



GÖTEBORGS
UNIVERSITET

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE IN PRACTICE

Perceived Fairness and Its Implications on Legal Legitimacy, Compliance, Belonging and Well-Being within the Swedish Asylum System.

ALESINA DELJAMIE

Master's Thesis:	30 credits
Programme:	Master's Programme in International Administration and Global Governance
Date:	2025-09-17
Supervisor:	Marcia Grimes
Words:	19995

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the individuals who were willing to share their stories and personal reflections on the asylum process with me. Your willingness to open up and share your experiences is profoundly appreciated, and I hope I have managed to adequately represent your story with the depth and thoughtfulness it deserves.

I would also like to sincerely thank my Supervisor, Marcia Grimes, for her invaluable guidance, insightful feedback and words of encouragement throughout this thesis.

Lastly, to my family and all people close to me, thank you for your unwavering support, patience and love throughout this journey. I am eternally grateful.

Abstract

Fair and transparent asylum procedures are fundamental to ensure justice, legitimacy and trust in migration governance. While there is considerable research on migration policies, institutional trust, credibility assessment and the effect of migration decisions on asylum seekers, little is known about how asylum seekers themselves perceive fairness, particularly in post-2015 Sweden. This thesis examines how asylum seekers perceive procedural fairness and decision outcomes within the Swedish asylum system and how these perceptions might influence their trust in legal institutions, compliance with law(s), sense of belonging, and psychological well-being. Drawing on qualitative semi-structured interviews, the study applies a deductive thematic approach focused on three dimensions of procedural justice (voice, dignity and consistency) to capture applicants' lived experiences of the process. The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents perceive the asylum process as unjust, characterised by a culture of disbelief, and the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) and its decision as illegitimate. Notably, all respondents expressed respect and willingness to comply with Swedish law in general, separating their distrust of the SMA from the broader Swedish legal system. The study further concludes that, although outcome favorability strongly shapes perceptions of fairness and legitimacy, it is not entirely decisive. The way in which the process unfolds has significant implications for perceived fairness, compliance, and psychological well-being, as some residence permit holders viewed the system as unjust, due to disbelief and perceived arbitrariness in decision outcomes.

Keywords: Procedural Justice, fairness, Swedish Asylum System, Migrants, Legitimacy, Compliance, Belonging, Well-being

Abbreviations and Definitions

PJT – Procedural Justice Theory

SMA – Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket)

MCA – Migration Court of Appeal

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

EU – European Union

DNA – Deoxyribonucleic Acid

PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

MC– Migration Court

MCA– Migration Court of Appeal

Asylum Seekers – “An asylum-seeker is someone who is seeking international protection. Their request for refugee status has yet to be processed” (UNHCR, 2025, p.1). In this paper, the term “asylum-seeker” includes people who have applied for protection. This includes applicants from all stages, from first application to possible appeals in the Migration Court and the Court of Appeal.

Refugees – “An individual who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” The 1951 Convention, Article 1, (p.14).

Table of Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Structure of the Thesis	2
2.0 PREVIOUS LITERATURE	3
2.1 The Context of Sweden	4
3.0 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION	6
3.1 The Rule of Law and the Importance of Procedure	6
4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
4.1 Procedural Justice Theory	8
4.2 Perceived Procedural Fairness	9
4.3 Key Dimensions of Procedural Fairness	10
4.3.1 Voice	10
4.3.2 Dignity	11
4.3.3 Consistency	12
4.4 Outcome Favorability as a Factor Influencing Fairness and Legitimacy	13
4.5 Legitimacy and Compliance	14
4.6 Belonging and Well-Being	15
4.7 Summary of Procedural Fairness and Trust Research	16
4.7.1 Institutional Trust and Procedural Legitimacy	17
4.7.2 Limitations of Quantitative Research and Contribution of This Study	18
4.7.3 Purpose and Research Questions	19
5.0 METHODOLOGY	20
5.1 Qualitative Research and Method	20
5.1.1 Deductive Thematic Approach	21
5.1.2 Semi-Structured Interviews	22
5.1.3 Data Collection	23
5.1.4 Interviewee Profile	26
5.1.5 Confidentiality	28
5.1.6 Researcher's Role	28
5.1.7 Ethical Considerations	29
5.1.8 Validity, Reliability, and Generalisability	30
6.0 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	30
6.1 Thematic Coding	30
6.2 Experiences of Procedural Justice	31
6.2.1 Voice – The Opportunity to Express One's View	32
6.2.2 Dignity – Respectful and Humane Treatment	36
6.2.3 Consistency – Equal Application of Rules	37
6.2.4 Procedural Factors Detected Inductively	39
6.3 Perception of Legitimacy of the SMA	41
6.3.1 Acceptance of legal authority in General.....	42
6.4 Outcome Fairness	43
6.5 Sense of Belonging	44
6.6 Well-Being	45
6.6.1 The Role of Civil Society and Acts of Solidarity	46
7.0 CONCLUSION	48
7.1 Contribution	49
7.2 Limitations	50
7.3 Future Research	50

1.0. Introduction

The situation of asylum seekers constitutes a pressing global issue. War, violence, and complex sociopolitical dynamics compel individuals to leave their homelands in search of safety and better opportunities. Today, an unprecedented number of over 120 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide, including refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2025). The UN 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, hereafter ‘Refugee Convention’, and its 1967 Protocol explicitly state that those individuals facing persecution in their country of origin have a right to seek asylum in other countries if the state in question is unable or unwilling to protect. If the person meets the criteria outlined in the Refugee Convention, the international community is obliged to provide them with protection (UNHCR, 2019). Consequently, the administration of asylum procedures and their fairness become key components of the migration regime.

Sweden has historically been viewed as a generous and welcoming country towards refugees (Jansson, 2024). However, the arrival of approximately 163,000 asylum applicants in 2015 precipitated a shift from a traditionally generous policy to a more restrictive system. These developments strengthened the position of the populist right-wing Sweden Democrats’ migration ideology and gradually influenced other mainstream parties to adopt more stringent asylum policies (Thunborg et al., 2021). The Swedish government justified these measures on the grounds of overwhelmed reception facilities, strained welfare services and concerns about fiscal sustainability (Regeringskansliet, 2016). This evolution indicates that asylum claims are negotiated within a complex nexus of politics and morality, where the priorities and values of the state to protect its interests are in conflict with those of individuals’ right to seek protection under international law. The restrictive interpretations of asylum law have raised critical questions about the fairness of asylum procedures (Gren et al., 2023), prompting debates on whether the current system legitimises bureaucratic violence¹. Some scholars conclude that discretionary practices by caseworkers and structural inequalities in asylum adjudication result in unpredictable outcomes and perceived injustices (Jansson, 2024; Garvik & Valenta, 2021).

¹ Defined by Gren et al., (2023) as “ How bureaucracies as social institutions, besides providing access to rights, also impact refugees in ways that are constraining, humiliating, soul killing, and sometimes life-threatening”. P1.

While existing literature has highlighted the evolving structure of inequality that emerged within the Swedish Migration Agency, henceforth ‘SMA’, it remains largely silent on the dimension of procedural fairness. In particular, few studies examine how asylum seekers themselves perceive the fairness of the asylum process within the Swedish asylum system. This underexplored dimension is significant because perceptions of fair treatment influence not only trust in institutions but also applicants’ psychological well-being, sense of belonging, and willingness to comply with legal decisions (Frank & Nivorozhkin, 2025). This thesis addresses this gap by applying Procedural Justice Theory, hereafter ‘PJT’, which emphasises that fair and respectful decision-making processes foster trust, legitimacy and decision acceptance, even when the outcomes are negative (Tyler, 1988). Contemporary public administration research supports these claims that perception of fairness enhances trust and compliance (Grimes, 2006; Frank & Nivorozhkin, 2025), whereas unfair procedure erodes trust and cooperation.

Utilising a qualitative semi-structured interview approach, this study seeks to explore how asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iran and Ukraine who arrived in Sweden between 2015 and 2024 with varying gender, age and legal statuses (accepted, rejected, or pending) perceive key procedural justice dimensions such as voice (the opportunity to express one’s story), dignity (respectful and humane treatment), and consistency (equal application of rules), and how these experiences relate to their perceptions of legal legitimacy, compliance, social belonging, and psychological well-being. By moving beyond predominantly quantitative survey-based research and focusing on the lived experience of applicants, this research provides an in-depth, context-sensitive understanding of procedural fairness in Swedish asylum adjudication, contributing empirical insights that complement quantitative findings and inform more just and trustworthy migration policies.

1.1. Structure of The Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven main parts and structured as follows: Chapter One presents the introduction. Chapter Two reviews previous research. Chapter Three discusses the conceptual foundation. Chapter Four outlines the theoretical framework and key concepts, as well as the research aim and questions. Chapter Five addresses the methodology. Chapter Six combines the findings and analysis. Finally, Chapter Seven offers conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2.0. Previous Literature

Migration and the experiences of asylum seekers have received considerable attention in academic research. Primary themes include bureaucratisation and credibility assessment of asylum stories. This section provides a concise overview of these strands.

The first strand of literature primarily addresses the question of how and why asylum systems in Western Europe, including Sweden, have become increasingly restrictive and bureaucratised since the 2015 refugee crisis (Jansson, 2024). While democratic states often aim to symbolically uphold international obligations by offering protection, this commitment often comes into conflict with national interests (Freedman, 2015; Liodden, 2022). These studies often frame the asylum process as a form of state control, shifting focus from a humanitarian-oriented approach to a more restrictive control mechanism (Jansson, 2024; Garvik & Valenta, 2021). Several of them adopt a theoretical or normative approach, emphasising the importance of state sovereignty and border controls (Freedman, 2015; Sager & Öberg, 2017), while others offer empirical insights into how these restrictive policies result in procedural complexity, delays, and legal uncertainty (Moberg et al., 2024; Liodden, 2016).

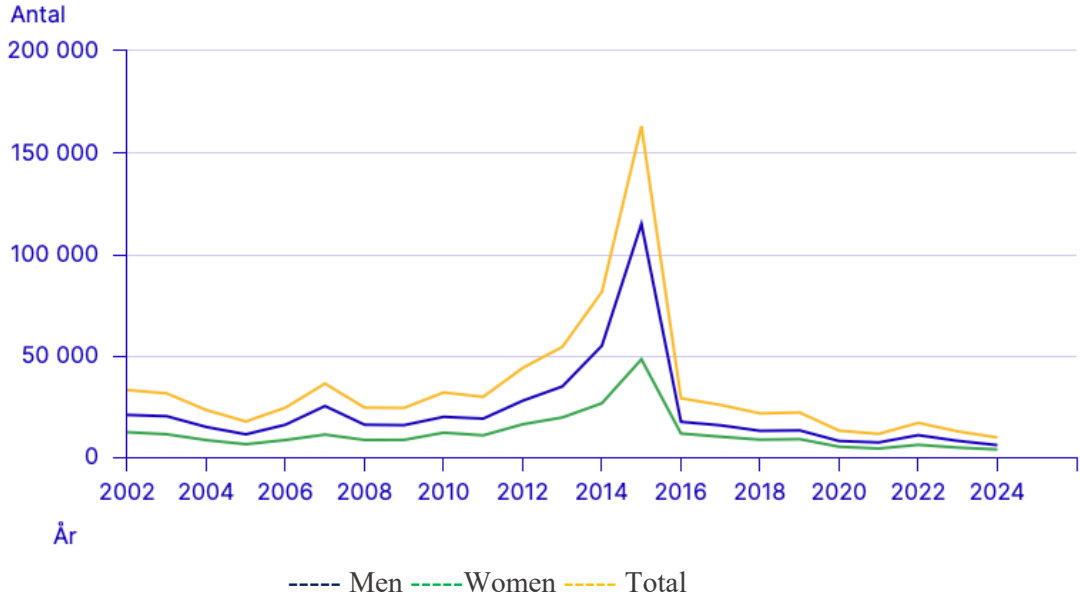
The second strand of literature focuses on the micro-level practices of asylum procedure, examining how the credibility of asylum stories is assessed in decision-making and highlighting the complex interplay between legal frameworks, discretionary judgment, and applicant narratives. The outcome of asylum cases is often determined by the extent to which caseworkers consider the applicants' stories credible, ultimately influencing whether individuals are allowed to stay or face return. The literature shows that many caseworkers have limited training in this complex area, and the applicants are often expected to provide excessive evidence and emotionally convincing accounts, despite the psychological effects of trauma and fear, making the process more adversarial than protective (Mosley, 2018; Liodden, 2016; Bollingmo et al., 2014). Although the UNHCR guidelines require states to apply a low standard of proof in assessing asylum claims, in practice, authorities often impose stricter evidentiary burdens, undermining the benefit of the doubt principle outlined in the protocol (Freedman, 2015; Liodden, 2022). In the absence of documentary evidence, greater weight is often placed on oral testimony (Kagan, 2015), allowing caseworkers to interpret and adopt rules based on their own understanding and thereby render decisions despite significant uncertainties (Liodden, 2016). In the Swedish context, several scholars have highlighted that caseworker assessments may be influenced by subjective perceptions, power imbalances and

institutional time pressures, which may compromise the fairness of the asylum procedure (Wernesjö, 2014, 2019; Cegrell & Karlander, 2021). Although this literature offers critical insights into political priorities, bureaucratic obstacles, legal uncertainty and also highlights important structural and procedural aspects of the asylum system, it primarily focuses on the role of state institutions, with limited attention to how applicants experience the asylum process and how these encounters may affect their sense of fairness, trust and compliance.

2.1. In The Context of Sweden

Sweden has long been characterised by its commitment to human rights, generous asylum policy, and inclusive welfare system. This reputation has made Sweden one of the most desirable asylum destinations for people fleeing conflicts around the world (Thunborg et al., 2021). As demonstrated in graph 1, below, since 2002, the number of asylum seekers in Sweden has fluctuated, reaching its highest levels in 2015 when approximately 163,000 individuals, primarily from war-affected Syria, as well as from Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries, applied for asylum (Migrationsverket, 2025). Among the total applicants, around 70% were men. Approximately 70,000 were children, and about half of them were unaccompanied. In addition, a significant number were classified as stateless with no country of origin (Thunborg et al., 2021).

The total number of asylum seekers in Sweden (2002-2024)



Graph 1. The total number of asylum seekers per year in Sweden from 2002 onwards. Source: (scb.se, 2025).

However, this development strengthened the position of right-wing anti-immigration ideology, leading other political parties to adopt similar rhetoric. Despite Sweden's long-standing reputation as a moral superpower, the government implemented changes to the Aliens Act in 2016, replacing permanent residence permits with temporary ones, restricting family reunification and asylum rights, and adopting a more restrictive interpretation of asylum law (Thunborg et al., 2021; Jansson, 2024).

In most European countries, including Sweden, asylum policymaking and procedural standards are not determined exclusively at the national level but are part of multi-level frameworks that include international, European, and local legislation (Freedman, 2015). In determining refugee eligibility, Sweden follows the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, using the UNHCR Handbook as a guiding document (Migrationsverket, 2025). The SMA is responsible for asylum decisions in Sweden, and the process comprises four stages: submission of an application, investigation, a decision, and an appeal. The interviews can last several hours, and the burden of proof lies with the asylum seekers, who must provide detailed information about their circumstances and the reasons for seeking asylum (Sohlberg et al., 2024). Procedural safeguards and decisions of asylum claims in Sweden are regulated by the Swedish Aliens Act (2005:716)², particularly in chapters 5 - 6, 16 and 18. If applicants do not meet the refugee criteria, their case may still be considered on humanitarian grounds, such as serious health conditions. Those rejected at first instance by the SMA have the right to appeal the decision to the Migration Court and, in some cases, to the Migration Court of Appeal, hereafter MCA. If the Migration Court considers it necessary, the applicant may be invited to an oral hearing, where they can present their case in person. The judge and board members then jointly decide the outcome of the case (Migrationsverket, 2025; Johansson, 2017).

Asylum seekers' perceptions of procedural justice, decision-making, and its impact on trust and compliance with the system have received limited scholarly attention, despite growing interest in credibility assessment and legal uncertainty in the SMA asylum system. Some of the most prominent research on the role of legal statuses and their impact on asylum seekers' trust and institutions' legitimacy within the Swedish context includes the work of Esaiasson et al., (2022) and Sohlberg et al.'s (2024), which will be discussed in more detail in section 4.7.

² Utlänningslag (2005:716). Alien Act, Chapters. 5 §6, 12 §§1–3. Chapter 12, Sections 1–3 outline the principle of non-refoulement, Riksdagen.se (2025).

3.0. Conceptual Foundation

The following section discusses the rule of law and the importance of procedure. It addresses the relationship between legal rules and procedural practices, which provide the conceptual foundation for the thesis

3.1. The Rule of Law and The Importance of Procedure

In asylum adjudication, where decisions can have life-or-death consequences, it is important that procedures not only follow established rules but also aligned with humanitarian and ethical principles. Dworkin, (1986) argues that law is not merely a set of rules, but a coherent moral practice grounded in principles of fairness and reasoning. This perspective is vital in asylum law, where national legal interpretation can significantly shape the degree to which international protection obligations are fulfilled (Kneebone, 2009). Dworkin distinguishes between formal (instrumental) and substantive (normative) conceptions of the rule of law. The former emphasises consistency and adherence to procedures, but risks reducing asylum law to rigid bureaucracy. On the other hand, the substantive approach integrates justice and human dignity into legal reasoning (Peczenik, 2021), reflecting Dworkin's integrity model. This approach requires legal systems to not only uphold procedural regularity but also outcomes that reflect humanitarian values. While neutrality is a core principle (Tyler, 2006), asylum governance often reflects political pressure and security concerns, which can lead to subjective interpretations that disadvantage refugees (Thunborg et al., 2021).

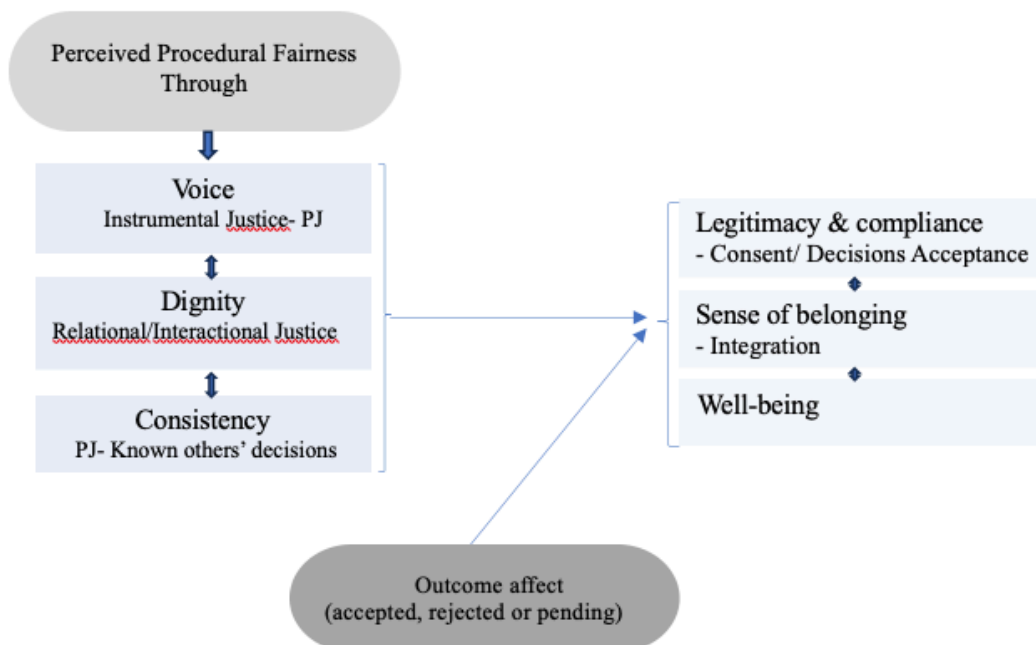
A central aspect in this debate is procedural fairness, whether asylum seekers experience legal proceedings as impartial, transparent and just. Kumlin & Rothstein, (2005), apply this concept in public administration, highlighting that perceived fairness fosters both institutional and interpersonal trust. Sohlberg et al. (2024) find that for asylum seekers, this trust depends on whether applicants believe state institutions are fair and effective. Exclusionary bureaucratic treatment may foster alienation and hamper integration, decreasing trust not only in the legal process but also in broader state institutions (Gill & Good, 2018). Empathetic engagement by the authority, however, can promote a sense of recognition and reinforce trust in the system (Lipsky, 1980). While the rule of law provides the conceptual foundation for the thesis, procedural justice theory offers more concrete and operational concepts that will structure the analyses. These are discussed in the next section.

4.0. Theoretical Framework

This thesis is grounded in Procedural Justice Theory (PJT), and Figure 1 illustrates the thematic approach guiding this research. The model is designed to capture key dimensions of PJT, such as voice, consistency, and dignity, and their potential influence on asylum seekers' perceptions of legitimacy, belonging, and mental well-being. Although the model presents these relationships in a causal structure, it is important to note that this study does not directly test the causal relationship. Rather, it seeks to describe and interpret the interrelations and possible influences among these factors. The arrows here represent the potential pathways of influence, providing a clear structure for analysing how procedural fairness is perceived, through key dimensions, during the asylum process, and final outcomes, and how these experiences and perceptions may shape applicants' sense of legal legitimacy, belonging, and mental well-being.

Figure 1

Thematic framework guiding this thesis



The model above depicts the mechanism through which procedural elements influence the perception of fairness and their impact on legitimacy, compliance, belonging, and well-being.

This chapter introduces PJT and how fairness is perceived during the institutional process. The second part focuses on the left-hand side of the model depicted in Figure 1, discussing the conceptualisation of key procedural fairness and why it matters for different outcomes. The third section in this chapter will discuss the right-hand side of the model by exploring how perceived procedural fairness through these key elements may influence asylum seekers' sense of legal legitimacy, belonging, and mental well-being.

4.1. Procedural Justice Theory

PJT highlights the importance of fair processes in authoritative decision-making and examines how individuals' perceptions of these processes influence their willingness to comply with authoritative decisions (Tyler, 2006). Rooted in psychological research on social justice (Lind, 1988), it assumes that fairness is a core societal value (Folger, 1977). PJT has been widely applied in criminology, sociology, and organisational psychology (Blader & Tyler, 2003; Leung & Lind, 1986), as well as in political science to explore citizens' trust in democratic institutions and their legal compliance (Gibson, 1989; Grimes, 2006).

The theory posits that individuals assess their experiences with authorities based on key procedural criteria such as *voice*, *consistency*, and *dignity*. Findings across these studies show that people strongly care about how authoritative decisions are made, and when these conditions are met, they are more likely to perceive institutions as legitimate and are therefore more inclined to comply with decisions, even when the outcomes are personally unfavourable.

However, PJT maintains that certain procedures are perceived as fairer than others, regardless of the outcome (Jackson et al., 2012; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Justice is often explained through two distinct perspectives: procedural justice, which focuses on the fairness of the process and its impact on individuals' willingness to accept a decision and comply with the rules, and distributive justice, which concerns the fairness of outcomes (Leventhal, 1980; E. Lind & Earley, 1990). Some scholars highlight the importance of distributive justice in shaping the perception of fairness and argue that although procedural fairness matters, outcome favourability often plays a central role in decision acceptance (Sohlberg et al., 2022). Although the relative importance of each remains contested, the procedural justice perspective is frequently seen as more influential in fostering legitimacy regardless of outcomes, particularly when individuals feel respected, receive clear explanations, and perceive decision-makers as neutral and ethical (Bies and Moag, 1986; Jackson et al., 2012).

Lind and Tyler (1988) extend the discussion of procedural justice effects by introducing group-value theory as a method for understanding why procedural fairness matters, arguing that people care about procedure because it signals their social standing in a group. From a social-psychological perspective, the model highlights two sources of fairness evaluations: the broader shared social values and the individual's need for recognition and inclusion within the group. This is relevant to my study because asylum seekers not only judge the procedure by formal adherence to the rules, but also whether they were listened to, treated with dignity, and whether the case officer took their claims seriously, conveying inclusion that might shape perceived procedural justice and eventually legitimacy.

In sum, PJT provides an important framework in understanding how individuals perceive justice, legitimacy, and compliance with authorities. The following section discusses the significance of perceived procedural fairness in the asylum context.

4.2. Perceived Procedural Fairness

Understanding how individuals perceive the process is important, as just procedure can significantly influence public trust, legitimacy and fairness of political institutions (Grimes, 2006; Rothstein & Stolle, 2015). As this research focuses on asylum seekers and their lived experiences of the procedures, it is important to explore whether they perceive the asylum process and the final decision as fair. Ansems, (2021) defines perceived procedural fairness as “the perception of being treated fairly and justly in terms of procedural characteristics, interpersonal treatment, or both” (p. 32). This quote indicates that both the structure of the procedure and the nature of interpersonal treatment play an important role in how fairness is understood.

It is essential to recognise, however, that while perceptions of fairness play a central role in this theory of procedural justice, they are not necessarily objective or true. Rather, these perceptions are shaped by individuals' prior experiences, expectations, and cultural frames of reference (Esaiasson et al., 2022). Unlike ordinary citizens who typically engage with the state from a position of legal membership, asylum seekers often assess their treatment by comparing conditions in their host country to those of their country of origin, a phenomenon known as “dual frame of reference” (Sohlberg et al., 2022). Interpersonal treatment by caseworkers might influence how asylum seekers interpret fairness, with respectful encounters playing a central role in improving perceived fairness (Ansems et al., 2021; Sohlberg et al., 2022). However, what constitutes fair treatment is not

universally agreed upon. What one person considers fair, another may not (Röder and Mühlau 2012). Thus, perceived procedural fairness is not only psychological but also sociological, shaped by social norms and individual histories. In the case of asylum seekers, this perception may be further complicated by their precarious legal status, unfamiliarity with host-country institutions, and the high stakes involved in the outcome. In distinction to citizens, asylum seekers can lack prior experience or a clear understanding of how legal procedures work, making their interpretation of fairness both context-specific and deeply personal, highlighting the need to explore these perceptions through a procedural lens. Against the backdrop of this information, this paper will now turn to the next section, where the core concept of PJT employed in this study will be presented.

4.3. Key Dimensions of Procedural Fairness

Although the definition and terminology of procedural justice may vary across disciplines and scholars, they reflect overlapping core ideas. Among the key dimensions of PJT as outlined by Tyler (1990), voice, consistency and dignity are considered essential in shaping individuals' perception of fair procedures (Esaiasson et al., 2022; Cremer & Tyler, 2007).

4.3.1. Voice

Voice refers to the opportunity individuals are given to express their views before decisions are made (Esaiasson et al., 2019). A substantial body of research has established that allowing individuals to articulate their views and concerns significantly enhances their perception of procedural fairness and satisfaction with the outcomes (Folger, 1977; Lind et al., 1990; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Van den Bos et al., 2003). Within the broader framework of PJT, this element has emerged as one of the most studied dimensions in both qualitative (Ansems et al., 2020) and quantitative studies (Esaiasson et al., 2022). According to Tyler (1990), fairness is evaluated not only by outcomes, but by whether individuals feel their views and perspectives were genuinely considered.

Building on this, Grimes (2006) introduces the concept of 'effective influence' to capture individuals' perceived ability to influence decision-making. Her study of a local railway expansion in Sweden showed that when people felt they had equal opportunities to influence outcomes, their trust in the authority increased, and they were more willing to accept the final decision. However,

she also found that this effect was weaker compared to the impact of authorities showing respect and consideration for the local community. This suggests that while voice is an important dimension of procedural justice, perceptions of dignity and respect may carry even greater weight in shaping trust and acceptance.

Extending this perspective to the legal context. Ansems and Mak (2020) examine perceptions of procedural fairness among defendants in Dutch criminal proceedings, highlighting that respondents value voice for several reasons. Some believed sharing their personal stories could positively affect judicial decisions, while others emphasised the opportunity to explain why certain things happened and provide nuances behind their actions. Judges, they argued, should not rely only on written case files but must also hear the defendants' side of the story to form a complete understanding and thereby make a correct decision (Ansems and Mak, 2020). Regardless of some contextual nuances, there is a broad consensus that voice plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of procedural fairness, signifying individuals' opportunity to express opinions and concerns before decisions are made.

4.3.2. Dignity

Closely linked to voice, dignity represents another core dimension of procedural fairness, which refers to the respectful and humane treatment of individuals throughout legal or bureaucratic processes. Esaiasson et al., (2019) define dignity as “when authorities recognise individuals' status as respected members of society during interactions.” p. 295. This relational dimension of procedural justice underscores the importance of the manner in which individuals are treated with respect and dignity. According to Tyler & Lind, (1992) authorities must avoid humiliating behaviour and show that they value the dignity of individuals they make decisions about.

As a conceptual inverse of relational justice, Kumlin & Rothstein, (2005) introduce the concept of a “culture of mistrust” in their study of Swedish welfare policies, particularly within need-testing programmes, where individuals are required to disclose extensive personal information under scrutiny without feeling genuinely heard. Such circumstances can lead to a loss of dignity and trust in public institutions. A parallel dynamic is evident in Swedish asylum procedures, where officials are tasked with navigating and interpreting a complex array of regulations and applying them to individual cases, often without clear guidance. This has led to criticism of the SMA for fostering a “culture of disbelief, in which caseworkers exercise discretion in their decision-making. This

practice may result in uncertainty and bias, which can undermine both their dignity and the legitimacy of the asylum process (Khosravi, 2010).

The 1951 Refugee Convention affirms the need for fair and respectful treatment, nevertheless, its implementation by the SMA and the MC has faced significant scrutiny in recent years. Elsrud, (2020), in her ethnographic study, shows how the treatment of asylum seekers by the SMA undermined their dignity, placing them in a condition of ‘social death’ characterised by exclusion, rejection and loss of all hope for the future in Sweden, resulting in ‘re-scaping’ as a way to restore dignity and a sense of human worth.

4.3.3. Consistency

The third key dimension of procedural justice is consistency, defined by Esaiasson et al. (2019, p. 295) as “the absence of systematic bias in the conduct of decision-making authorities.” This principle refers to the uniform and impartial application of rules and procedures across individuals and cases over time (Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986). Drawing on Leventhal’s (1980) criteria for fair procedure, Tyler (1990) highlights that consistent treatment enhances perceptions of neutrality and reduces suspicion of arbitrariness or bias. When people perceive that similar cases are treated similarly, they are more likely to accept outcomes and view authorities as legitimate.

This concern is especially salient in asylum contexts. (Thomas, 2008), in his study of Consistency in Asylum Adjudication in the UK, emphasises how inconsistency in the decision-making has given rise to the notion of “asylum lottery” in both media and academic discourse. In line with Tyler’s (1990), Tomas emphasises that different outcomes in similar cases undermine the core idea of justice, especially when decisions largely rest on credibility evaluations. These disparities are often attributed to the complexity of cases, unclear guidelines, inconsistent interpretations of narratives or similar evidentiary documents, and, in some instances, the political affiliation of decision-makers or other external pressure.

While most scholars agree that consistency implies equal application of rules across comparable cases, asylum seekers may also assess it through the lens of international legal norms, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. Compliance with these obligations is often regarded as a benchmark for fairness. (Gibney, 2013) argues that when legal decisions align with these international legal principles, applicants are more likely to feel their rights are protected, whereas deviation from such

principles may be perceived as a violation of justice. Ultimately, it is the applicants' own perceptions of fairness and whether rules are applied consistently that shape their trust in the system and affect their psychological well-being.

4.4. Outcome Favorability– An alternative factor that may influence fairness and legitimacy

A key insight from procedural fairness studies is that people are more likely to accept decision outcomes if they perceive fair procedures are followed (Tyler, 2011, 2014). In the context of asylum, the relationship between different outcomes, such as accepted, rejected or deferral, and their potential influences on the applicants’ perception of fairness and acceptance of outcomes has received considerable attention. Several studies show that positive decisions like acceptance are associated with higher trust in migration authorities, better mental health, and a stronger sense of belonging, while rejection or extended waiting periods often have the opposite effect (Esaiasson et al., 2022; Jakobsen et al., 2017; Bakker et al., 2016; Sohlberg et al., 2024). However, Esaiasson et al. (2024) emphasise that it is true that the way decisions are made matters, but the outcome’s favorability is key to whether asylum seekers accept decisions or not. It is argued that people are more inclined to accept decision outcomes that align with their personal preferences, regardless of how just the procedures in themselves were perceived to be. This statement challenges the core idea of PJT, that fair procedure alone is enough for a democratic government to gain an individual's acceptance of difficult policy decisions.

Table 2. Operationalisations of Perceived Procedural Fairness

CONCEPT	DEFINITION	THEORIZED MECHANISM OF PERCIEVED FAIRNESS
Voice (Instrumental Justice)	Individuals’ ability to express their views, provide evidence and being able to participate in decision-making process and influence the outcomes	Sense of influence. The opportunity to participate, express their concerns and the belief that one’s view and input is genuinely considered.
Dignity (Relational/ Interactional Justice)	The experience of being treated with respect, empathy & humanity in legal proceedings by authorities.	The feeling of being recognized, respected, valued and included. Reduced humiliation & emotional stability.
Consistency (Known others’ Decisions)	The uniformity of decision-making across similar cases, ensuring equitable treatment.	Perceived consistency in the sense of equal treatment and uniformity of outcome across similar cases.
Outcome Effect (Accepted, Rejected & pending status)	The impact of final asylum decision or prolonged uncertainty on perception of procedural fairness. 13	What was the actual outcome.

This chapter has discussed several key dimensions of procedural justice theory and decision outcome, which individuals use to evaluate the process in its entirety. Building on this foundation, the next chapter will turn to the main relationship this study aims to explore, focusing on how perceptions of fairness during the asylum process and different decision outcomes may affect legitimacy, compliance, sense of belonging and well-being.

4.5. Legitimacy and Compliance

Institutional legitimacy refers to the extent to which those subject to a system regard its laws, decisions, and authorities as appropriate and justifiable (Jackson et al., 2012; Leerkes & Kox, 2017). Perceptions of procedural fairness are central to institutional trust (Grimes, 2006). At the same time, Tyler (2006) notes that legitimacy extends beyond procedure; people may accept authority for normative, cultural, or socialised reasons, even when their personal experience of procedure is negative. Because it has both a normative and legal nature, its relationship to compliance may vary across contexts. In settings where the state-citizen relationship differs, the link between procedural justice, institutional legitimacy and legal compliance may not be as strong (Jackson et al., 2012). This cross-cultural variability is relevant in asylum settings. Sohlberg et al. (2024) show that newly arrived asylum seekers often distinguish between institutions in their country of origin, which are often viewed as corrupt or unreliable, and institutions in Sweden, which may initially benefit from comparatively higher trust. Whether that trust endures may depend on lived experience within the asylum procedure.

Compliance is the behavioural expression of these legitimacy judgements, and the reasons behind people's obedience to the law are complex. In his book, *Why People Obey the Law*, Tyler (2006) examines the underlying factors behind legal compliance, highlighting that individuals' willingness to follow rules is shaped by perceptions of legitimacy, procedural and distributive justice, moral obligation, social norms, and trust in institutions. Obedience occurs when people regard legal authorities as legitimate, meaning their decisions and rules are viewed as appropriate and justifiable. Legitimacy, in this sense, fosters voluntary compliance rather than compliance based on fear of punishment or the pursuit of rewards (Tyler, 2006). Institutional legitimacy arises not only from the authority of state entities, such as governments, police and courts, but also from normative principles, where compliance is driven by internalised values and norms rather than mere institutional authority (Jackson et al., 2012).

In conclusion, the key point here is that compliance is not only about following the law, or the risk of detection and punishment is high, but also a sense that following the law is the correct thing to do, which consequently influences the legitimacy and compliance with legal rules. The following section will outline the concept of belonging and well-being, and their reciprocal influence on one another.

4.6. Belonging and Well-being

A sense of belonging and well-being are closely linked and considered essential for asylum seekers' integration and psychological resilience (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Anant, (1969) describes belonging or 'belongingness' as a personal involvement in a social system to the extent that the individual feels to be an integral part of that system. Hagerty et al. (1992) describe it through two dimensions: the experience of being valued and accepted, and the belief that one's unique characteristics meaningfully contribute to the group. Study shows that the intersection of social categories such as ethnicity, gender and age influence how asylum seekers negotiate their sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Sporton et al., 2009), and lack of it may result in social marginalisation and reduced participation, creating challenges for both asylum seekers and society.

The concept of belonging in migration studies is often seen as a process of struggle, with asylum seekers navigating emotional and mental health challenges as they (re)orient in the host country (Fuchs et al., 2021). According to Vertovec, (2023), migration often involves rapid adjustment at the social and cultural levels. In addition to the language, cultural and social differences, asylum seekers also encounter challenges related to emotional transnationalism (which refers to the sense of being stuck between two worlds). Ager and Strang (2008) view belonging as a key milestone in integration within society, rooted in social connections, mutual respect, and shared values. These needs become particularly strong when people sense themselves socially or emotionally excluded as an outsider (Kale et al., 2019). In response, they seek connections that foster feelings of security, safety and value, which in turn can restore their sense of belonging and well-being.

Well-being is traditionally associated with health, quality of life, presence or absence of illness (Placa et al., 2013). Sociological interest in subjective well-being has grown (Whittaker et al., 2005), as it reflects individuals' evaluations of their lives, encompassing both affective and cognitive dimensions (Adler & Seligman, 2016). It typically consists of three components: (i) sustained positive affect, (ii) low levels of negative emotion, and (iii) overall life satisfaction.

Research has shown that life satisfaction is closely related to trust, particularly in public institutions, which positively influences social trust and, in turn, contributes to personal well-being (Esaiasson et al., 2020). For asylum seekers, well-being is also shaped by psychological responses to past trauma, cultural loss, adaptation difficulties, and the availability of both emotional and practical support systems (Carswell et al., 2011). Against this background, it is important to understand asylum seekers' subjective perspectives on legitimacy, belonging and well-being in detail, and to analyse how their perceptions of fairness may relate to these factors. The next chapter will summarise the procedural fairness research on migrants in Sweden.

Table 3. Operationalisations of Outcomes

CONCEPTS	OPERATIONALISATION
Legitimacy (Acceptance of Legal Authority)	Individuals' perception of fair procedure and their willingness to follow decisions based on the belief that it is bot necessary and right to do so. It is assessed through the degree to which applicants experience legal institutions as just, transparent and legitimate.
Sense of Belonging (Social inclusion & Integration)	Feeling of inclusion & connection to society. Strong sense of belonging provides purpose & identity. It is evaluated through the degree of social integration, recognition and the ability to form meaningful connections. Key element include participation in social and civic activities, and access to resources that foster long-term integration.
Well-Being (Emotional & Psychological Impact)	The mental, psychological & emotional effects of the process and asylum outcomes. Well-being is assessed through the psychological and emotional consequences of the asylum process, shaped by procedural fairness and feeling of inclusion. A strong sense of belonging can reinforce well-being by fostering positive emotional stability and resilience, while legal uncertainties and exclusion exacerbate distress.

4.7. Summary of Procedural Fairness and Trust Research

As outlined in the literature review chapter, migration studies have extensively examined issues such as migration policy, credibility assessment and bureaucratic encounters. Despite great contributions, they largely overlook the asylum seekers' lived experiences and their perception of procedural fairness. This thesis builds on recent Swedish research focusing on asylum seekers' perspectives on waiting, and institutional trust, factors that strongly influence perception of fairness (Esaiasson et al., 2022; Sohlberg et al., 2024; Schütze, 2025), but shifts the emphasis toward perceived procedural fairness as a central analytic concept. More specifically, it explores how asylum seekers frame procedural fairness in practice, how legal status and interactions with

institutions influence their well-being, and how these experiences shape their sense of inclusion. Although some of these themes have been touched on quantitatively, no study to date has framed procedural fairness qualitatively or placed it at the centre of analysis in the Swedish context. However, across the aforementioned studies, three overarching interrelated themes with relevance to procedural justice have emerged, which consist of institutional trust, the waiting time, and the impact of the decision outcome. Each connects directly to the core procedural justice dimensions and the ways asylum seekers evaluate the legitimacy and fairness of institutions.

4.7.1. Institutional Trust and Procedural Legitimacy

Empirical studies underscore the centrality of institutional trust in shaping asylum seekers' experiences. Sohlberg et al. (2024), employing a mixed-methods design combining in-person recruitment with online panel surveys, demonstrate that trust in both institutions and individuals declines over time during the asylum process in Sweden. This decrease in trust is explained through three interrelated factors.

First, prolonged waiting periods, often exceeding a year, leave applicants in a state of legal and existential limbo, fostering feelings of hopelessness and growing frustration with the SMA. Second, negative day-to-day encounters marked by perceived inefficiency or lack of empathy further weaken trust, as supported by statistically significant evidence of declining trust over time. A third factor highlighted in Sohlberg et al.'s (2024) study is the role of isolation, integration and material hardship. Although the study notes that some individuals feel safer compared to the conditions in their home countries, these positive elements are not enough to outweigh the overall negative impact of procedural uncertainty, isolation and dissatisfaction. In sum, the findings in Sohlberg et al.'s (2024) study highlight that deferral and uncertainty in the asylum process in Sweden play a critical role in shaping individuals' trust in both institutions and society.

Schütze (2025), using a large-scale survey examining variations in trust in the SMA across different migration groups underscores the importance of institutional performance in shaping trust. It shows that, compared to other categories such as labour migrants or student visa applicants, asylum seekers often report lower levels of trust in the SMA. This difference is attributed to structural challenges and a more adversarial asylum procedure, characterised by higher uncertainty and lower acceptance rates, conditions that Sohlberg et al. (2024) argue undermine both neutrality and voice in applicants' perceptions. Schütze (2025) similarly recognises the importance of decision outcomes in shaping

institutional trust, but she does not equate them with lower acceptance rates and does not explore this dimension in depth, instead leaving it for future research.

Esaiasson et al. (2022) address this gap by quantitatively exploring how decision outcomes granting or rejecting a residence permit shape asylum seekers' perception of fairness. Their findings highlight several factors, with the decision outcome emerging as the most influential factor in shaping institutional trust and perceived fairness. Individuals granted a residence permit tend to show higher levels of life satisfaction and institutional trust, reflecting the effect of positive outcomes of the perception of procedural legitimacy. On the other hand, rejected applicants often describe feelings of exclusion and disappointment towards institutions and society. Additionally, Esaiasson et al. (2022) show that applicants awaiting decisions or deportation report trust levels similar to those formally rejected, suggesting that prolonged uncertainty alone can have an effect comparable to formal denial. A further insight from their study is that temporary residence permits, while legally favourable, may still create procedural uncertainty associated with temporary status, which undermines the perception of future stability and trust in both the institutions and the host country.

4.7.2. Limitations of Quantitative Research and Contribution of This Study

As noted, much of the existing literature relies on post-2015 panel surveys, offering important statistical insights but are limited in its capacity to explore how fairness is subjectively experienced, understood, and articulated by asylum seekers. While these studies identify correlations between procedural elements and institutional trust, they often overlook factors such as emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions that shape perceptions of fairness and legitimacy, such as how individuals interpret being heard or conceptualise dignity, fairness, and consistency in a high-stressful situation. Crucially, they cannot fully explain the interactional dynamics, such as hope, trauma, communication barriers, and contextual complexity, that shape these statistical patterns, limitations that are acknowledged by Sohlberg et al. (2024) and Esaiasson et al. (2022).

This thesis responds by utilising semi-structured interviews, which aid in understanding the mechanisms at work, particularly when quantitative indicators fall short in understanding why the theorised determinants of the observed variable don't seem to have the expected effects. This approach allows researchers to capture perceptions that go beyond the thin conceptual definition, to understand what people actually mean when they feel an authority has listened to them or what

they believe constitutes dignified and respectful treatment. By grasping these layered perceptions and shifting focus from outcome-oriented survey research to in-depth interviews, this research seeks to give a voice to asylum seekers' perspectives and capture the contextualised factors that shape their evaluation of the SMA. The study explores how these perceptions influence three interlinked domains: system legitimacy, social belonging, and well-being, each of which is also conditioned by the perceived favourability or fairness of outcomes. In doing so, this study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to ongoing debates on designing a more responsive, fair, and humane asylum system (Sohlberg et al., 2024; Esaiasson et al., 2022).

4.7.3. Purpose and Research Questions

This research builds upon the insight outlined in the literature review and the theoretical framework, highlighting several important questions. It is structured around the following questions, with the primary research question guiding this study being: How do asylum seekers in Sweden perceive procedural fairness within the Swedish asylum system? To answer the main question, the following sub-questions are addressed.

- i) How do asylum seekers describe their experiences of voice, dignity in procedure, and how do they perceive consistency and fairness in the decision outcome?
- ii) What attitudes do asylum seekers have regarding legitimacy and compliance with laws, feelings of belonging, and their own well-being?
- iii) How do applicants account for the effect of experiences of procedural justice on their trust in the asylum system and acceptance of legal decisions, and in what ways do these perceptions influence their sense of belonging and psychological well-being?
- iv) How do different outcomes (accepted, rejected or waiting) influence legitimacy, belonging and well-being?

5.0. Methodology

This section will transparently and systematically outline the data collection method and analysis processes. Initially, I will describe the chosen method for data collection, followed by a detailed explanation of how the empirical research was conducted. This section will also include a description of how the empirical research is carried out and the profile of the interviewees. Additionally, the section will provide a comprehensive description of the data analysis method for this study, the role of the researcher, and a discussion of the ethical considerations associated with this study.

5.1. Qualitative Research and Method

Research can generally be categorised into four main methodological approaches: qualitative, quantitative, experimental and mixed methods (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018). The authors emphasise that the two common approaches, namely qualitative and quantitative methods, distinguish the research based on how the data characteristics shape the design, analysis and interpretation of the study. According to Marshall & Rossman, (2014), qualitative methods can be powerful when exploring how respondents perceive and interpret their experiences, especially within complex social or behavioural contexts, a view also supported by (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). Although it helps to provide a detailed account of individuals' perceptions and attitudes, the researcher's primary role then lies in how he or she interprets and analyses what is observed Marshall & Rossman, (2014).

While quantitative studies can provide valuable insight into people's attitudes and establish patterns, they can not accurately capture the complex subjective realities, such as unique personal histories or emotions of asylum seekers (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). This limitation makes it difficult to understand what respondents mean when referring to concepts such as low voice or high trust, and to identify the mechanism through which these experiences lead to higher trust and compliance (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). The closed response options in surveys can also constrain asylum seekers' recall, or what they feel is the most important, which can lead to incomplete or misleading data. Moreover, factors such as frequent mobility, cultural diversity, linguistic difficulties, and possible mistrust toward authorities can also make it difficult to reach asylum seekers through survey research (Esaiasson et al., 2022). However, qualitative research can also suffer from these

challenges, but interviews and open dialogue offer more flexibility and clarification on the spot, allowing richer and more accurate insights Marshall & Rossman, (2014).

Since fairness is not only about outcomes, but also respectful and consistent treatment, key elements like tone of voice, emotion or the ability to speak are lost in the fixed format of a yes/no or 1 to 5 scale. A survey method may record low or high trust, satisfied or not satisfied, but it cannot explain whether distrust originates from the disrespectful encounter, a long waiting time, threat of past experiences or personal interpretations. On the other hand, an open interview conversation can uncover these challenges (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Given that complex life experiences and emotions shape the views of asylum seekers, a qualitative semi-structured interview approach is a better choice than a quantitative approach with statistical inference or survey formats. This method allows for reflexivity, enabling researchers to rephrase or follow up on topics as they arise. Such flexibility is key to capturing themes that the interviewer might never have anticipated (De Leo et al., 2022). Additionally, a narrative approach treats asylum seekers as active experts in their own experiences. As a result, they often feel empowered, as they have the opportunity to voice concerns in their own words and underscore their perspectives on what truly matters to them, rather than being limited by the researcher's agenda, as is the case in the quantitative approach. For these reasons, this study adopts a qualitative approach to uncover the subjective context-specific meaning behind asylum seekers' experiences of procedural fairness and trust over survey questionnaires (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

5.1.1. Deductive Thematic Approach

Patel, (2011) suggest that researchers can collect data through three different approaches: inductive, deductive and abductive reasoning. The inductive analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns that emerge from the data, whereas the deductive approach relies on pre-established theories and earlier research. Worth noting that the scarce focus on deductive approaches in qualitative methods has resulted in limited guidance and illustrative examples of its application, which made it difficult for me to design and conduct my research effectively.

However, given the nature of this study and its theoretical construct, a deductive version of thematic, or theoretically-driven coding approach, is the most suitable research design. According to Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79) "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and

reporting patterns (themes) within data.” Thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative interview studies because of its flexibility, and some scholars have even combined deductive and inductive methods to create a more hybrid approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Moreover, a deductive approach is particularly beneficial in migration studies as it ensures conceptual clarity, methodological rigour and policy relevance. Through application and examination of an already-established theoretical proposition, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on fairness in asylum adjudication. Merton, (1967) highlights that in deductive research, it is important to operationalise the theoretical framework to demonstrate how it can be empirically tested. Consequently, I have operationalised the theory model accordingly. Additionally, the structured nature of this study enables easy comparison with other studies on legal decision-making, fairness, and migration integration, providing a solid foundation for evaluating the experiences of asylum seekers.

Although this study follows a deductive approach, it will adopt an exploratory stance, a mixed method of deductive and inductive approaches. This flexibility will allow me to explore emerging themes and insights throughout the process. The framework guides the analysis in terms of what to include, but leaves room for respondents to clarify what each concept means from a subjective point of view, and how they think the theorised explanations may have affected their feelings of legitimacy, belonging and well-being.

5.1.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are one of the most commonly used instruments for gathering data in qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), as they offer researchers a unique opportunity to examine topics through the interviewees’ experience, providing depth into how different phenomena are perceived or experienced (Bryman, 2016). It is also used in research questions focused on capturing the respondents’ subjective perspectives on a phenomenon rather than producing a generalisable understanding of a larger population (McGrath et al., 2019). There are four different interview models, each adaptable to a particular context. These models consist of semi-structured, focused or unstructured, and group interviews.

Given the exploratory element of this research, semi-structured interviews are the most well-suited method of data collection for this study as it allow for the exploration of the asylum seekers’

experiences and perception of fairness in the asylum process and how they influence their sense of institutional legitimacy, belonging and well-being. This approach will ensure that key procedural justice dimensions such as voice, consistency, dignity and perceived legality are thoroughly explored while also enabling the identification of emerging themes and patterns that can contribute to the development of the theoretical model (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Another reason this approach is chosen is that it includes aspects of both structured and unstructured models, which ensures interviewees provide relevant answers to the main question while still having the flexibility and freedom to give open-ended responses (Bryman, 2016).

While valuable for qualitative research, semi-structured interviews have certain limitations, such as being time and resource-intensive and typically involving small sample sizes, which can restrict the feasibility of larger-scale data collection and limit broader applicability. Nevertheless, when managed effectively and executed carefully, they offer in-depth and meaningful data that can enrich understanding of the research topic. Another key limitation is the researcher's influence on the data collected through question framing or interpretation, which may lead to bias and influence the study's credibility (Bryman, 2016). To address these challenges and minimise my role as a researcher, I aimed to create an open and safe space where I can actively listen to the respondents while remaining objective. To avoid steering interviewees with leading questions, Rapley's concept of "neutralisation techniques" were employed, meaning strategies that allow respondents to frame their answers without researcher influence (Rapley, 2001). During the interview process, I also conducted a group interview of three individuals utilising the focus group technique. While the group started with the interview guide, I initiated the discussion, which led to an engaging debate among the participants and unveiled new aspects of the issue into light. One can conclude that, although semi-structured interviews have limitations, they remain an effective method for gathering open-ended data.

5.1.3. Data Collection

To ensure both validity and relevance of the data, the respondents were chosen carefully based on relevant criteria, such as being post-2015 asylum seekers with relevant experiences and knowledge. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Gothenburg, except for two, which were held virtually through phone in other cities during March and April 2025, and each interview lasted between 90 and 130 minutes. As Marshall & Rossman (2014) note, digital interviewing can

sometimes become more formal and require additional preparation to ensure engaging flow, but if managed properly, it can be more time-efficient.

Before proceeding with data collection, an interview guide was prepared as a core part of this semi-structured interview. The questions are designed to capture asylum seekers' evaluations of procedural fairness within their legal proceedings, see Appendix (II). To effectively capture asylum seekers' narratives and interpretations concerning procedural fairness, legitimacy, belonging and well-being, the interview guide was divided into six thematic sections. This structure ensures a coherent flow of the questions, allowing for a thorough exploration of each concept while also remaining flexible to the unique experiences of the respondents. The first section is an introductory question that served as a warm-up phase for the interviewees to provide me with background and demographic details such as age, gender, country of origin, education and employment background both in their home country and in Sweden. The second section related to the respondent's experiences with the asylum process, with a focus on capturing their interactions with migration authorities, legal representatives and the decision-making process. This part will provide narratives of perceived procedural fairness through voice, dignity and perceived legality based on their lived experiences with legal institutions.

The third section relates to the perception of procedural fairness in the asylum process, particularly in regard to voice, consistency, dignity and perceived legality. This section directly tests the theoretical framework and enables respondents to explain the fairness in the process. The fourth section concerns the outcomes and their impact. This section allows me to clearly see how asylum decisions, accepted, rejected or waiting, impact respondents' perception of fairness, legitimacy and trust in the migration authorities. Since the outcome favourability can shape the perception of fairness, this section allows for a comparative examination of how different legal statuses influence applicants' attitudes.

The fifth section includes the sense of belonging and social integration, and focuses on how the respondent feels included or excluded in society and their relationship with Swedish society. Given that, a sense of belonging is both a result and a reinforcer of procedural fairness perceptions, making it a core section for understanding social integration. The sixth and final section relates to asylum seekers' well-being and the mental health impact. Since psychological factors like stress, trauma, hope and resilience are key indicators of well-being related to fairness, this part is essential for exploring how procedural fairness and asylum outcomes may influence emotional well-being and

future aspiration. Although the interview guide is organised into clear sections, the questions remained flexible, allowing the respondents' answers to be flexible (Bryman, 2016).

As shown in Table 4 below, this study was produced after interviewing a total of ten refugees and asylum seekers aged between 20 and 39. Of the seven respondents with Afghan nationality, three were born and raised in Iran, two were from Iran, and one was from Ukraine. To ensure interviewees feel safe sharing their personal experiences and expressing themselves freely. Most of the interviews took place in closed library rooms, respondents' flats, a private room in a church or over the phone. The interviews were always initiated with a description of the study, including its aims, purposes and scope, while stressing the anonymity and voluntary nature of the interview. The interviewees approved the audio recording and were informed that the tape would be deleted after transcription.

To ensure quality and accuracy, the transcription proceeded shortly after the interview (Bryman, 2016), and as agreed upon, the audio recording was removed. The transcription process also made me aware of the emerging themes and enhanced my knowledge for the upcoming interviews (Bryman, 2016). The language capability of the respondents has also been taken into consideration. To minimise linguistic errors, all interviews were conducted in the native languages of both respondents and interviewers, Dari and Farsi, except for one respondent with a Ukrainian background, who was interviewed in a combination of Swedish and English. The combination of face-to-face and transcription processes has paid attention to details such as expressions, tone of voice, and emotions, as these factors are important in conveying the meaning behind interviewees' descriptions of their experiences of the process (Bryman, 2016).

5.1.4. Interviewees' Profile

As shown below, the participants consisted of a heterogeneous group of individuals with a range of backgrounds, ages and other personal characteristics.

Table 4.

Fictive names	Nationality	Gender & age	Date & type of arrival at the time of entry in Sweden	Legal status at the time of interview
1. Shahin	Afghan	Male 35 years	2016, Adult with family	Rejected twice at all instances, and residing without legal status.
2. Ashraf	Afghan	Male 30 years	2018, Adult alone	Rejected once at all instances and re-applied due to new circumstances, waiting
3. Murtaza	Afghan	Male 26 years	2015, unaccompanied minor	Initially rejected at all levels, later granted permanent residency through the "Gymnasielagen"
4. Moshtaq	Afghan	Male 25 years	2015, unaccompanied minor	First rejected at all instances, later granted permanent residency through the "Gymnasielagen"
5. Maysam	Afghan	Male 20 years	2022, unaccompanied minor	Rejected once at all levels. Currently in the process of leaving Sweden for France
6. Shams	Afghan	Male 32 years	2017, unaccompanied minor	Rejected at all levels, left Sweden for France six month ago, where he applied for and was granted asylum
7. Kimya	Afghan	Female 34 years	2015, Adult with family	Rejected once at all instances, and a second time by SMA, but was later granted a temporary residence permit by the court.
8. Khurshid	Iran	Female 37 years	2022, Adult with family	Rejected once at all instances. Currently residing without legal status with her children and waiting for the statute of limitations on her case to expire in order to re-apply
9. Farah	Iran	Female 39 years	2022, Adult with family	Rejected at all levels once, but re-applied due to new circumstances, and currently waiting a decision
10. Dmytro	Ukraine	Male 37 years	2023, Adult with family	Received a temporary residence permit under the Mass Refugee Directive "massflyktsdirektivet"

The sample comprises unaccompanied minors (upon arrival), adult men and women with different national backgrounds, experiences, and reasons for seeking asylum in Sweden, allowing the study to capture a broader range of perspectives and identify both shared and contrasting patterns across participants (Patton, 2015). To ensure interviewees had relevant experiences related to the research

questions, a purposive sampling strategy integrated with snowball sampling was employed, where the initial participants recommended other potential interviewees with relevant experiences (Bryman, 2016). One potential risk of this approach is that the participants may share similar characteristics, which can reduce the diversity of perspectives and result in a narrow or one-sided dataset.

However, the combination of these strategies was logical, as it allowed me to leverage the participants' networks while also achieving the intended number of participants for this study. Involving multiple gatekeepers reaching respondents with diverse national backgrounds, legal statuses, and asylum experiences helped reduce the risk of homogeneity in the sample. Please find the elaborate version of the recruitment strategy and participants' current legal statuses in Table 4 and Appendix (I).

Although the length of participants' stay in Sweden may not be directly relevant to the research questions, the selection of respondents from the past decade reflects the ongoing impact of Swedish restrictive migration policies on the asylum process. At the time of the interview, the respondent had lived in Sweden for a period ranging from three to eight years. Participants were selected regardless of their current migration status, whether awaiting, accepted or rejected, as these elements, including varied backgrounds, were important in exploring diverse perspectives on the fairness of different asylum statuses.

Finding and interviewing asylum seekers comes with numerous challenges, including moral, ethical, and practical considerations. Gaining access to the respondents proved to be more challenging than expected, as two potential participants cancelled their interviews because of health reasons, and several others were postponed for different reasons, making the process time-intensive and increasing the possibility of selection bias. The sensitive nature of asylum-seeking obviously raises concerns, and there are various reasons why asylum-seekers might hesitate to speak with a researcher. Some may face the threat of deportation or live in Sweden as undocumented individuals, believing that talking with a researcher could be risky. This could potentially lead to cautious or filtered responses, constraining the depth of their narratives. For instance, an asylum seeker awaiting a decision may avoid criticising the authorities out of fear that it could negatively affect their case, even if the study is entirely anonymous.

5.1.5. Confidentiality

Confidentiality was upheld through handling the data with care and discretion. Participants were informed about their anonymity and privacy (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Identifying details or data, such as names, addresses, or other personal information, have not been disclosed.

5.1.6. Researcher's Role

It is essential to consider the researcher's identity at all stages of qualitative research, as knowledge and power are interconnected, and the researcher's sociopolitical position can influence the researcher, potentially empowering or undermining certain groups (2010; Rose, 1997). The power dynamic between the researcher and the respondents can also influence qualitative studies (Bryman, 2016). While the interviewees' narratives should be central to qualitative research, the researcher ultimately decides what is considered "important" and what to include or exclude during the research process, which can influence the final analysis (Bryman, 2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Given the inherent nature of qualitative research and its reliance on subjectivity, there is a risk of harm, as interpretations of participants' stories may be influenced by biases or misunderstandings, potentially leading to misrepresentation or unintended negative consequences (Patton, 2015). As I have previous experience volunteering in a law office with a group of legal experts in migration matters, assisting refugees with legal matters and my previous role as a case officer at the migration agency, I made sure to remain neutral, critical and open-minded toward the data, ensuring that my analysis and interpretation are as objective and empirical as possible.

It is also noteworthy that my identity as an Afghan-born Swede and my previous role have positioned me in a dual "insider-outsider" role. According to Hellowell, (2006), an insider is someone who has prior intimate knowledge of the people being researched, while an outsider has no such familiarity. In this study, my shared ethnicity, language, and nationality with some participants and personal experience as a former asylum seeker positioned me in an "insider" role, easing the interviewees' trust and fostering open, honest sharing of experiences (Hellowell, 2006; Hockey, 1993). This shared background also eliminates potential cultural shock and facilitates more intimate and detailed responses. Interviewing in Dari and Farsi allowed for deeper communication and more meaningful discussion. While the insider identity brought advantages, it might also have influenced the study, as my overfamiliarity with certain meanings and narratives could have led to overlooking them and not probing deeply enough (Hockey, 1993).

However, regardless of shared nationality and language with the majority of the respondents, my educational background positioned me as an outsider during the research process. Some participants elaborated on their experiences, assuming that I lacked knowledge of the context, while in other instances, this outsider identity heightened the power dynamics, with some respondents viewing me as a successful example of an Afghan who listens and can/wants to write about their experiences with the SMA. Throughout the interviews, I might have posed familiar questions or shared relevant experiences gained from working with migrants, but never led nor shared opinions to facilitate discussion around the topic (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2007). As the respondents react to these questions/experiences, the researcher's role in this study cannot be completely ignored, despite being objective and neutral.

5.1.7. Ethical Consideration

Following scientific principles, research should be undertaken with consideration for the well-being of participants. Key ethical factors such as information consent, confidentiality, anonymity and respect have been considered throughout the study (Bryman, 2016). This is to ensure the well-being of participants and the integrity of the research. Another key element of ethical research and knowledge production is reflexivity (Rose, 1997; Hellowell, 2006). While self-reflection has been present throughout the research process, certain unavoidable aspects, like my identity's influence, have shaped the research in different ways. By providing a transparent discussion, see the section on the role of the researcher, this study seeks to support more ethical and responsible research practices.

Considering the often traumatic experiences of migrants due to war, violence or psychological distress linked to uncertainty or deportation (De Leo et al., 2022), particular attention has been taken to avoid triggering trauma during the interviews. On one occasion, when one respondent became emotional, the researcher refrained from pressuring her to continue, allowing her to take a pause and resume only when she felt ready. Questions related to well-being were asked with empathy, and participants were free to refrain from answering if they felt uncomfortable. This study adheres to the established ethical principles, by the Swedish Research Council, to minimise potential harm (Vetenskapsrådets, 2024), which outlines four key ethical research principles: reliability, honesty, respect and responsibility. Guided by these principles, the study has been carried out with careful consideration of its implementation and the potential implications of its findings. Moreover,

considering the sensitivity involved in working with vulnerable groups like asylum seekers, special attention has been paid to safeguarding interviewees' integrity and upholding confidentiality at all stages of the research (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

5.1.8. Validity, Reliability and Generalisability

Holme, (1997) describes validity and reliability as central to the foundation of social research. Ray, (2007) defines validity as “whether a variable measure what it is supposed to measure” p.12. While reliability, on the other hand, focuses on transparency and consistency. This study does not claim to assert an absolute truth but tries to achieve its objectives and deliver honest, precise and reflective results based on the data collected while also ensuring transparency and replicability so that other researchers can conduct similar research. It is believed that (Winter, 2000), validity and reliability are more robust in quantitative studies because of the numerical nature of data and the method employed for its collection. However, it can be established within this qualitative interview research as it utilises a systematic approach to data collection and analysis. Generalizability, however, depends greatly on the diversity of the samples. It is worth noting that while this study includes participants from different national backgrounds, genders and age groups, its limited scope is recognised to avoid over-generalisation (Bryman, 2016), and the findings of this research are not representative of the entire population of asylum seekers from these countries.

6.0. Empirical Findings and Analysis

This chapter will present and interpret the findings through the lens of the thesis's theoretical framework. The overarching question guiding the analysis is how asylum seekers perceive justice in the Swedish asylum system and legal outcomes, and how these experiences may shape their sense of legal and procedural legitimacy.

6.1. Thematic Coding

While this study applies a theoretically informed thematic coding process, it will also adopt an exploratory approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), seeking to understand the common experiences of asylum seekers within the Swedish asylum system. Although the analysis is based on a small and

context-specific sample of participants, the analysis provides meaningful insights into asylum seekers’ lived experiences and their implications on the perceived fairness, institutional and legal legitimacy, belonging and mental well-being. The identified patterns are thematically organised into five main categories, each comprising several subcategories, and they are as follows:

Table 5.

<p>1. Experience of procedural Justice</p> <p>1a. Voice (opportunity to express views)</p> <p>1b. Dignity (respectful treatment)</p> <p>1c. Consistency (uniformity across decisions/cases, consistency with laws).</p> <p>1d. Other (explorative dimension)</p>	<p>2. Perceptions of Legal Legitimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Institutional trust ● Acceptance & compliance
	<p>3. Sense of Belonging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feelings of inclusion/exclusion ● Recognition, respect, and civic identity ● Participation and integration narratives
<p>5. Outcome Favorability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rejected vs. accepted vs. limbo status ● Impact on interpretation of fairness ● Variability across status groups 	<p>4. Psychological and Emotional Well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mental health, emotional stability ● Hope, anxiety, stress, resilience ● Effects of uncertainty and waiting

6.2. Experiences of Procedural Justice

Procedural Justice Theory posits that when people perceive the decision-making process as fair, neutral, consistent and respectful, they are more likely to trust the authority, accept their decisions and comply with the law even when the outcomes are unfavourable. The subsequent categories explore how participants in this study experienced fairness during the asylum process and legal outcomes, analysing their perceptions through voice, consistency and dignity and how these factors shape participants’ sense of legitimacy, belonging and psychological well-being. However, there are no definitive right or wrong answers, and my objective is to provide as fair and accurate account of the respondents’ perspectives through each section as possible.

6.2.1. Voice - The Opportunity to Express Your View

This first theme refers to individuals' ability to express their views, provide input, and feel that their narratives are considered during the asylum procedure. The first question asked respondents was whether they were given sufficient time and opportunity to share their story and express their concerns with the case officer during the asylum process. While participants unanimously voiced strong criticism of the asylum process and its legal outcomes, their perception of being heard varied. Notably, respondents 1, 2, 3, 7, and 9, all of whom received rejections from SMA, acknowledged having enough time to present most of their claims. However, they also reported experiencing a lack of trust and suspicion from case officers. For instance, respondents 1, 2 and 9 emphasised that although they were allowed to speak, their testimonies were met with doubt, and they were interrupted during the interview process. In regard to the first question, Respondent 1 (R1), a 35-year-old man from Afghanistan, who initially sought asylum with his mother and sister, acknowledged that enough time had been given, but also expressed a deeper critique of how his statements were handled:

“Yes, the officer at the SMA listened to me, and my first interview lasted about three hours. He asked a lot of questions, and I tried to answer as best I could. The officer tries to ambush you by reframing the same questions to see if you gave the same answer, or making mistakes to find an excuse [...]. I believe the officer has already decided that he will reject this person's case from this country.”

His response underscores the presence of a formal voice, where he has been given time to speak, but at the same time expresses a suspicion and reflects a perception of prejudged outcomes and mistrust, highlighting that the perceived value and impact of his voice were neglected. R1 narratives closely align with PJT's, emphasising that the procedural legitimacy depends not only on participation or being allowed to talk, but on whether the participation or providing input is seen as consequential (Tyler & Bies, 1990).

R1 further elaborated:

After four years, I sought asylum, which again resulted in rejection [...] After appealing, SMA's decision, I was called to interview at the Court, where I was given enough time to answer their questions in detail, and submitted

complementary documents. I have got the impression that they understood me better this time. But when I am reflecting now, they don't care [...].”

As is evident from the quotation, the respondent was given time and attention to present his concerns during the interviews in various instances, particularly in the court, where he was allowed to provide detailed responses, which gave him hope. However, a closer interpretation reveals that he did not perceive this as a genuine voice in the procedural-justice sense, as he felt the authority did not care, and his story had no influence on the outcome. This suggests that voice may not have an independent effect on perceptions of fairness, rather, its impact appears to shift once the decision becomes known. This pattern is in line with the findings in asylum adjudication research by (Bohmer et al., 2008; Souter, 2011), highlighting the difference between procedural formality and substantive influence, a key concern in perceived fairness.

In similar terms, R2, a 30-year-old man from Afghanistan, echoed that, although he was allowed to present his claims, he regarded the interview as a formal requirement rather than a genuine effort by the authorities to understand his situation. He highlighted that:

“Yes, they allowed me to talk, but as you get experience with the asylum process, you understand that this interview is a part of the process, where you present your asylum claims, but in reality, it doesn't matter what you say and what problem you may face in your home country. It is like they have an order from above their boss to just listen for a few hours, question what they say and then reject their claims.”

The R2's reflections reinforce the distinction between procedural formality and actual influence, mirroring R1's view. The decisions are perceived by him to be influenced by hierarchical direction, and nothing that has been said could influence the decisions. In his assessment, the process was characterised by structural rigidity shaped by pre-judged assumptions, which he believed undermined procedural fairness. For both participants, this disconnection becomes more salient in later stages of the process, especially after receiving negative outcomes. This mismatch between procedural opportunity and perceived influence is important in understanding how asylum seekers assess the fairness and legitimacy of the system.

In conjunction with the opportunity to express your own perspectives and potentially influence, gender and cultural dimensions of procedural injustice also emerged as R9, a 39-year-old woman from Iran, explains that:

“I was given enough time to elaborate on why I left my country, and put myself in a difficult situation where I will not be able to see my family again and put everything I had behind. I couldn’t talk thoroughly, but I did what I could. I thought the officer would understand my situation and not compare me to a Swedish or European woman.”

When asked what she meant by this comparison, she added:

“Because of my upbringing and background, I couldn’t express certain things freely. They pushed me to be more detailed, but didn’t let me speak in my way. They interrupted me, saying I wasn’t answering the question or my answers were not convincing to them, and then the time was up [...].”

Her experience highlights that while she was given the space to present her concerns, the cultural norms of communication ability and trauma disclosure were not present (Herlihy et al., 2012). This underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and empathic interviewing, both of which are necessary to realise the voice dimension. It demonstrates that procedural shortcomings are not only related to authorities’ practices but can also arise from the cultural encounter itself, which may act as a barrier. The participant believed that a Swedish woman could respond more easily to such questions, while she struggles to do so herself. She also expected that the case officer should know certain aspects of her situation, yet this is not the case. By allowing participants to express their perspectives and concerns in their own words, qualitative research can uncover detailed insight into how procedural fairness is experienced, nuances that a survey study may not be able to fully uncover.

Several respondents, e.g., R1, R2, R5, and R7, stress problems of communication and translation during asylum procedures, explaining that when comparing interview protocols across instances or between family members’ cases, it becomes evident that the interpreters at times failed to convey their statements accurately. Identical accounts are formulated in different ways, which later allowed caseworkers to question the reliability of claims due to variation in their stories. R2 noted:

” When interpreters failed to translate accurately, caseworkers frequently treated these errors as my fault, using them as justification to question the credibility of my story and, ultimately, reject my case.”

R2 explains that in several interviews conducted with different interpreters, parts of the same asylum stories were translated in various ways. These discrepancies were later used as grounds for

caseworkers to question the coherence of his asylum claims. Such practices not only compromise the fairness of applicants' cases but also undermine trust and confidence in the integrity of the asylum procedure as a whole.

Except for R10, a 37-year-old man from Ukraine, who said he had enough time to talk and understood, but he didn't have much to say. As he noted;

“It was quite obvious, I didn't need to say much, just filed a form and stated where in Ukraine I am from and that everyone from Ukraine will get a temporary residence permit by law.”

The rest of the participants' narratives reflect a consistent theme across different demographic backgrounds, age and gender. It demonstrates that asylum seekers may be formally invited to speak, but the conditions of the interview, power-dynamics, interruptions, disbelief and pressure undermine their capacity to be heard. While voice is central to the perception of justice, it is often constrained within asylum procedures, undermining both legal legitimacy, mental well-being, and trust in institutions. Such procedural shortcomings may contribute to feelings of marginalisation, alienation, and mistrust in the very system meant to provide protection. This resonates with what De Cremer & Tyler, (2007) observe that procedural fairness can be reduced to a performative gesture. The authors argue:

“Procedural fairness rules may not always be meaningful. For example, Greenberg (1990) noted that managers and authorities sometimes also try to develop the appearance of being procedurally fair as an impression management strategy (i.e., “I listen but I do not use this information”), a strategy that may possibly have positive consequences in the short term (Tyler, 2001) but eventually lead to a negative reputation of not being trustworthy” (De Cremer & Tyler, 2007, p. 738).

This chapter has identified that while the majority of the respondents acknowledge the opportunity to speak during their asylum interviews, they believe their voices were neither genuinely valued nor meaningfully considered, as they carry no real influence on decision-making. This is consistent with PJT underlining that when voice is perceived as symbolic rather than consequential, it undermines not only trust in institutional legitimacy but also contributes to psychological distress and social exclusion, key concerns in this thesis. Therefore, the case officer must consider age, gender, background, and other factors such as mental health issues that might impact asylum seekers' ability to perform during the interview.

6.2.2. Dignity - Respectful and Humane Treatment

This sub-chapter turns to another core element of procedural justice, dignity, which refers to the extent to which individuals feel they are treated with respect, neutrality and humanity throughout the legal process by authorities (De Cremer & Tyler, 2007).

When asked about their experiences, respondents expressed diverse perspectives on how SMA treated them during asylum interviews and the entire process. Although some participants, e.g., R3, R4, R8, and R10, describe their treatment predominantly as neutral or positive, noting occasional unpleasant encounters with guards or administrative personnel, these did not substantially impact their perception of fairness. They care more about how their caseworker treated them during the asylum interview itself. While these neutral or positive accounts are acknowledged, the analysis that follows focuses on cases reporting colder, dismissive or even dehumanising experiences. R1 noted:

“They didn’t disrespect me, but there was no empathy either. They asked the same questions repeatedly and criticised my answers. They were cold and detached, but they didn’t insult me. The Taliban kill you with weapons; these officers kill you slowly with their decisions.”

R5, who later decided to leave Sweden for France, described an experience of being belittled during his asylum interview, which he felt was disrespectful:

“While I was explaining my fears about the Taliban, the case officer was smirking. It felt like he didn’t take me seriously, like I was telling him some kind of joke or my story was made up, and that hurt. At the end of my interview, when I said goodbye, he just gave a sarcastic smile, like I was stupid. I lost all my hopes.”

In line with this R9, an Iranian woman who applied for asylum with her teenage son, described her interaction with the migration representative at the court as difficult; she emphasised:

“The migration representative was rude. He interrupted me during the court hearing and told me to go to another country like England, Canada or elsewhere, but not Sweden. My psychiatrist wrote a letter about my mental condition, but when I submitted he said he didn’t believe it as it was a lie. They later cancelled my work permit. I felt humiliated and broken.”

She had a similar experience as R5 and added that during the break in the court proceedings, she greeted the migration officer, who ignored her entirely. R9 noted:

“This moment, though seemingly short, became a powerful symbol of disrespect that I remember till now. I felt they don’t see us as humans with real problems. They look at us with suspicion. I didn’t experience fairness during my asylum process. The caseworker’s behaviour worsened my mental health [...].”

These narratives underscore how the perception of dignity is deeply tied not only to formal interaction and the presence of empathy and humane engagement. As De Cremer and Tyler (2007) point out, authorities may keep the formal appearance of fairness without genuinely caring about individuals’ concerns, what (Greenberg, 1990) describes as “listening without using the information.” While this may create a temporary illusion of justice, it may ultimately damage trust in the system. The participants’ narratives illustrate that respect is not only about politeness, but about being acknowledged, believed, and treated as a person whose concerns have value. A lack of such treatment can lead to feelings of dehumanisation, psychological harm and disillusionment with the asylum process. While voice concerns the opportunity to speak, dignity concerns how one is treated while speaking. Both are deeply intertwined in shaping asylum seekers’ perception of fairness. The findings suggest that even when voice is formally granted, the absence of dignified treatment can render that voice meaningless.

6.2.3. Consistency - Equal Application of rules

Following the discussion on voice and dignity in the previous chapters, the dimension of consistency within PTJ brings attention to whether rules and decisions are applied equally across similar cases. Although participants often lack access to specific details about others’ cases, which makes it difficult to assess consistency with certainty, several participants highlight disparities in treatment and decision outcomes. Some note that rejections, in particular, appear to follow a uniform pattern, regardless of the individual’s case, which is perceived as inconsistent. For instance, respondents R1 and R2, who were familiar with each other’s cases, reported receiving rejection letters that were almost identical in both wording and reasoning. R2, emphasised:

“Look at our decisions (he lifted the paper), the sentences are the same, like they copy and paste it, even though we had different reasons for seeking

asylum, they said the same thing that our claims were vague and unclear without explaining it further or asking for further clarification”

R1, who was interviewed separately, echoed:

“ I know several other Afghans, atheists, LGBTQ+, and converts; everyone was rejected. R2 and I had the same case officer, and his name appears in two other rejections, too. I think he just rejected everyone from Afghanistan without properly considering each case.”

Although both respondents underscored being treated respectfully, their narratives reflect consistency in decision, not in a positive sense. These identical outcomes and reasoning across dissimilar cases can undermine the principle of individualised evaluation, central to fair procedure evaluation (Lind & Tyler, 1988). From a PJT perspective, consistency in outcome alone does not ensure fairness, rather, just procedures require that similar cases are treated alike based on relevant legal and factual considerations, which reflect clear and case-specific reasoning (Tyler, 2006; Lind & Tyler, 1988). This is especially salient in asylum proceedings, where claims are often highly individualised, except for family cases, where all members may have a joint claim.

On the other hand, however, some respondents reported inconsistencies in how cases with similar geographical backgrounds and threats were resolved. R5, emphasised:

“I know people from my area in Afghanistan with the same Taliban threat. Some were granted residence permits because SMA said it is dangerous for Hazaras’ while others like me were rejected. I think it depends on the case officer. Some are more informed and humane than others.”

This narrative supports research indicating that discretionary variation among decision-makers can lead to unequal outcomes even under the same legal framework (Van der Leun, 2003). (Note: This statement contradicts the individualised case-specific decision notion). The respondent’s reflections highlight that individual officer judgement, empathy or information may impact outcomes, indicating inconsistency in application. The absence of a clear rationale in negative decisions is a repeated concern. Similarly, R4 notes that he and two others from his city in Afghanistan, who were initially rejected on age-related grounds, were later granted permits under the same legal provision. These examples underscore temporal inconsistency, where similar claims lead to different results depending on policy shifts or timing rather than merit.

However, R10 perceived that the rule was equally applied across similar cases:

” For us Ukrainians, it was clear. On the SMA website, it says that we could get a temporary permit under the so-called ‘masskyddsdirektivet’, and everyone I spoke to got the same letter around the same time. At the refugee centre, when I talked to refugees from other countries, many complained, but I don’t know what their case was about.”

In contrast to the previous respondents’ narratives, R10’s experiences suggest that a clear legal framework, such as the application of the EU’s Mass Protection Directive, contributes to the perceptions of procedural fairness, particularly when coupled with equal treatment and consistent decision outcomes. On the other hand, a lack of clarity or explanation in their decisions renders asylum seekers’ perception of justice (Herlihy & Turner, 2007), as is evident from the account of other asylum seekers.

In sum, respondents’ narratives demonstrate the complexities in how consistency is perceived and how law is applied across cases, as respondents experienced and interpreted it differently. While some perceived uniformity in outcomes as an absence of individualised assessment, which undermines the fairness that consistency is meant to ensure. Others experienced inconsistencies in outcomes for similar claims, raising concerns about the exercise of discretion bias and unequal application of legal standards. This ambiguity in respondents’ narratives highlights that while equal treatment is often identified as a theoretically important dimension of procedural justice, in practice, respondents struggle to assess consistency because of limited access to others’ case information. Many respondents in this study, similar to findings of Ramji-Nogales et al., (2007), report having little insight into how comparable cases were handled, which limits their ability to accurately assess consistency. Nevertheless, perceptions based on even a few familiar cases still affect their sense of trust, legitimacy and compliance. In cases where decisions are clearly explained and aligned with UN and EU criteria, such as for Ukrainian nationals, consistency is evident and positively associated with fairness. In contrast, for Afghan and Iranian applicants, the perceived uniformity of rejection without clear reasoning lead to negative evaluations of procedural justice.

6.2.4. Procedural Factors Detected Inductively

The data also revealed additional factors, such as family fragmentation, dismissals of hard evidence and inconsistencies in translation that go beyond the core elements of PJT. Several respondents

described the separation of family cases across different caseworkers and legal representatives as profoundly unjust. For R7, such institutional practices led to inconsistent treatment and outcomes within the same family, undermining the perceived fairness and trustworthiness of the asylum system. She noted.

“I mean, it was wrong from the start to be assigned to different case officers. If the entire family had one case officer and one lawyer as we wished, we would have experienced the process differently, and the outcome would not have been so different, which is totally illegitimate and unjust [...]. For example, my sister’s case officer was more respectful and understanding than my case officer, and she got a permanent residence permit [...]. Of course, every decision maker decides differently based on their understanding.”

The respondent’s narrative highlights several aspects of fair procedure, more importantly, how the bureaucratically imposed division of the family member has led to what she perceived as procedural and outcome injustice. This demonstrates that assigning family members with similar asylum claims to different caseworkers increase the risk of inconsistent treatment due to variation in interpretation, evidentiary standards or personal bias. Her account demonstrates that when interconnected claims were evaluated separately rather than holistically, it led to differences in both treatment and outcomes, contributing to a growing sense of injustice and institutional failure. In procedural terms, this highlights a lack of neutrality and consistency, two important components of perceived legitimacy (Tyler, 2006; Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Several respondents reported that even strong evidence, such as DNA tests confirming family ties or medical statements from doctors documenting trauma, was dismissed or questioned by the SMA. R7 elaborated:

“They questioned us being a family, which is a violation of integrity [...]. We conducted a DNA test at the Rättsmedicinalverket, which showed a likelihood of a 99.99% chance of being the same nuclear family. However, its credibility was questioned. I don’t trust the SMA after experiencing it, because they do as they wish and don't listen to and don’t even change if they did wrong.”

The narratives reveal her struggle with the internal logic of the process, particularly questioning the family’s tie, which was perceived as a violation of personal dignity and integrity and an extraordinary burden of proof first placed on asylum seekers, and then the institution’s failure to

engage meaningfully with the evidence presented. In her case, despite the DNA test confirming the relationship with 99.9% certainty, the SMA's refusal to revise its decision after receiving this objective and clear factual evidence adds to the applicants' deep sense of procedural injustice and lack of institutional legitimacy.

A similar pattern is evident in R4's narrative, where the SMA questioned his age. Despite the forensic test result confirming he was underage, his case was rejected on age-related grounds, underscoring structural rigidity and mistrust. This is consistent with (Eastmond, 2007; Herlihy et al., 2010), that asylum seekers are often expected to provide documentary evidence even when not possible to do so. Yet, when such expert evidence is presented, its credibility may still be challenged or dismissed. Such a double standard contributes to a sense of procedural betrayal, powerlessness, thereby eroding the trustworthiness and justice in the institution.

6.3. Perception of Legitimacy of the SMA

This section and the sub-section examine how respondents evaluated the legitimacy of the SMA and their broader willingness to comply with Swedish law. For asylum seekers, this evaluation is critical, as their experiences with the SMA often constitute their most direct and consequential encounter with the Swedish legal system. Across the interview data, the overwhelming majority, nine out of ten respondents, describe the SMA as lacking those qualities, which undermines its perceived legitimacy and is unworthy of compliance. Many respondents (R1, R2, R5, R8, and R9) describe decision-making as unjust, based on disbelief or personal judgment, and inconsistent with their understanding of what is fair. R1, reflected:

“The decision made about my case was unfair and illegitimate in all instances. The first case officers destroyed everything for me and my family, and I believe the decision was made based on personal judgment [...] Ten years of my life have been destroyed because of the unfair decision.”

This narrative demonstrates how perceived subjectivity and arbitrariness in caseworkers' decision-making can erode trust in the SMA. When applicants believe that the outcomes are influenced by personal judgment rather than impartial and consistent legal reasoning, the Swedish asylum system is perceived as procedurally unjust and institutionally illegitimate. In a similar vein, R5 and R9 describe their initial interaction with the caseworker at SMA as cold and impersonal, expressing the belief that the decision was influenced more by subjective judgment than by adherence to

established legal standards. However, the findings reveal a notable distinction between the applicants' perception of the SMA and their broader commitment to Swedish law as discussed below.

6.3.1. Acceptance of legal authority in General

While the majority of respondents perceived the asylum process as unjust and regard the SMA as illegitimate and unworthy of accepting its decision, all respondents in this study express respect and willingness to follow the Swedish law in general, separating their distrust in a specific politicised institution like SMA from the broader legal system (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Jackson et al., 2012; Levi & Stoker, 2000). On the question, whether it is important to comply with the Swedish law, R9 expresses a strong moral duty to follow the law:

“Yes, it is important to follow the law. Everywhere you live, you have to accept the rules of that country. Everything works because there are laws implemented in that country. Even though I live as an undocumented migrant, I need to follow the law.”

Similarly, R2 articulates not only acceptance but also its active contribution to Swedish society:

“It is important to follow the Swedish laws. We came here and took refuge. I work and pay tax like any other citizen while waiting for a decision. I didn't come here to do anything wrong.”

Respondents' narratives reflect a strong normative commitment to legal compliance, even in the face of personal disappointment with the legal procedure. Such attitudes are consistent with the PJT's assertion that people may comply with laws out of a sense of moral duty rather than fear of punishment, especially when they perceive those laws as serving the collective good, which brings social order (Tyler et al., 2004). R2's account reflects both adherence to the legal norms and willingness to contribute to the host society. However, for some, compliance with Swedish law is seen as a matter of both individual responsibility and avoiding negative consequences, as R8 elaborate:

“ It is not for one individual; it is for everyone [...]. If you don't follow it, you can get deported.”

In sum, respondents' accounts demonstrate that their perceptions of legitimacy were strongly shaped by whether they were given the opportunity to present their concerns, treated with respect and dignity, experienced consistency, and fairness in the process. Importantly, the findings indicate that while perceptions of procedural injustice undermine trust in the SMA at the agency level, they did not necessarily diminish acceptance of the broader Swedish legal system. Instead, respondents' narratives revealed a nuanced position, distinguishing between trust in a specific institution and trust in the principle of law itself.

6.4. Outcome Fairness

While PJT highlight the importance of fair procedure over results, some respondents' narratives underscore the importance of outcomes. A favourable decision does not necessarily eliminate prior perception of unfairness, but it's essential, particularly when accompanied by respectful treatment. For instance, R7's trust in the Migration court was shaped not only by the temporary permit she obtained, but also by feeling heard and taken seriously during the appeal process, which she viewed as a significant procedural improvement:

“ I appealed to the court, and there were different judges. They allowed me to explain, asked follow-up questions and carefully examined my cases. They later concluded that we indeed are one family and face the same threat, and granted me a temporary permit”

This change in procedure and outcome represents a critical turning point in how applicants experience justice. When respondents felt they had been listened to or treated with respect, their perception of justice improved even when the permit remained temporary. Individuals with positive outcomes tend to view the procedure and outcome as fairer, illustrated by R10 and R7, than those who were rejected or remain in a state of uncertainty. One can conclude that the outcome itself plays a central role in shaping both the perceived legitimacy of the institution and the fairness of the procedure, a finding that is not surprising, given the decisive importance of outcomes for applicants' lives.

6.5. Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging plays an essential role in people's social integration, well-being and their perception of being a valued member of society. According to Baumeister & Leary, (1995), the human need to belong is central and has significant psychological and social implications. In this study, asylum seekers' feelings of belonging appear to be shaped not only by their legal status but also by their experiences during the asylum procedure and interaction with the wider community.

Three distinct patterns are identified throughout the data. One, that individuals with permanent residency still experience exclusion. Two, those with a temporary permit express short-term belonging, and those with rejected or pending situations surprisingly express some sense of belongingness, which is largely built on community connections rather than legal recognition. These patterns indicate how the perception of justice interacts with the broader societal context to shape a sense of belonging.

Despite being permanent residence holders, R3 and R4 emphasise a feeling of exclusion and marginalisation. R3 noted:

” No, I don't feel I belong here. Despite trying to integrate and take part in cultural events, I felt like an outsider [...]. Even after I got a residence permit, the uncertainty and repeated rejections left me with trauma that I'll have for life. After I got a temporary permit, I had six months to find a job or lose it. This is hard even for an ordinary Swede; imagine for me as an unaccompanied migrant.”

This statement reveals that legal status alone does not assure a sense of belonging. It suggests that earlier procedural experiences, like uncertainty, rejection, and conditional temporary permits, have left lasting psychological effects. This is inconsistent with research highlighting that uncertainty can lead to feelings of exclusion and lasting mistrust, even after receiving a permit (Hedlund, 2016). In R3's case, the procedural injustice left an emotional imprint that a residence permit could not influence. Those holding a temporary permit, such as R7 and R10, while hopeful, expressed a conditional form of belonging to Sweden. For instance, R10 commented:

“I live in the present, and my home is where I feel safe [...]. but my 13-month permit means I can't plan ten years ahead, so I still feel temporary.”

While the statement reflects a degree of situational acceptance, it highlights how temporary status affects long-term planning, creating a sense of temporal belonging. Even with the feeling of safety now, the uncertainty of their temporary status prevents them from fully envisioning themselves as part of society.

On the other hand, some respondents with rejected or pending cases, like R8 and R9, express a sense of belonging stemming from community engagement rather than institutional recognition. R8 explained:

“The SMA is separated from society. I feel bad and stressed even when I hear the name Migration Agency. But the church understands my situation has helped me; I can study Swedish there, and that gives me and my children hope and the feeling that we belong here.

This account underscores an important distinction between procedural legitimacy and social belonging. While respondents feel alienated from the asylum institution, they still find meaningful inclusion through civil society, particularly through churches and voluntary organisations. This resonates with Wernesjö, (2014) and Yuval-Davis, (2011) observing that social belonging is often mediated by community-level interactions rather than solely by legal frameworks.

Overall, participants’ accounts show that while legal status affects feelings of belonging, it is not the decisive factor. Procedural fairness, particularly dignified treatment and consistent decision-making, plays a significant role in shaping whether individuals feel included or excluded. For some, the psychological impact of an unjust process continues to influence their identity and sense of inclusion long after their legal status was secured, underscoring the importance of fair procedure.

6.6. Well-Being

For the asylum seekers interviewed in this study, who faced legal, social, and emotional vulnerabilities, how they experienced procedural justice profoundly affected their mental health and overall well-being. Their narratives consistently underline that the absence of key elements of fairness during their asylum process and legal outcomes harmed their psychological stability, leading to distress, hopelessness, and exclusion, which in turn hindered integration. R3, who arrived as an unaccompanied minor, reflects on the cumulative effect of being unheard, disrespected, and repeatedly rejected:

“It has impacted my mental health in every aspect. After my third rejection, the personnel threw me out of the camp [...]. I lived in the jungle for over a year as a homeless [...] deep scars in my mind and soul.”

In a similar term, R8 underscores the absence of empathy in her interview:

" The asylum process can break you, and those who work there should understand that these people are fleeing from war. I cried so much during the asylum interview, but the case officer just stared at me without showing any emotion."

Respondents' experiences of the asylum process underline the absence of voice, dignified treatment and lack of empathy, all of which contributed to their psychological suffering. Therefore, trauma-informed approaches in the asylum process are vital in enhancing well-being

R9 shares a similar perspective on asylum procedure and the consequences of the outcome:

" Everything I had was fear, sadness, and anxiety. The unfair asylum process and unjust outcomes took my happiness, sleep, and my comfort."

Another type of unfair experience, which was produced during the asylum procedure, was the prolonged uncertainty, which left asylum seekers feeling cut off from the system, followed by multiple rejections, often took a severe toll on mental health, sometimes with tragic consequences.

R1 explains:

“I know some young people who have committed suicide [...]. because they could not cope with the stress of long waiting periods and multiple rejections.”

Research by Silove et al., (2017) confirms that prolonged asylum processes are linked to elevated risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidality. The respondents' narratives demonstrate that the unjust asylum process itself becomes a source of harm when they feel powerless.

6.6.1. The Role of Civil Society and Acts of Solidarity

While state procedures often fail to incorporate concerns of well-being during the procedure, civil society actors appear to play a critical role in offering both emotional and material support. As R8 notes:

" The church has been a safe place for me and my children, where we received help, both financially and emotionally."

Or R4, who received support from a family, describes:

"After my last rejection, I had nowhere to go, and a Swedish family helped me and another Afghan boy. We both lived with them until we got a residence permit. The family saved us."

These findings show that the perception of fairness through voice, dignity and outcome in the Swedish asylum process significantly affects individuals' mental health and social integration. Perceived absence of justice can lead to emotional suffering, distrust, and, in severe cases, self-harm. The respondents also highlight the important role of non-state actors in providing both material and emotional support, mitigating the psychological harm caused by the formal process, and fostering a sense of belonging and mental well-being. However, when asylum outcomes are uncertain or negative, applicants' abilities to adjust and plan their lives in line with society's expectations, such as working or settling long-term, are hindered, which in turn undermines their sense of belonging.

7.0. Conclusion

The main objective of this thesis was to investigate how asylum seekers in Sweden perceive procedural fairness during the asylum process and how these perceptions shape their views of fair procedure, institutional legitimacy, sense of belonging, and well-being. Previous studies have shown that asylum seekers face significant bureaucratic and legal challenges in obtaining protection in Sweden, particularly since the introduction of recent restrictive asylum laws. But their connection to procedural and outcome fairness has remained unexplored. By examining the relationship between perceived procedural fairness and its implications on asylum applicants, this study has shown that the asylum process as a whole can be described as challenging and difficult to negotiate, marked by uncertainty and disbelief.

To acquire deep insight and understand applicants' subjective lived experiences of fairness, this study relies on data from semi-structured interviews with ten asylum seekers from diverse backgrounds. The findings affirm that the participants' experiences of voice, dignity, and consistency play a significant role in shaping their perception of justice and legitimacy. These procedural elements are often reported as being absent or inconsistently applied. Several asylum seekers who emphasised being disbelieved during the interviews or being subject to arbitrary decisions frequently expressed a sense of procedural injustice and perceived institutional illegitimacy. Notably, this perception was not only connected to the negative outcome but also to the process through which those outcomes were reached. This aligns with Tyler's (1990) argument that individuals care deeply about how decisions are made and when legal procedures are understood as disrespectful, inconsistent or arbitrary, trust in institutional legitimacy tends to decline (Tyler et al., 2004; Van den Bos et al., 2014).

It has proven difficult to isolate the elements of PJT from one another; therefore, rather than only treating them as separate factors, I may also consider these dimensions as interconnected components that collectively influence applicants' perceptions of fairness, sense of legitimacy and compliance. The findings in the study reveal that outcomes undeniably play a vital role in the perception of fairness, which is perhaps not surprising given its direct effect on applicants' lives. Nevertheless, my conclusion is that the way in which the process unfolds has significant implications for perceived legitimacy, compliance, sense of belonging and mental well-being. Equally important, the findings indicate that perceptions of voice are closely linked to outcome favorability and tend to shift once the decisions become known, whereas other procedural factors

appear more stable and exert influence on trust and compliance regardless of outcome. While survey studies can identify patterns of attitudes or certain behaviours, they are limited in unpacking the nuanced meaning behind these complex factors, which qualitative interview studies are better suited to unveil.

The findings further show that certain procedural shortcomings, such as family fragmentation, inconsistent outcomes in similar claims and the disregard of documentary evidence, significantly undermine the fairness of the asylum system. Even those participants who ultimately granted permanent or temporary permits highlight feelings of marginalisation or emotional instability rooted in earlier experiences of procedural injustice. At the same time, the data reveal the important role of civil society engagement in affecting applicants' sense of belonging and inclusion.

However, in the long run, lack of adequate legal support, repeated rejections at different instances, continued accusations of fraudulent claims, and perceived unfair treatment by SMA can intensify feelings of uncertainty, hopelessness and marginalisation. As a result, applicants may completely lose faith not only in the system, but also in society. Consequently, some may choose to leave Sweden and seek asylum elsewhere, while others, who may have made an effort to learn the language, integrate or have family members, choose to remain in the country as undocumented, excluded from the social support system, often living with deep psychological distress and an uncertain future.

7.1. Contribution

My research has unpacked and added to the nuanced understanding of people's experiences and what they convey when expressing low voice, dignity, legitimacy or compliance. Factors which are difficult to capture through survey-based research. The findings support the key assumptions of PJT, particularly the centrality of its elements in influencing perception of fairness and trust. Another potential contribution of this study lies in its effort to operationalise PJT beyond the legal or policing contexts and apply it in the asylum context, in understanding the emotional aspects of fairness and the role of non-state actors in fostering a sense of belonging and integration. From a policy perspective, the finding highlights the importance of trauma-informed approaches, especially with individuals who have experienced trauma or other forms of violence. It offers insight into perceived relationships and lived experiences that may help future research and inform policy

development. In this sense, the study supports the idea of a more humane, respectful and procedurally fair asylum procedure that nurtures trust, dignity, and social cohesion.

7.2 Limitations

Nonetheless, several limitations need to be acknowledged. A clear limitation of this study is the small sample size, which limits the generalizability of the findings. While the purposive and snowball sampling strategies facilitate effective access to a diverse group of participants, there remains a risk of selection biases, as those individuals who agreed to participate may have had only negative or reflective experiences. Moreover, although the study was conducted with rigorous ethical standards and reflexivity, the researcher's positionality as both an insider and outsider may have shaped interview dynamics and interpretation of participants' narratives (Hellowell, 2006).

7.3. Future Research

A master's thesis is limited in its scope, and many avenues would be interesting to explore which were left unconsidered. To understand the implications of the result presented in this study on a deeper level, future research could extend this study by including participants from a wider range of nationalities and regions in Sweden, as well as integrating comparative data from other European asylum systems. This study captures perceptions at one moment in time; a longitudinal method could explore how perceptions of fairness, legitimacy or integration evolve. More specifically, future quantitative or qualitative research could explore how legal criteria are applied or how asylum seekers' perceptions of political influence in decision-making, e.g., by asking (Do you think political orientation or party affiliation of caseworkers affects asylum outcomes?). Future research could also explore the cultural dimension, as well as the perception of fairness among LGBTQ+ individuals and religious converters within the Swedish asylum system.

Bibliography

- Adler, M. (2010). Administrative justice in a Scandinavian legal context: From a liberal and a social state to a market state or a milieu state. In *Administrative justice in context*. Bloomsbury.
- Alvesson, M., & Sköldbberg, K. (2018). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Anant, S. S. (1969). A cross-cultural study of belongingness, anxiety and self-sufficiency. *Acta Psychologica*, 31(4). [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-6918\(69\)90095-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-6918(69)90095-X)
- Ansems, L. F. M., Mak, E., & van den Bos, K. (2020). Speaking of justice: A qualitative interview study on perceived procedural justice. *Law & Society Review*, 54(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12499>
- Ansems, L. F. M., van den Bos, K., & Mak, E. (2021). The importance of perceived procedural justice among defendants with a non-Western background involved in Dutch criminal cases. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.746364>
- Barrett-Howard, E., & Tyler, T. R. (1986). Procedural justice as a criterion in allocation decisions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50(2). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.50.2.296>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Bies, R. J., & Moag, J. F. (1986). Interactional justice: Communication criteria of fairness, (Eds.) *Research on negotiations in organizations* (Vol. 1). JAI Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Björnberg, U. (2011). Social relationships and trust in asylum seeking families in Sweden. *Sociological Research Online*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2286>
- Blader, S. L., & Tyler, T. R. (2003). A four-component model of procedural justice: Defining the meaning of a “fair” process. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203029006007>
- Bohmer, C., Shuman, A., & Weston, S. (2008). Rejecting refugees: Political asylum in the 21st century. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(3).
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

- Carswell, K., Blackburn, P., & Barker, C. (2011). The relationship between trauma, post-migration problems and the psychological well-being of refugees and asylum seekers. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 57(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764008105699>
- Cegrell Karlander, I. (2021). *Officialprincipen i migrationsprocessen: Domstolens utredningsansvar* [Doctoral thesis, Uppsala University].
- Charmaz, K., & Mitchell, R. G. (2007). Grounded theory in ethnography. In *Handbook of ethnography*. SAGE.
- Dahlvik, J. (2017). Asylum as construction work: Theorizing administrative practices. *Migration Studies*, 5(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnx043>
- De Cremer, D., & Tyler, T. R. (2007). The effects of trust in authority and procedural fairness on cooperation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(3). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.3.639>
- De Leo, A., Cotrufo, P., & Gozzoli, C. (2022). The refugee experience of asylum seekers in Italy: A qualitative study on the intertwining of protective and risk factors. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 24(5). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-021-01296-3>
- Dworkin, R. (1986). *Law's empire*. Belknap Press.
- Elsrud, T. (2020). Resisting social death with dignity: The strategy of re-escaping among young asylum-seekers in the wake of Sweden's sharpened asylum laws. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1719476>
- Eastmond, M. (2007). Stories as lived experience: Narratives in forced migration research. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20(2). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem007>
- Esaiasson, P., Lajevardi, N., & Sohlberg, J. (2022). Reject, limbo, and accept: The effect of migration decisions on asylum seekers. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(15). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2042222>
- Esaiasson, P., Persson, M., Gilljam, M., & Lindholm, T. (2019). Reconsidering the role of procedures for decision acceptance. *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(1). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000508>
- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107>
- Folger, R. (1977). Distributive and procedural justice: Combined impact of voice and improvement on experienced inequity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(2). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.35.2.108>
- Frank, E., & Nivorozhkin, A. (2025). Legal status and refugees' perceptions of institutional justice: *Public Administration Review*, 85(Early View). <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13898>

Freedman, J., Sahraoui, N., & Tastsoglou, E. (Eds.). (2022). *Gender-based violence in migration: Interdisciplinary, feminist and intersectional approaches*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Fuchs, L. M., Jacobsen, J., Walther, L., Hahn, E., Ta, T. M. T., Bajbouj, M., & von Scheve, C. (2021). The Challenged Sense of Belonging Scale, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42409-021-00021-y>

Garvik, M., & Valenta, M. (2021). Seeking asylum in Scandinavia: A comparative analysis of recent restrictive policy responses towards unaccompanied Afghan minors in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9(1), 15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00221-1>

Gibson, J. L. (1989). Understandings of justice: Institutional legitimacy, procedural justice, and political tolerance. *Law & Society Review*, 23(3). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3053830>

Gill, N., & Good, A. (2018). Making the right decision: Justice in the asylum bureaucracy in Norway. In *Asylum determination in Europe*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94749-5_12

Greenberg, J. (1990). Organizational justice: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. *Journal of Management*, 16(2), 399–432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639001600208>

Grimes, M. (2006). Organizing consent: The role of procedural fairness in political trust and compliance. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00299.x>

Hedlund, D. (2017). Constructions of credibility in decisions concerning unaccompanied minors. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMHS-02-2016-0010>

Hellawell, D. (2006). Inside–out: Analysis of the insider–outsider concept as a heuristic device to develop reflexivity in students doing qualitative research. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510600874292>

Herlihy, J., & Turner, S. (2010). What assumptions about human behaviour underlie asylum judgments? *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 22(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eeq027>

Hockey, J. (1993). Research methods—Researching peers and familiar settings. *Research Papers in Education*, 8(2), 199–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267152930080205>

Holme, I. M., & Nilsson, B. (1997). *Forskningsmetodik: Om kvalitativa och kvantitativa metoder* (2., rev. och utök. uppl.). Studentlitteratur.

Migrationsverket. (2025) Lagar och förordningar. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from <https://www.migrationsverket.se/om-migrationsverket/styrning-och-uppfoljning/lagar-och-forordningar.html>

Jackson, J., Bradford, B., Hough, M., Myhill, A., Quinton, P., & Tyler, T. R. (2012). Why do people comply with the law? Legitimacy and the influence of legal institutions, 52(6).

- Jansson, T. (2024). Governing through bureaucratically imposed waiting: On stuckedness among asylum seekers and refugees waiting for residence permits in Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work*, 27(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2023.2282390>
- Kagan, M. (2015). Believable victims: Asylum credibility and the struggle for objectivity. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 16(1), 123–131.
- Kale, A., Stupples, P., & Kindon, S. (2019). Feeling at home: A multisensory analysis of former refugee and host society residents' integration in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2019.100615>
- Khosravi, S. (2010). *“Illegal” traveller: An auto-ethnography of borders*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kneebone, S. (Ed.). (2009). *Refugees, asylum seekers and the rule of law: Comparative perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kumlin, S., & Rothstein, B. (2005). Making and breaking social capital: The impact of welfare-state institutions. *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(4), 339–365. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414004273203>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Leerkes, A., & Kox, M. (2017). Pressured into a preference to leave? A study on the “specific” deterrent effects and perceived legitimacy of immigration detention. *Law & Society Review*, 51(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12297>
- Leung, K., & Lind, E. A. (1986). Procedural justice and culture: Effects of culture, gender, and investigator status on procedural preferences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50(6). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.50.6.1134>
- Leventhal, G. S. (1980). What should be done with equity theory? *Social exchange: Advances in theory and research*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3087-5_2
- Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.475>
- Lind, E. A., Kanfer, R., & Earley, P. C. (1990). Voice, control, and procedural justice: Instrumental and noninstrumental concerns in fairness judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(5). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.5.952>
- Lind & Tyler, T. R. (1988). *The social psychology of procedural justice*. Springer.
- Liodden, T. M. (2019). Making the right decision: Justice in the asylum bureaucracy in Norway. In N. Gill & A. Good (Eds.), *Asylum determination in Europe: Ethnographic perspectives*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94749-5_12
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. Russell Sage Foundation.

- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE.
- McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, 41(9). <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149>
- Merton, R. K. (1967). *On theoretical sociology: Five essays, old and new*. Free Press.
- Moberg Stephenson, M., & Herz, M. (2024). Lived experiences of Swedish asylum policy among unaccompanied young people and social workers in a non-governmental organization, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2022.2063364>
- Mosley, A. (2018). Re-victimization and the asylum process: Re-assessing the weight placed on credible fear interviews in determining credibility. *Minnesota Journal of Law & Inequality*, 36(2). <https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/lawineq/vol36/iss2/12>
- Patel, R., & Davidson, B. (2011). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder: Att planera, genomföra och rapportera en undersökning*. Studentlitteratur.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Peczenik, A. (2021). *Vad är rätt? Om demokrati, rättssäkerhet, etik och juridisk argumentation*. Lund University. <https://doi.org/10.37852/oblu.106>
- Placa, V. & Knight, A. (2013). Discourse on wellbeing in research and practice. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 3(1). <https://www.internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/view/177>
- Ramji-Nogales, J., Schoenholtz, A. I., & Schrag, P. G. (2007). Refugee roulette: Disparities in asylum adjudication (Scholarly Paper No. 983946). <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=983946>
- Rapley, T. J. (2001). The art(fulness) of open-ended interviewing: Some considerations on analysing interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100303>
- Ray, L. (2007). Validity of measured party positions on European integration: Assumptions, approaches, and a comparison of alternative measures. *Electoral Studies*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2006.03.008>
- Regeringskansliet. (2016, April 29). *Sweden's convergence programme 2016*. Government Offices of Sweden. <https://www.government.se/reports/2016/04/swedens-convergence-programme-2016/>
- Ritchie, J., & Spencer, L. (2002). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In *The qualitative researcher's companion*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986274.n12>
- Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3). <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913297673302122>

- Rothstein, B., & Stolle, D. (2015). *The quality of government and social capital: A theory of political institutions and generalized trust*. University of Gothenburg.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/39172>
- Scholten, P. (2020). Mainstreaming versus alienation: Conceptualising the role of complexity in migration and diversity policymaking. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1625758>
- Schütze, C. (2025). Migrants' trust in the Swedish Migration Agency: Exploring influencing factors through large-scale survey data. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-024-01227-9>
- Silove, D., Ventevogel, P., & Rees, S. (2017). The contemporary refugee crisis: An overview of mental health challenges. *World Psychiatry*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20438>
- Sohlberg, J., Agerberg, M., & Esaiasson, P. (2024). Waiting for asylum: Reduced institutional and interpersonal trust. *Political Studies*, 72(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217221103728>
- Souter, J. (2011). *A culture of disbelief or denial? Critiquing refugee status determination in the United Kingdom*.
https://www.academia.edu/466835/A_Culture_of_Disbelief_or_Denial_Critiquing_Refugee_Status_Determination_in_the_United_Kingdom
- Svenska Akademien. (2025) *Svenska Akademiens ordbok (SAOB)*. <https://www.saob.se/>
- Sweeney, J. A. (2009). Credibility, proof and refugee law. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 21(4). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eep027>
- Thomas, R. (2008). Consistency in asylum adjudication: Country guidance and the asylum process in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Refugee Law*, 20(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/een034>
- Thomas, R. (2011). *Administrative justice and asylum appeals: A study of tribunal adjudication*. Hart Publishing.
- Thunborg, C., Osman, A., & Bron, A. (2021). Being in limbo or learning to belong? Telling the stories of asylum seekers in a mill town. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 53(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2020.1824666>
- Tyler, T. R. (1988). What is procedural justice? Criteria used by citizens to assess the fairness of legal procedures. *Law & Society Review*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3053563>
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law* (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Tyler, T. R., & Bies, R. J. (1990). Beyond formal procedures: The interpersonal context of procedural justice. In *Applied social psychology in organizational settings*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Tyler, T. R., Huo, Y. J., & Thacher, D. (2004). Trust in the law: Encouraging public cooperation with the police and courts. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 593.

- Tyler, T. R., & Lind, E. A. (1992). A relational model of authority in groups. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.). Academic Press.
- Valentine, G., Sporton, D., & Nielsen, K. B. (2009). Identities and belonging: A study of asylum seekers living in the UK and Denmark. *27*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1068/d3407>
- Van den Bos, K., Maas, M., Waldring, I. E., & Semin, G. R. (2003). Understanding the psychology to perceived fairness: *Social Justice Research, 16*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024252104717>
- Van den Bos, K., Van der Velden, L., & Lind, E. A. (2014). On the role of perceived procedural justice in citizens' reactions to government decisions and the handling of conflicts. *Law Review, 10*(4). <https://doi.org/10.18352/ulr.287>
- Vertovec, S. (2023). *Superdiversity: Migration and social complexity*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203503577>
- Wernesjö, U. (2014). *Conditional belonging: Listening to unaccompanied young refugees' voices*.
- Whittaker, S., Hardy, G., Lewis, K., & Buchan, L. (2005). An exploration of well-being with refugee and asylum-seeker. *Psychology and Psychiatry, 10*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104505051210>
- Winter, G. (2000). A comparative discussion of the notion of "validity" in qualitative and quantitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 1*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2000.2078>
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). *The politics of belonging: Intersectional contestations*. SAGE.

Appendix (I). Recruitment strategy and applicants' legal statuses at the time of interview.

Three interviews were conducted in quiet library rooms. One participant was recruited through a former legal guardian for unaccompanied minors, and the other two participants were identified through snowball sampling. Two interviews were conducted in the church, but the interaction took place in a private room, where a one-on-one conversation occurred with one respondent, who was identified through the snowball effect and subsequently interviewed by phone. The initial contact was established through a former teacher volunteering at a language class called Swedish for immigrants (Svenska För Invandrare (SFI)). Two of the interviewees were found through a local barber who was himself undergoing the asylum process and frequently met other asylum seekers. The interviews were held in his shop after business hours to ensure privacy and convenience. The rest were recruited through Facebook Messenger and a law office, and later contacted by phone and thoroughly informed about the study and given their consent. Once the oral consent was approved, the interviewee and I agreed on a suitable interview time, virtual or in-person.

The three key gatekeepers included a former teacher who volunteered to teach Swedish at a language café arranged by an SFI teacher at a church in Gothenburg, where asylum seekers also received support such as accommodation, food and other basic needs. The second gatekeeper was a former high school teacher who helped and sheltered two former unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan and was engaged in different civil society organisations to assist unaccompanied asylum seekers. Individuals involved in such organisations become vital contacts for asylum seekers, entrusted with knowledge about their asylum claims, legal procedures and their daily lives in Sweden. These gatekeepers act as intermediaries between the researcher and the interviewee participants, facilitating initial contact, obtaining informed consent, and providing some basic information about the participants to assess their suitability for the interview.

Appendix (II). Interview Guide. Interview questions measuring PPJ and its impact

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to explore asylum seekers' lived experiences, focusing on their perceptions of fairness during the Swedish asylum process and its broader implications. In this interview, you will be asked about your interaction with SMA and your experience of legal processes. Your responses are valuable for understanding how asylum seekers perceive fairness in the asylum procedures and how it influences their sense of legitimacy, belonging, well-being, and acceptance of legal decisions.

Your responses will remain completely confidential. Identifying details, such as your name and place of residence, will not be recorded, and the recording and transcripts will therefore be anonymous. Your participation in this study is important but completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

Consent and anonymity

Do you consent to participate in this study?

Do you agree to this interview being recorded for information accuracy? The recording will be deleted after transcription.

If you have any questions before or during the interview, please feel free to ask. May we begin?

Background and contextual information

- I. Could you tell me your age, nationality, ethnic background and occupation in your home country as well as now?
- II. Did you come with your family or alone, and at what age?
- III. Did you seek asylum jointly as one family or as an individual? Please be very brief.
- IV. How long have you been in the asylum process? What is the status now?
- V. Did you appeal the decision?
- VI. Do you think the appeal process was fair? Why or why not?

Perceptions of Procedural Fairness through key dimensions of (PJT)

Voice (Distributive justice)

- I. Were you given the time and opportunity to tell your story and share your concerns with the officer at the SMA during the asylum process? Why or why not?
- II. Do you feel that you have managed to convince the officer(s) and influence the decision outcomes, or was your asylum claim doubted?
- III. Do you think that the SMA processed your case correctly? And do you feel they were considerate in their decision-making?
- IV. If you felt unheard, how did that influence your trust in the asylum system?

Consistency (equal procedure and application of rules)

- I. Did the asylum procedure seem clear and predictable to you?
- II. Based on what you have experienced or discussed with other asylum seekers, did you feel that decisions were applied consistently across similar cases (e.g. coming from the same area, ethnic group or military background story by being a member of a family whose case has been managed differently)?
- III. Were you given a clear reason or explanation for the decision in your case, why was it accepted, rejected or prolonged?

Dignity (relational justice)

- I. How were you treated during the asylum process by the migration officials (guards, front desk and caseworkers) and legal representatives?
- II. Did you feel respected and valued during the asylum process?
- III. Were there any moments when you felt you were not treated with respect and dignity? If so, how did these experiences influence(d) your perception of fairness, your emotional well-being and trust in the system?
- IV. Do you feel that your story has been heard and that there was an openness and understanding to listen to your story by the Migration Agency or courts? Was your asylum claim criticised or doubted?

Perceived legality (In light of UN-regulations)

- I. Did you feel that the Swedish asylum system follows the international human rights principles and UN guidelines during the asylum processes and decisions? How and why not?
- II. Were you informed about your rights, legal options and obligations in a way that was understandable to you?
- III. How do the legal explanations or lack of them and your experience of the asylum process impact your trust in the fairness and credibility of the system?

Perceived fairness of the process

- I. What is your general overview of the asylum process? Do you think it was fair or unfair? Why or why not?
- II. Were there any aspects or specific moments that made you feel the process or decision outcome was more or less fair to you?

Outcome favorability & decision reaction

- I. What was the outcome of your case? (waiting/limbo, accepted or rejected)
- II. How did you feel when you received the decision?
- III. Did the outcome influence how you perceived the fairness of the process?

Legitimacy (decision acceptance and acceptance)

- I. Do you think the decision made about your case was legitimate? Why not?
- II. Did you accept the decision outcome, or do you feel it was unfair and appeal it to the migration court?
- III. If you disagree with the outcome, what aspects do you find most unfair?
- IV. Is it important for you to follow the Swedish law in general

Sense of belonging (integration)

- I. Do you think you belong in this country? Why or why not?
- II. Has the process and legal status impacted your sense of belonging and social integration? Do you feel accepted by society?

Well-being (psychological and emotional impact)

- I. How has the asylum process affected your mental health and emotional well-being?
- II. Maybe it is not a very appropriate question, but have you experienced stress, anxiety or uncertainty because of the asylum process?
- III. Were or are there any sources of support (e.g., community, legal aid or NGOs) that have helped you with legal matters and cope with the process?

Extra questions

- I. Did the asylum process and the final decision outcomes influence your view of the institutional authorities and Sweden as a country?
- II. What was your initial expectation of the Swedish asylum system before arriving? Was it how you expected or not? Where did you get that information from?
- III. What changes in the asylum process and decision-making do you think are required to make it feel fairer and more just?

Thank you for sharing your experience. Your insights are invaluable in understanding fairness in the asylum process and decision-making and its influences on individuals. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?