-being. Rather they are judgements that individuals form on the spot … resulting in pronounced context effects*.'

As such, it is important to account for such factors in getting closer to individuals' subjective state of well-being, which is what each of the main thesis chapters attempts to do in different ways. This said, there is another perspective on whether we are good judges of our well-being. This perspective considers biases and influences that affect our reports as an integral component of what it means to be subjective.

Next, it could be not so straightforward to translate internal thoughts, feelings and mental states to responses across different measurement instruments (Lucas, 2018). This is the case with survey questions, such as those in the APS, which could be more cognitively demanding than what their straightforward formulations suggest (Schwarz and Clore, 1983, Pavot and Diener, 1993). Similarly, challenges could arise in translating SWB to survey questions in English, when English is not a person's native language.

In relation to this, authors have indicated systematic variation in the interpretation of SWB questions from one context, culture, country to another (Diener and Suh, 2003, Suh and Koo, 2008, Flavin et al., 2011, Exton et al., 2015, Oishi, 2018). In situating happiness in the anglophone context, Wierzbicka (2004) indicates that '*there is nothing special about being happy*'. This is in contrast with notions such as '*joie*' or '*bonheur*' in French. These notions refer to a more exceptional state and yet would also translate to happiness in English. Furthermore, some cultures associate well-being with luck and good fortune. This is reflected in the term '*eudaimonia*', composed of '*eu*' or good and '*daimon*' or spirit, fortune (McMahon, 2008, Oishi et al., 2013). To illustrate this, Lu and Gilmour (2004) find that while Americans associate happiness with excitement and personal success (i.e., internal conditions), Chinese individuals associate this with peace and calm. This is because happiness relates in part to good fortune and luck (i.e., external conditions). As a summary of these differences, Oishi (2018) suggests the following:

> *'Global reports (of happiness) appear to magnify cultural differences in everyday emotional experiences, especially when cross-cultural comparisons involve two groups that differ in the desirability of happiness'.*

In the context of this thesis, it is difficult to rule out that SWB comparisons between the UK-born and migrants, from different countries of origin and with different reasons for migration, are not partly reflecting cultural differences in the meaning of SWB.

In addition, Oishi's (2018) reference to '*desirability*' is noteworthy, since different meanings of well-being affect whether individuals believe they should pursue well-being at all, and therefore whether well-being relates to this instrumental and ultimate good referred to in section 2.1.1. For example, research finds a '*fear of happiness*' or an '*aversion to happiness*' in certain cultures (Joshanloo, 2013, Joshanloo and Weijers, 2014, Lambert et al., 2021). This results from the conception that after a positive experience necessarily comes a negative one, since part of well-being rests on fate, on good fortune. In such instances, reporting low SWB could either reflect a person doing poorly in their life, or a person with a different perspective on the desirability of SWB (Chen et al., 1995, Johnson et al., 2005).

The four research chapters aimed to address these concerns in different ways. In Chapters 5 and 6 using APS data, including migrants' country of origin aimed to capture some of these differences which would otherwise be conflated with migrants' reason for migration. In the qualitative interviews, one objective was to probe whether refugees hold a different understanding of SWB, not in relation to their country of origin, but in relation to experiences of seeking asylum. As such, an important limitation is that this thesis did not extent the qualitative component to migrants with other migration reasons. This would have provided insight into whether and how other experiences of migration, specifically, change individuals' interpretation of subjective well-being.

8.1.2 Limitations in research on migrants' SWB in destination countries

Next, there are several concerns in conducting research at the intersection of migration and SWB, two of which are discussed here.

First, individuals self-select into migration. This limits the possibility of making causal, let alone representative, claims on associations between migration and SWB. The issue of self-selection manifests in different ways. For one, it manifests in differences between those who chose to leave their home country in the first place, and those who remain. It is often suggested that migrants move because they are '*unhappy*' relative to other individuals residing in their home country (Graham and Markowitz, 2011, Otrachshenko and Popova, 2014). More specifically, those who migrate are '*frustrated achievers*', that is, selected not only in terms of SWB (i.e., frustrated), but also on characteristics such as education or financial capacity (i.e., achievers, Boneva and Frieze, 2001, Graham and Pettinato, 2002, Graham and Nikolova, 2013, Méndez, 2020). Thereof, migrant respondents in both APS samples and qualitative interviews are likely to be selected in various ways. Chapters 4 and 7 discuss the likely direction of this selection for refugees who took part in the interviews.

Selection also manifests in differences between those who migrate temporarily and those who eventually return to their country of origin. Return intentions relate to how positively migrants perceive the life they currently lead. For example, there is evidence that those who are dissatisfied with life in the destination country tend to be those who select into return migration (Mara and Landesmann, 2013, Kratz, 2020, Schiele, 2021). Return migrants are also selected on other dimensions such as labour market

and entrepreneurial ambitions (Ambrosini et al., 2012, Marchetta, 2012, Batista et al., 2017). As a result, changes in SWB over time, and in the implications of employment for SWB over time, could partly reflect a shift in the composition of an immigrant population. Importantly, this shift could happen in relation to individual characteristics which are endogenous to SWB. While this limitation is difficult to overcome, an advantage of the APS is the possibility to disaggregate migrants by years of residence, thus mitigating selection concerns relating to return migration at least.

Second, in reporting how they perceive their life, migrants may overstate their SWB, even in the event of low objective living outcomes and challenges in the destination country. Different '*forecasting biases*' (Schkade and Kahneman, 1998, Gilbert, 2009), such as failing to anticipate challenges after the initial migration honeymoon period and the impact of non-pecuniary losses for SWB might be underreported by migrants. Failure in different elements of the migration journey may symbolise failure in one's broader life expectations and aspirations (Knight and Gunatilaka, 2010, Portes, 2010, Hendriks, 2015), which would explain why these are difficult to report.

This limitation transposes in a slightly different way to the case of refugees. Some studies point to high SWB among refugees, despite multiple challenges in the destination context, such as discrimination, isolation, and barriers to the labour market (Chan et al., 2016, Fozdar and Torezani, 2018, Wenning, 2019). Here, this could translate refugees' sense of '*gratefulness*' or wanting to '*give back*' for having obtained a protection status, not only vis-à-vis people in the destination country but vis-à-vis those still back home (Heins and Unrau, 2018, Rowley et al., 2020, Schmitt, 2021). How this would play out in SWB reports is not straightforward, however. While some authors find that with processes such as '*relative gratification*', refugees report higher SWB (Richardson et al., 2004, Fozdar and Torezani, 2018), others suggest that this instead leads refugees to underreport their SWB, with feelings of being unduly lucky to have escaped persecution and knowing how precarious well-being is (Ayar and Karasu, 2021).

One objective of the qualitative interviews in Chapters 4 and 7 was to address this concern, by exploring whether refugees change how they think about SWB after seeking asylum. Interviews with 20 selected participants suggested this might not be the case. However, since the qualitative analysis was not

extended to migrants with other reasons for migration, it is difficult to fully capture how forecasting biases and changes to the meaning of SWB would manifest for individuals with other migration reasons. Such concerns therefore apply to the thesis as a whole.

8.2 Thesis conclusions and contributions

Despite these challenges and limitations, the thesis still sought to provide new evidence on the 3 following research questions:

1. What does SWB mean for refugees living in the UK?
2. Are there differences between the local-born, refugees and other migrants' SWB in the UK?
3. How does employment contribute to the SWB of the local-born, refugees and other migrants in the UK?

To address these questions, the doctoral research followed a mixed methodology, providing insight through four standalone research articles, each with separate conclusions. This section now weaves together and integrates separate conclusions, highlighting how they contribute to existing literature.

8.2.1 Disentangling the meaning of SWB for refugees, from what promotes their SWB

The first concluding remarks concern refugees' SWB. In the context of semi-structured conversations on their SWB, refugees provided insight into what happiness and life satisfaction mean to them. These are two widely used measures of SWB in Western countries, including the UK. The conversations indicated significant overlaps between refugees' definitions and how these measures are defined in broader conceptual literature. For example, it is the case that life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation refugees conduct when thinking about their life in general. To do so, each individual brings in domains such as employment, health, and the well-being of their family, that contribute uniquely to this general evaluation. In addition, the word happiness resonated with refugees as a positive emotion, something fleeting in nature. Some participants referred to traumatic experiences of seeking asylum which made them search not only for happy emotions, but for the disposition allowing one to experience positive emotions at all.

A key contribution of these conversations was to evidence how migrating to seek asylum does affect happiness and life satisfaction. For life satisfaction, the interviewees indicated a shift in domains that contribute to a positive evaluation of life overall. Some participants emphasised a search to stay '*busy*', to multiply opportunities to work, volunteer, care for others, and be active. As for happiness, several participants shed light on the fragility of these emotions, and the capacity to experience these emotions, as a result of traumatic migration experiences. In neither case, however, did participants hint to a substantial shift in the meaning of these two SWB measures.

In contrast, participants evidenced a need to expand our perspective on what composes SWB, by suggesting the existence of another concept which this thesis summarised as '*safeness*'. Refugees referred to safeness as a subjective state of mind, positive and continuous in nature. Safeness was not entirely reflected in objective indicators of participants' safety at the time of the interview, such as having a legal refugee status or being in a safe accommodation. While sharing structural characteristics with other SWB components, safeness was uniquely defined as a sense of peace of mind, in present and future temporalities, and what enables refugees to take risks and make mistakes. This finding has several implications. First, safeness questions the extent to which one can understand how refugees are doing in destination countries, drawing from established components of SWB only. Second, the content of safeness shares similarities with SWB as defined beyond the Western context, of a lower arousal state, of homeostasis with oneself and the environment (Lu et al., 2001, Lee et al., 2013, Joshanloo, 2014, Lim, 2016). Hence, these interviews indicate opportunities for the conceptualisation of SWB to expand beyond its rooting in Western theories.

8.2.2 Identifying differences (and lack thereof) in migrants' SWB, by reason for migration

The interviews also facilitated the comparison of SWB data across migrant groups, based on the nature of their migration journey, including those who migrated to seek asylum. Using the decade of APS data in the UK for which SWB information is available, between 2012 and 2022, this second part of the analysis contributed several insights. First, when comparing migrants' SWB to that of the UK-born, there were fewer differences across migrants by reason for migration, than what could be expected given differences in indicators of objective living outcomes. For example, work migrants often have better

health and employment outcomes relative to other migrants. This transpired in the descriptive statistics produced for this research (see Tables 5.1-5.3 and 6.1-6.4), and yet not in the main analysis of SWB (see Table 5.4). Next, while the empirical analysis highlighted worse anxiety outcomes for migrants, this gap was relatively similar across migrant groups. Examining trends over time indicated that migrants' SWB converges towards that of the local-born, but that this convergence is largely a decrease in SWB over time. While this is the opposite of what some literature has evidenced (Helliwell et al., 2018), this parallels the decline in migrants' health outcomes towards those of the local-born pointed to elsewhere (Antecol and Bedard, 2006).

8.2.3 Connecting migrants' employment, SWB, and the UK's policy context

Finally, the analysis examined whether employment status contributes to differences in SWB across migrants' reason for migration and relative to the UK-born. Here also, the findings were not in line with those expected given relevant empirical literature. First, while employment contributes more positively to the happiness of migrants, at varying levels of significance, this is not true of those who migrated for family reasons. For family migrants, those in employment report lower life satisfaction relative to out of employment migrants. Second, while there is evidence that SWB gains from employment tend to decrease with years of residence for work and asylum migrants, this is not true of study migrants. In this case, the positive gap in SWB for those in employment increases with years of residence.

Different mechanisms such as the employment rate in migrants' reference groups, or the accumulation of supporting resources in the destination countries that come with years of residence, are insightful but insufficient to explain these findings. As such, a key contribution of these results is in indicating that characteristics of the UK's immigration and employment policies, such as the requirement to remain employed for residence in the country, likely contribute to these differences, opening up an important avenue for further research.

8.3 Avenues for further research

This section now discusses four of these avenues for further research: first, using finer information on migrants' socio-demographics and migration experiences (8.3.1); second, considering safeness beyond migration to seek asylum (8.3.2); third, exploring the implications of migrants' worse anxiety outcomes

(8.3.3) and fourth, assessing the relation between migrants' SWB and their perceptions of the destination country's policy context (8.3.4).

8.3.1 Intersection of migrants' experiences and socio-demographics

The findings from this thesis would benefit from disaggregating migrants by other individual socio-demographics and experiences, alongside the focus on reason for migration. For example, several results indicated that respondents' gender might be a confounding factor, such as how safety concerns were discussed by participants in Chapter 7. This extends to Chapters 5 and 6, where further insight is needed which considers the gendered nature of immigration to the UK and how this may affect the contribution of employment to SWB. In the UK, family migrants are in majority women, and work migrants in majority men. A gender analysis would therefore be particularly insightful in so far as there are gender differences in migrants' countries of origin in the norm of labour market participation.

Another example pertains to differences in the experiences of seeking asylum. For example, interviews in Chapter 7 highlighted a connection between safeness and whether respondents had sought asylum in the UK or were resettled from abroad. This is important to explore in and of itself. Furthermore, in thinking how this would impact Chapters 5 and 6 using APS data, an empirical question arises of whether differences in asylum-seeking journeys transpire in the SWB of APS respondents. It could be that worse anxiety outcomes across migration reasons conflate different anxiety outcomes between resettled and non-resettled refugees. Although the APS does not indicate whether asylum migrants came through resettlement schemes, one could proxy indicators of origin country and year of arrival, for example, to estimate the likelihood that a person was resettled.

As a last example, a promising avenue for further research lies at the intersection of migrants' reason for migration and country of birth. The analysis considered whether migrants from EU and non-EU countries differed in SWB, and in SWB implications from employment. Arguably, there is room to push this further, especially in a post-Brexit context which removes many of the benefits that EU-nationals historically enjoyed in the UK. In parallel, the qualitative insight in Chapters 4 and 7 could also consider how refugees' country of origin shapes understandings of happiness, life satisfaction, and safeness, and hence better isolate the role of migration reason, for which this thesis sought to provide novel insight.

8.3.2 Safeness beyond migration to seek asylum

The second avenue relates to the safeness concept described by refugees. Other authors suggest that our understanding of what it means to be well could include lower arousal forms of well-being. While such studies usually highlight this in comparing Eastern and Western conceptions of SWB, the findings from this thesis call for two slightly different explorations. On the one hand, to what extent does migrating to seek asylum play a part in advancing the place of homeostasis, of peace of mind, in defining what it means to be well? There were clear indications in the interviews that the shift in the place of safeness for SWB related to seeking asylum. This resonates with other evidence on the well-being of asylum-seekers and refugee youth (Chase, 2013, 2021, Bjørneseth et al., 2019, Dromgold-Sermen, 2022). However, refugees who took part in the interviews had mostly migrated from non-Western countries (see Table 7.1). It could be that this safeness component, alongside reflecting traumatic migration experiences, also reflects a part of what it means to be well from a country-of-origin perspective. Further exploration is needed to disentangle these two effects.

On the other hand, is SWB different in Eastern and Western contexts, as suggested in other research, or could Western conceptions of SWB simply be expanded? In other words, safeness may compose the SWB of individuals without experiences of migration between countries. There is evidence elsewhere that this could be the case. For example, much literature indicates the importance of neighbourhood safety, safety in the community, alongside more extreme forms of safety such as safety from violence and crime, in shaping everyday well-being (Johnson et al., 2009, Cummins, 2011, González et al., 2012). Assessing whether safeness composes SWB for individuals across different neighbourhoods, across different communities, even within '*safe*' countries as the UK, therefore, requires further exploration.

8.3.3 Relation between anxiety and objective living outcomes

The third avenue pertains to the worse anxiety outcomes estimated for migrants in Chapter 5, regardless of initial migration reason, and consistent across different specifications. The implications of anxiety symptoms are far-reaching: in younger populations, they associate with lower educational performance (Fletcher, 2010, D'Agostino et al., 2022). In adult populations, anxiety associates with lower labour market outcomes (Lerner and Henke, 2008, Cornelius et al., 2011, Henderson et al., 2011) and health

impairments that reduce life quality and longevity (Papakostas et al., 2004, Linder et al., 2019). Further empirical evidence is needed on why migrants in the UK systematically report worse anxiety outcomes.

As developed by other authors, however, it is possible to see a person's socio-economic outcomes as exacerbating factors for anxiety (Diderichsen et al., 2012). In other words, the likelihood of anxiety is unequally distributed in a population, along initial socio-economic inequalities (Virtanen et al., 2011, Ervasti et al., 2013, Linder et al., 2019). Findings from Chapter 5 therefore raise further questions as to the nature and direction of this relation between indicators of migrants' objective living outcomes and worse anxiety outcomes.

8.3.4 Migrants' perceptions of the policy context

The final avenue for further research pertains to the implications of immigration and employment policies for migrants' SWB. In Chapter 6, the channels that were expected to support the estimations, such as the role of comparison with reference groups or the availability of supporting networks, were insufficient to comprehensively explain differences between migrant groups. The explanation was therefore expanded to characteristics of the UK's immigration and employment policies, including the link between employment status and residence rights.

This is a notable avenue for further research. Other literature shows that individuals are perceptive of and receptive to policy changes in their environment, with direct implications for their well-being (Helliwell, 2006, Pacek and Radcliff, 2008, Rostila et al., 2015, Voßemer et al., 2018, Heins, 2023). As such, the findings from Chapter 6 call for exploring whether migrants' perceptions of changes to employment policies, in some instances conditioning their right to reside in the UK, explain their SWB in the country. For example, one hypothesis was that SWB differences between migrants in and out of employment would decrease with years of residence. This was not the case for study migrants. For study migrants in the UK, there is pressure upon graduation to quickly join the labour market before being considered an over-stayer. Whether study migrants perceive policy changes, such as the suppression and re-introduction of Graduate Route visas, to the extent that these alter the contribution of employment for SWB, is a question that requires further empirical evidence. With broader shifts in the UK's

immigration policies, from ending freedom of movement as part of Brexit to criminalising the act of seeking asylum, implications for migrants' SWB in the UK could be far-reaching.

8.4 Policy implications

Finally, this thesis concludes with two policy implications. What is meant by a '*policy*' implication is an implication of the research, which could inform decisions made by policymakers, as opposed to shaping avenues for further research.

8.4.1 Connecting policies to SWB

The first stems from the indication that migrants' SWB is responsive to policy changes. The context of this research is one of major shifts in how the UK portrays and deals with immigration to the country. It would have been complex to discuss all shifts occurring between 2012 and 2022, given the vast amount of policies, either announced or implemented, taking place across this period (for recent scholarship: Donmez and Sutton, 2020, Neureiter, 2022, Benchekroun, 2023, Sumption and Walsh, 2023). Arguably, these can be summarised as policies of '*regaining control*' (Blinder and Richards, 2016, Allen and Blinder, 2018), of curtailing immigration by allowing only the '*best and brightest*' to enter the country (Luthra and Platt, 2021, Sumption and Walsh, 2023). It is important to consider the detrimental implications of increasingly restrictive policies for migrants' SWB, including those who migrated in need of protection. As a corollary, if migrants are receptive to policy changes, then promoting more welcoming and supportive immigration policies in the country may contribute to higher SWB among migrants.

8.4.2 Using SWB data to measure implications of asylum policies

From a more practical perspective, the thesis demonstrates the possibility of measuring migrants' SWB, including in the context of migrating to seek asylum. There are many opportunities for the collection of SWB data to be rolled out in different domains relating to refugees' lives in destination countries. These include access to healthcare services, or labour market policies such as HOPE. This would help understand what promotes positive life perceptions among migrants who move in search of protection.

By the end of this doctoral research, several of the partner organisations had already started collecting SWB data for asylum migrants taking part in their programs. Together, we developed a version of the

SWB scales that would be easily interpretable for newly arrived migrants, with perhaps lower language skills (Annexe Figure 8.1). One of the partner organisations in Oxford was applying to a bid for City Council funding, and introduced these scales in how they would assess the effectiveness of their programs and identify areas for improvement. We also worked towards transferring the scales to a mobile application, or devices across their infrastructures, to regularly take a pulse of participants' well-being, in the spirit of Danny Kahneman and his daily reconstruction method.

This is an encouraging note to end on since, if anything, this doctoral research consistently demonstrated that migrants' SWB provides different insight to more widespread indicators of objective living outcomes. Developing more robust ways to capture refugees' SWB would help understand how these different living outcomes contribute to refugees' broader, subjective interpretation of their lives. In this, the thesis only replicates calls made by other researchers in the UK, such as Paul Dolan, Richard Layard, and Robert Metcalfe, by expanding this to individuals who migrated to the UK for different reasons, including to seek asylum.

8.5 Annexes

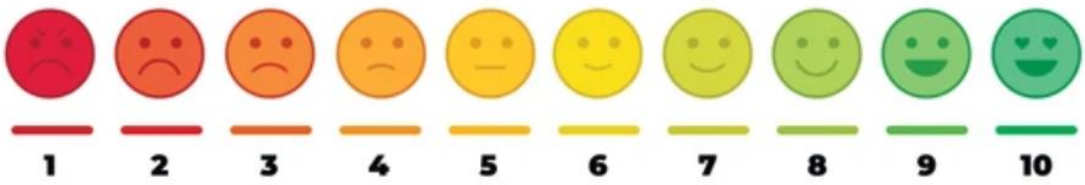
Annexe Figure 8.1. Illustrated scales to measure subjective well-being

I would like to ask 4 questions about how you are doing in your life.

Please circle where you think you are today. There is no right or wrong answer!

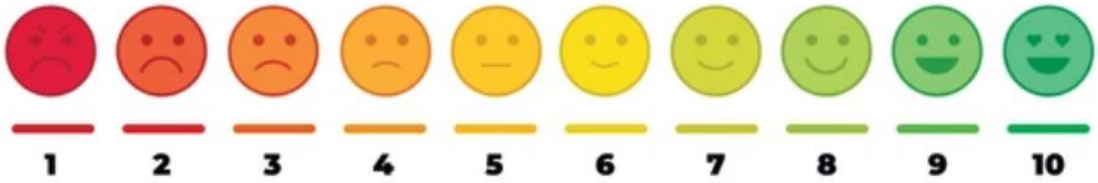
1. Life satisfaction:

How **satisfied** are you with your life?



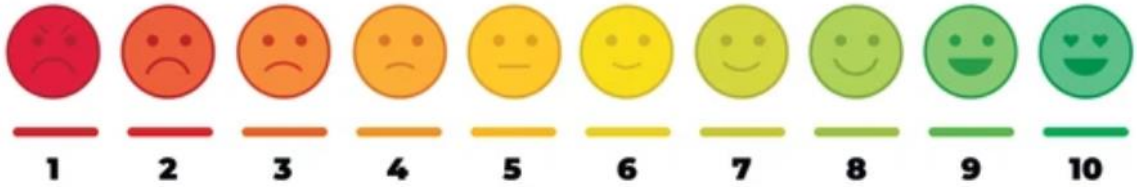
2. Worthwhile:

How **worthwhile** are things in your life?



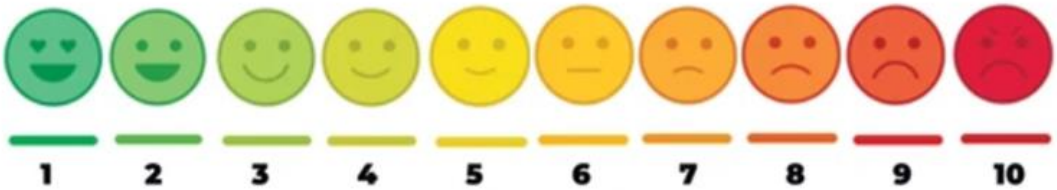
3. Happiness:

How happy are you today?



4. Anxiety today:

How anxious are you? (0 is not at all anxious, and 10 is completely anxious)



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Appendices

Interview invitation

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Daisy Pollenne
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Well-being of refugees in the UK

Hello!

We are conducting research at the University of Oxford to **improve well-being and employment of refugees** who are residing in the United Kingdom.

[Name of organisation] has agreed to help in the research, and suggested we send you an invitation to take part in an interview. This interview is on your experiences in the UK.

There is no obligation to take part!

If you would like to, please respond to this email so we can set up a date for the interview. We can do this on the phone, online, or in person.

If you would like more information at this stage, feel free to contact me.

Thank you!

How to contact me:
Daisy
Email: daisy.pollenne@gtc.ox.ac.uk
Phone number: +44 7 851 891 604

Permission from collaborator

June, 2024

To whom it may concern:

Two of the chapters Daisy Pollenne will present as part of her dissertation contain material that was submitted as joint papers with myself.

One paper was published in the journal of Comparative Migration Studies (DOI: 10.1186/s40878-024-00371-6). Another paper is currently being considered by the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.

In both cases, I can confirm that:

- Daisy obtained access to the data, conducted the empirical analysis, drafted early versions of the manuscripts and presented these to several conferences. She also submitted the manuscripts to journals, took the lead in responding to reviews for the accepted manuscript, and is the contact author for both submissions.
- My role consisted of a traditional mentor/supervisor for a DPhil student: I provided feedback on the empirical analysis and the written manuscript, while Daisy remained the lead contributor.

Best regards,



Carlos Vargas-Silva

Professor in Migration Studies
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