

Interview Transcript

Collation

Question 1: Do you have a smartphone?

Hafiz: yes I own three, one tablet. Smartphone? I have two smartphones and one stupid one.
I: What a stupid phone?
H: It's old fashioned, you know, not a smart phone.
I: Do you use them for different things?
H: In England no, but back in Syria yes for calling and things like that. The new ones I use for social media here, but sometimes I have to stop because it is distracting and puts me off other things in real life

I: Do you own or have access to a smartphone?
Mehar: Yes, I have one [shows me his android phone] it is from Lebara
I: Have you had this one since arriving in the UK?
M: Yes, always this one

I: Do you have access to a smartphone?
Kaamil: Yes, you know I do [laughs and pulls out two phones from his pocket to show me]
I: Why do you have two?
K: Because... one is for work, the other for myself, when I come back from work to play, use Facebook things like that, yeah... one is an iPhone and the other, Samsung galaxy

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Moiz: Of course, [picks up his phone from the table and shows me it] I always have phone... it is an iPhone 11, it is a good one.
I: Have you always had the same phone since you've been in the UK?
M: Yes same one, it has lasted me almost four years now

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Aklilu: I had a phone a smartphone - I still got it, you've seen it, now? The one with the big orange case. I don't have it with me now as it is in the shop. You know, I told you before, I take it to this shop, give it to them, they give me money for it and keep the phone... you can keep it there for three weeks I think, then you pay something like £10 to get it back. I do this a lot at the minute, but this is the last time. I have been having problems with money so this is why I have been doing it the past few months but I can't any longer. I get it back Monday.
I: When your phone is in the shop, do you miss it?
A: Yes of course, you know I have wife in my country. I want to talk to her everyday, but when I put my phone in to the shop I have no proper way of contacting her. It gets very lonely... depressed you know. I have been here 10 years and not seen her in person... people back home look after her well, my parents, our friends... she wants to come here so we can be reunited, but it takes a lot of time, a lot of waiting. We talk about this a lot, but I can't contact her without the phone... to call or video call. Sometimes I can go to the library and try and use their computers, I have to go to Newcastle though because the computers in Sunderland do not let you on messenger
I: Facebook messenger?
A: Yes, I have asked the people who work there why this doesn't work but they haven't done anything about it, so I go to Newcastle to use their computers
I: Do you go often?
A: When I miss my wife, I go there

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Yad: No I don't have... do you mean like a TV or iPad?
I: No, you're mobile phone, is it a smartphone?
Y: [laughs] of course [taking it out of his coat pocket and putting it on the table to show me] it is an iPhone 13

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Asad: Yes, I have an iPhone.... i think it is an iPhone 8 or 9

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Maaz: Yes I have smartphone... it is a Samsung

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Palesa: Of course I have a phone, how can I live without one here?

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Ishan: Yes, of course I have, I have
Santi: Of course, I use my smartphone everyday

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Habib: Yes, I have this one [shows me from picking it up off the table] this one is... I think it is a Samsung

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Tamir: At the moment, I do not have a phone... I did have one before I was taken into hospital, but they took it off me there and I still have not had it back [for context, TA* was taken into a psychiatric ward for a couple of weeks, informed by members of FODI]

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Solin: Yes, I have a phone... it is an iPhone...

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
Roda: Yes I have a smartphone, and it is really helpful to do everything with that

I: Do you both own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
N: Ahh we are always... at least me are looking for the internet wherever we go... city centre everyday [laughs]...

I: Do you own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?
A: Yes, you won't have heard of it before probably though - xiomi. This is the phone that I've had since being in the UK

I: So I'm going to record now. Just so everybody's aware.
SOR: OK, yes. OK.
I: Is that OK? Yeah. OK. So the first question is, do you all have smartphones?
SOR: Yes.
I: What kind of phone?
SOR
You I think the iPhone... That's the Huawei phone... and him I think iPhone, yes.

Question 2: How do you normally access data?

Gamal: Yeh, usually I buy a SIM card
I: You buy a SIM card?
G: No, I don't. It is more expensive in other countries to by it. The one I buy is 20gb for £12 per month.
I: Do you have access to Wi-Fi?
G: No I don't, we don't have access to it in the housing
I: So you can only use the data from the SIM you buy?
G: Yes

I: Okay, how do you normally access data for your phones?
Hafiz: SIM card, I pay for them. I have a top-up SIM, I have to go to Tesco to do this, when they run out of money, you know. I don't have a contract, I use pay-as-you-go... it is easier for me
I: Yep, and did you get a SIM from the drop in?
H: Yes, but I haven't used it yet

I: And how would you normally access data or internet on it?
Mehar: I now have a contract with EE [for context, we previously spoke about how this man has been living in the UK now for 4 years with settled status] but when I was in the hotel and my house [before settled case] I was always switching between SIMS... Giffgaff, Three, Lenovo... whichever was the best offer for the money you know. The hotels have Wi-Fi, but sometimes it is very slow and when you leave, if you don't have SIM then its very hard

I: And how do you normally access data?
Kaamili: I am on a contract, I get unlimited data
I: How much do you pay for that?
K: £20 a month... it is good value

I: How do you normally access data/internet? [SIM, Wi-Fi, other]
Moiz: I have an unlimited plan with 3, I am on a contract it is like £20 per month which is good... all data calls and texts included, I think my contract is around two years
I: Is having unlimited data important for you?
M: Of course, the contracts with less are not value - having enough data is the most important thing so I can call my family and children back home

I: When you do have your phone, how do you normally access data/internet? [SIM, Wi-Fi, other]
Aklilu: Before COVID, I was using pay as you go but now I have two SIM cards that I pay for monthly [takes them out of his wallet to show me]. If I pay nicely for both of them for 6 months I can get any phone I want, only if I can pay for them - they give me unlimited data, texts and calls and stuff.
I: Did you ever get a SIM card from FODI?
A: I got the SIM card from FODI, but I lost it [laughs]... you know I lose a lot of things
I: Did you think that 20gb was enough?
A: No... it was only 20gb, it is not enough, you know in my life, since like being young I used my phone - watching what people are doing back home on social media is important for me. I have 3 sisters in Canada, 1 brother in UK, 2 in USA 1 in Norway. I have a lot of family across Europe and the US... we have no freedom in my country [Ethiopia] so people have to leave. We meet eachother on facebook, messenger, WhatsApp, IMO. Do you know IMO? Many English people don't know this one
I: No I don't think so
A: It is like WhatsApp but people can use it erm... [unlocks his phone to show me the IMO app, scrolling through his messages to show me] ...Whatsapp can be hard to connect with people from different countries sometimes, IMO is very easy which is very good for people like me

I: How do you normally access data/internet? [SIM, Wi-Fi, other]
Yad: Yes, I have data for a phone call it uses 3G but for internet I need 4G
I: Do you have a contract? Like a SIM card for your data?
Y: No I don't have a contract, look [he opens up the GiffGaff app on his phone and shows the dashboard] I pay monthly but it is not a contract. I think I get 80gb... no 100gb...
I: And how much do you pay for that amount of data?
Y: I pay £20 a month for it, it is expensive but I don't have Wi-Fi or anything at home so I need the data to be able to do things like watching videos or video calling my family... 100gb is enough I never go over, before I used to be on a smaller amount of data and it was not enough for me

I: How do you normally access data/internet? [SIM, Wi-Fi, other]
Asad: I have the SIM card from FODI... it is data for free 6 months it is I think 20gb a month with Vodafone but then it finishes after 6 months
I: Do you find that 20gb is enough?
A: It is better than nothing but it is not enough... I can do things like working sending emails, messages things like that, but it is not enough to do everything I want to do like video calling my family or friends, or watching YouTube videos since we have no TV... I have to be careful with how much data I use
I: Before the SIMs were handed out at FODI, how were you accessing data?
A: Before I have a 3 SIM, it was very expensive... I think I was paying around £20 a month... and it was not great because I didn't get much signal at home which is where I usually use my phone to relax or watch videos and call family... now Vodafone is better, I can get 4G [laughs]
I: When you leave the house, do you ever connect to public Wi-Fi?
A: Yes, I try always... but sometimes it is not very good, some places it works some it doesn't, it just depends... I prefer to use it though because it saves my data

I: How do you normally access data/internet? [SIM, Wi-Fi, other]
Maaz: I have a SIM
I: Was the SIM from FODI?
M: No... I got it from another charity in Newcastle but it is no good. I think it is around 15gb for 6 months... it is free but it is not enough data. The first month I used it for a couple of days, watching videos... using social media, normal things, the data was gone. Gone. How am I supposed to use it like that? It means I have to watch what I am doing all the time... how much data... gigabytes. I don't like.

I: If you don't mind me asking, how do you normally access data or internet?
Palesa: I pay for data every month, I use...giffgaff. It is the one you cancel any time like, I'm not on a contract, but it renews every month.
I: Yes I know, I think I use the same one, how much data do you normally pay for?
P: It is normally £10 a month... I don't actually know about how much data that it because I never use all of it because, it is important for me to say that I have Wi-Fi in my house now... after getting my papers I was able to start paying for my own Wi-Fi rather than only having a SIM, this makes such a difference and it means I don't use as much data anymore because when I am in the house I can just use my Wi-Fi. I mean, I still have to pay for the Wi-Fi, but it is actually pretty cheap, I have a monthly deal with TalkTalk in my house
I: Great, I imagine that makes life so much easier
P: Yes, of course, I can do anything in the house — watching videos, calling, videocalling people from home — without worrying anymore

I: How do you normally access data or internet?
Santi: Mobile internet?
I: Yes, like how... do you have a SIM card or a contract?
S: Yes I have a contract... EE... it is good internet
Ishan: Yes, of course... I get a SIM card from here [FODI]
I: For the FODI SIM, you get 20gb of data a month right?
Is: No... um 20gb in a month yes...
I: Do you think that this is enough?
Is: No, it is not enough for me... because, just you say, you get only that data for a month. Normally I use it and in 15 days, it will finish yeh... sometimes when it finishes I will do contract with GiffGaff you know? When the internet on this SIM finishes I must use contract for the rest of the days because it is not a lot and the internet is important... I can't live here without internet

I: How do you normally access data or the internet?
Habib: You know when I came... the Home Office they give me £24 or something like that a week, I save this money to buy a contract... to like, monthly I do... I do 30gb or 20gb a month depending on how much I need
I: So you always buy the data?
H: Yes I have to buy myself
I: Have you ever had a SIM given to you? By FODI or another organization?
H: Yeh they give me, but its working like one week and then it stop... so I have but it is not working because the data runs out really quick, I told you last week about the time back in France when I had one of these SIMs and I put it in the bin because I thought it was not working... the data runs out so quickly man
I: So the data you get on those SIMs is not enough for you?
H: No... it is not enough

I: So when you did have your phone, how did you normally access data or the internet? Did you have a SIM card?

Tamir: For the past one month, until now, I have been disconnected... I have been disconnected because my phone has been in the custody of the police after they arrested me... so... S2 of the mental health, they took my belongings... they took my phone... so I have lost contact, I was not able to talk to my people, my friends, even those who are supposed to help me, I am an asylum seeker for five years now... so my phone would have been helpful, but for now as I speak it in the hands of the police... I was told it was for safe keeping... the officer in charge is on leave so I cannot get it back right now... I have tried to get a new phone but this is not the problem... it is the number that is the problem... because I can't remember it to exchange it... so I cannot even get into contact with the people that I need to talk to, I don't have their numbers so it's like really terrible and giving me mental stress... it is horrible to be disconnected, to not be able to reach out to people, my friends, people who could help me... for this reason it is a very difficult situation for me now because I am not able to get access to my data, my gmail... when I try to get a new phone, my gmail is not able... I can't get access to it because my phone number is connected to my old SIM so I can't get my gmail back, my Whatsapp back... all my contacts and apps, I can't get access to them as I speak now... it is a very very difficult situation... this is terrible for my life

I: That must be very stressful

T: Yes very stressful, because if you don't have a phone, you are out of the world... because only the phone now can connect you to the world... the phone allows you to get access to what you need... when I tried to find out how to get home from the hospital, I had no idea where to find the number for a taxi, for example... I couldn't get the taxi because I wasn't able to get the number or to find out where to tell him to take me... I don't have any gmail to connect to a google account... I wasn't able to get a bus last week... so my appointment last week was canceled because I could not find out the information... I can't get the support I need because of not having my phone

I: It is very easy to take for granted right

T: Yes, I came here today to speak and connected with people... I am still sick... but I needed to come here to connect. If I had my phone, I would be able to do it with my phone, but as I speak now, I can't... I am risking my health to meet the people, this is my main problem now because I don't have my phone...

I: Do you both own or have access to a phone? Is it a smartphone?

Nala: Ahh we are always... at least me are looking for the internet wherever we go... city centre everyday [laughs]...

I: to get wifi?

N: Yes to get wifi, you know Sunderland city centre?

Hamid: Sunderland city centre has free wifi, so when we come here we use that... free internet

N: Whenever I need I will connect to that wifi, it is so helpful... it doesn't reach here [St. Mary's Drop-in], but when you go to the shopping centre it will connect

I: Did either of you get a SIM from FODI?

H: Yes but that SIM is now finished

N: Now finished yeah

I: So when you had the SIM, it was 20gb right... did you think that was enough data a month?

H: No, you need more than that... 20gb is not enough to live like this in the UK... we are not complaining but it is not enough, sometimes run out things like that

N: I think the smartphone is nothing if you don't have data... in my way... whatever you have the best smartphone like him [gestures towards husband] or a cheaper one like mine [shows me her own phone] it doesn't matter if you don't have access to data. Because I have smartphone, but it is hard for me sometimes, I am always looking for wifi or getting people to share their data with me... sometimes it is embarrassing you know... I go to the dance class for example and people want me to send photos to them, but I don't have data and I might ask them to share with me or send it to them later when I get home... it can be so embarrassing because not everybody knows I am asylum [seeker] you know? And I don't always want to tell people, but it can make it obvious when I don't have data or a way to explain this

I: How do you normally access data or the internet?

Solin: I have a SIM card um... Giffgaff... I pay once per month...

I: Do you have wifi at home?

S: No... but because we are now moving when we get papers, hopefully we will get this in our new home

I: Do you think that will be easier?

S: Yes... of course, having wifi makes life a lot easier... sometimes you know, you have to be careful about how much data you will use, or what you do with it... when you can have wifi in your home, this is not a problem

Salat: He [Baba] says last month I spent £57 only for one month. Uhh... He is a rich, man, don't worry [laughs].

I: And you how? Do you normally get data?

S: Me, I have one free from hotel and someone is send me one SIM card for more than one year. Just the Internet. No, no call, no text.

I: Do you know how much internet you get with that SIM?

S: No, I don't know. No, but I don't spend much even before... about I I use the data, but I spent only 15 gigabytes... [in response to BAB]*... He's... he's asking you what you are asking me for what... what you are asking. You have a question. And for what you are asking.

I: How do you normally get data for your phone?

Roda: I actually normally get data with Vodafone because it's really good company... they make discount for everything

I: Do your parents have phones as well?

R: yes they both have smartphones

I: did you get SIM cards from FODI when they were handing them out?

R: yes we got one... my dad has that one it is O2 with 20gb of data I think... it is really useful for him to make calls and talk to everyone whatever he wants

I: And your sisters... you have one sister right?

R: I have two sisters and one brother

I: do they have phones?

R: yes they have phones as well... they use them a lot for different platforms like social media... Tik tokk especially, Instagram, Snapchat... my brother is the youngest he is thirteen years old, my sisters are fourteen and I am twenty

I: And how do you normally access data or the internet?

Amira: I have a 3 SIM it is very good but it is expensive for me

I: Do you pay monthly or is it pay-as-you-go?

A: Monthly, I get around 40gb of data with this SIM... this is good for me

I: Did you get one of the free SIMs from FODI when they were giving them out?

A: No... but I wanted to [laughs]... they wouldn't give me one when they had them here... too many people wanting one so

I: And how do you normally get data or Internet?

SOR: Uh, you mean the...

I: Do you have SIM card?

SOR: Yes. So now I think, yes, yes. Yes, all of them is SIM card, yeah...

I: Yep. And was it a? SIM card that Fody gave you. Or do you pay for it every month?

SOR: For him... every month is £30. That's for unlimited data... free data... free calls... free texts. Hermen also has unlimited... unlimited and he also shared for the family, his family.

I: OK. OK. And what about you?

SOR: Yeah, I have... that £15 per month, 20 giga, yeah.

I: 20 gig, OK. And do you think that's enough?

SOR: No, no... no, that's not enough because I will share it for my family. It's about that... almost... this is the 20 days or 18 days. Yeah, it's not enough. Yeah.

I: OK, the interview is why your phones important to you as an asylum seeker. So have you got a smartphone? How would you normally access the Internet?

Okot: I connect to the Internet where I'm staying like the hotel, and then... like Wi-Fi... that is how I get internet normally

I: Do you have a SIM card?

O: Yes, yes.

I: Is it from a FODI? Or is it one that you pay for yourself?

O: Ummm it's not from FODI, but one of the charity back in Middlesbrough, yeah, they gave us.

I: OK. And how much data do you get with that?

O: I don't really know.

I: Even though you don't know, is it enough data though?

O: Yeah, yeah. All I know is every month, every month it start again, you know. I don't know how much data... but I get it every month. I find out when I get a text sometimes that it is finished... then I have to only use Wifi.

Question 3: Do you use your phone to contact MEARs or Migrant Help?

Gamal: I call the migrant help sometimes when I have something to complain about. This is from a local number - so it is a normal call.
I: What is migrant help?
P: It is... if you have something to complain about, living in a hotel, you can get help from them. Because migrant help work with MEERs, so some people who work in MEERs make a lot of mistakes... they put it on you. This is what happened to me personally. I met the worst person I met in my life... the MEERs manager.
I: Was this in Sunderland?
P: No Doncaster, she has two faces... she says one things to me and the opposite to the MEERs manger. She tells me do this do this, and then telling other people don't do this, and I did it. I was acting as a translator for them... which means a lot of people come to me and want to translate things for them to the managers. There are a lot of things happening in the hotel... selling drugs, people wanting to rape people, people with a knife... the managers just want to gloss over these things. They tell people just to forgive.... It is a lot for me. She is the worst person I ever met, in the end, she and the security came together. I told her there was a lot of things happening in the hotel... they tried to put all of the problems on me, just to put them on me. I told her... I say things as they are. She said no, lies they can live forever. She told me that I don't understand why people come to the UK and think its safe — the person comes to me without any reason and wants to hit me with a knife. In front of cameras and security, and they didn't want to help.
Soo... When I come I knew nothing about the UK, I was just wondering whether the UK was like this, she told me people have drugs, people have knives... this is normal. But when i moved to Newcastle and met the manager from MEERs, I told her I felt like I travelled to another county. It was 100% different... the people, everything.
I: Did you call migrant help when you were in Doncaster?
P: Yes a lot.
I: Did they do anything to help?
P: Yes, but its like a circle. In the end... they said like this guy is complaining about this problem, this goes to the manager, this goes to the woman I told you about, she will tell this information and do with it. My problem was with her. For me, I don't think they would believe me... she worked for years and they don't know nothing about it. And believe me, in that hotel, I haven't been there for 6 months... in these 6 months I'm sure there are lots of problems happening and nobody knows about it.

Hafiz: Migrant help you can contact through online chat or phone calls because sometimes the interpreters speak more confidently... free... over the phone. You know in the drop-ins, you can see people all on the phones to migrant help, waiting for responses about different problems that they might have
I: Have you ever contacted migrant help?
H: Yes... [doesn't elaborate on this] sometimes you have to wait over an hour for them to answer your call, waiting around. Actually, this happened last week in the drop in, I was very agitated [also apologizes to me for this] because I had been waiting for them to call me back and they didn't
I: What about MEARs, do you use your phone to contact them?
H: ... [pauses to think] if I want to contact MEARs, I contact the house manager through a phone call on WhatsApp, I've never contacts MEARs directly, only my personal house manager who deals with problems from there

I: Have you ever used your phone to get support or advice in the asylum process? Through MEARs or Migrant Help?
Yad: MEARs, yes a few times. I think I have called them 4 or 5 times since being in Sunderland.
I: Do you have any examples?
Y: Yes on time I called them when I was changing accommodation, from the hotel to a house in Sunderland. Another time I call because our fridge stopped working, another for the electricity that was off for 3 or 4 days and other time for our... how do you say... cooking?
I: The cooker?
Y: Yes, it also stopped working [laughs]... nothing works! And then the final time I called because my bed broke, I could not sleep on it very comfortably... and with my back ohh, it was very painful.
I: Were they helpful when you called?
Y: I called Migrant Help because my bed broke, it was very painful ... they sorted out the problems, but you know ... sometimes they are very slow to fix things, for the bed I was waiting 21 days ... on the last day I called them again and I was told to call Migrant Help ... I called them and I was on hold for almost two and a half hours ... eventually ... picked up and told me to go back to Mears ... hours on the phone, waiting ... when you are waiting for them to pick up the phone, it drives you crazy listening to the music they play [laughs].

I: I know you now have settled status, but when you were applying for asylum, did you ever use your phone to get support? Either through MEARs or contacting Migrant Help?
Kaamil: I was in hotel during COVID, so I did a lot of things myself... buying everything, things like that. We were basically alone. Sometimes I call MEARs if there is an issue... the hotel was not good and I wanted to be in a house, to live normally... to cook, to live normally... the hotel it is nice, but it's not normal life. There were also lots of homeless people at the time, lots of people taking drugs, smoking weed in the hotels you know... I don't like this. Begin Muslim I don't like being around these kinds of people... I wanted to leave
I: Did you get put in a house?
K: Eventually yes, MEARs helped a lot with that
I: And now, it's different because you're settled... you're now with Gentoo?
K: Yes, they are like two different systems... asylum is MEARs and Migrant Help, now it is Gentoo and Council... Gentoo found my flat for me and were helpful... any problem you can call and they will fix for you... without them I would be homeless, you know.
I: Have you ever had any issues with either Gentoo or the Council?
K: Yes [laughs]... you know, I showed you the photographs of my roof [scrolls through his phone to find the series of photographs which he begins swiping through]... do you want me to send them to you?
I: If you would, that would be great
K: Of course, I showed you the emails I sent to them about the roof collapsing from the bad leak... weeks it took for them to come and fix it... I told them about the leak and they ignored me, a week later the roof collapsed. I think the tiles on the roof of the house were not good... some of them were broken, I think this was the problem. I told you, they gave me a date for them to come and fix it four months later... it is not good you know, living like that. Eventually I emailed somebody from the council and they were able to come and fix it, but it was still not good
I: And you took photographs of everything using your phone?
K: Yes, this is the most important thing... because people don't believe you... they want to see proof of the situation. So I take photographs of everything and send them to them so they can see

I: And did you ever use your phone to contact MEARs or Migrant Help during the asylum process?
Mehar: Yes, lots
I: Could you give me an example?
M: I phoned them many times, especially MEARs, because we had many problems with our house... always things going wrong or when we needed to get something repaired. One time, there was water coming down from the bathroom... leaking through the roof... which caused the electric to cut out. Another time, the washing machine had broken and we couldn't fix it. I had to call our house manager [MEARs] to get somebody to come and fix it. We also had to call migrant help sometimes when there were problems with our asylum cases.
I: Were they helpful when you called?
M: Yes, they always fix things in the end

I: Have you ever used your phone to get support or advice in the asylum process? (MEARs or Migrant Help)
Asad: Yes, I have rang MEARs a lot, especially our housing manager... in our kitchen they have a board with their number on who you call if you have a problem... a lot of times we have had problems with the heating or the electricity and we have had to call them.
I: Do you have an example you could tell me?
A: A couple of weeks ago ... it was snowing very bad ... our heating stopped working. It was so cold. We went four days without any heating ... we were using our blankets in the living room to try and stay warm ... we called Mears ... our housing manager... on the first day many times and sent messages on WhatsApp ... all of us [talking about the three other men living in the house] were on hold, calling Migrant Help for one, maybe two hours each time for three or four days to get it fixed.

I: How do you use your phone as part of the asylum process? Have you ever used your phone to contact MEARs or Migrant Help?
Ishan: Yes of course, we use it for that a lot... like if you have problem in the house or you need to contact somebody about an issue we connect with house managers at MEARs... so we use it a lot here, it is important to be able to connect with them
I: Do you think it is helpful being able to contact them this way?
Is: yes
Santi: You know, now you're looking at all information... its important the internet you know... social media, internet, news here in the UK or in your country, for me it is very important. To talk with my family, for information. Maybe sometimes migrant help send me information and I need internet for looking at this information?
I: Do either of you have an example where you've contacted Migrant Help or MEARs that you could tell me about?
S: Umm
Is: Yeh, before I use it for connect with Migrant Help... for me when I move here it was important to give them my new address and connect with MH to tell them about my new address here in Sunderland... I connect with them for that. And... also... I connect with them if I have problem in help I will tell them about what is happening in the house... MEARs and Migrant Help a lot of the time

I: In your experience as an asylum seeker, how have you used your phone as part of the asylum process?
 Habib: Yes my lawyers, I use my phone for lawyers, migrant help... everyone. This is what I use my phone for?
 I: Do you do this a lot?
 H: Yeh... it's not a lot but mainly... like Migrant Help I call two times in the last month
 I: And is that when you have a problem or issues?
 H: Yes, when I have a problem I use my phone to call Migrant Help... my lawyer I call a lot too... this is how I usually use my phone
 I: Do you ever use WhatsApp for your lawyer?
 H: Yes, sometimes
 I: Do you meet your lawyers in person? Or it is all online or through your phone?
 H: Just phone...
 I: So you've never met them in person?
 H: No, never
 I: And what about MEARs?
 H: MEARs?
 I: Yes, are you in the hotel? Or in a house?
 H: I'm in a house...
 I: So your housing manager? Do you ever use your phone to get in contact with them?
 H: My house manager is rose... yes yes... but I... I use the same phone. If I have problems with my house, I call her and she helps to sort it out. But when I call the house manager, they say to call migrant help... usually between these two numbers

I: So before, did you have your phone for as long as you've been in the UK?
 Tamir: Since the day I arrive in the UK and seek asylum, the first thing I did was get a phone to get contact... to reach Migrant Help... and that phone helped me to get the support I need... I was, I called, I used directions... I kept communicating until I get my asylum... through the help in my phone I was able to go through the asylum process
 I: So when you've been in Sunderland [interrupted...] have you ever used your phone to contact Mears?
 T: Mears... in fact, when I have heating problem in my house, I have to try to get a number to call... right now, I got their number but it is online, I can't get internet... even if I have internet I couldn't use it because my gmail is locked
 I: What about before?
 T: Before I contacted Mears... I contact Migrant help... I contact them when I have a problem and they reply to me... that is important to have my phone I would say

I: So the second question is how do you use your phone as part of getting support during the asylum process?
 Nala: So much... yeh so much for, you have to research everything about being an asylum seeker using your phone... you know we knew nothing about the legal rules or laws before we became asylum seekers, the phone is so important for being able to research and understand these things
 I: Have you ever used your phones specifically to contact people from Migrant Help or MEARs?
 N: Oh yes almost everyday at some points when we first became asylum seekers
 Hamid: Always... when our roof was leaking
 N: [laughs] everything... everything
 H: Any problem you have you have to call them, and they are able to help you fix the problem or emergency... erm boiler... our boiler broke once, and our cooker it was also broken.
 N: Everything...
 H: Migrant Help you can call and they will help you to get it fixed...
 N: you have to be patient because you will wait a long time sometimes to get things done... either when you call them you have to wait, or then you have to wait for the problem to be fixed... weeks it takes sometimes with lots of calling and messaging

I: How do you use your phone to get support or advice in the asylum process?
 Solin: Yes... asylum seekers... we call Migrant Help a lot... all the time when you have a problem you have to call them, and Mears sometimes too depends on the problem... if it is a problem with your house a lot of the time it is both of them
 I: Do you find it useful to be able to call them?
 S: Yes they are helpful... but you know... a lot of the time, you must wait a long time for them to answer... sometimes hours, the last time I called... I was here in the kitchen... I had my phone on the side on, what you call? [looks to Sarbast]
 I: On hold? Waiting?
 S: Yes... with the music [both laugh]

I: Yeah, yeah [laughs]. Have you ever used your phone to contact MEARs or migrant help?
 Salar: He [Baba] says yes many times he used to contact them, but when he says like now he has a sore throat and he becomes tired because they didn't answer me. But now we have a different link for migrant help. Very easy when you go to website, just refill form and after you write it your issue what is, what kind.
 I: OK. Ohh so you don't call them. You fill this in.
 S: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You give. Yeah... He says before I am, I am in very, very bad bad condition for my house. Then he they asked me a lot many question but after his call, they hung up the phone. And nobody answered.
 I: Do they have translators when you call?
 S: Yes... He says yes. He he says, yeah, or someone who's me that time. Help me or... I told them I needed translator. They they bring me translator.
 I: Okay. How about you?
 S: Yes, for myself, even now, I call to migrant help. Migrant help or Mears... But even now I call migrant help, I need translate. Why? Because I want situation has become clearer. Even I speak English. But I want to be where you are. Understand this. I help him very much... everyone not here because I supported everybody here without a friend. He says. I don't know anything, I will contact me... I will help them.

I: So have you or your parents ever used your phone to contact mears or migrant help?
 Roda: yes a lot... because my parents don't speak very much English... so I just call mears or migrant help to to everything
 I: so you do most of that work?
 R: yes
 I: that must be really hard on you
 R: yes a lot
 I: and is it the same with lawyers?
 R: yes I do everything... lawyers... everything
 I: do you meet them in person or is it online, or on your phone?
 R: sometimes I just call her and sometimes in person [snapchat notification that draws attention away] it depends on her time
 I: and do you use WhatsApp or anything to stay in contact with her? Or is it mainly calls?
 R: like emails... usually

I: Okay... have you ever used your phone to get help during your time as an asylum seeker in the UK?
 Amira: Yes, a lot. All the time calling Migrant Help, calling the house managers, in the hotel, you know. I spend so much time doing this
 I: What about Migrant Help?
 A: Yes... just calling them when you have a problem, sometime with S95 support... a different time I had to call them because I needed a new ID card... and without the ID card I couldn't open a bank account... they are not very helpful to be honest, at least when I have had a problem... they tell you to go to a different place or a different organisation to solve the problem always... they never sort it themselves... it is really... annoying... when I was waiting for ID card, I would ring them and they would say you have to keep waiting for it... they gave me a link to check, it was a website on the government page... and the links to find out more information didn't work [laughs]
 I: And do you find you have to wait a long time when you call them?
 A: Of course, always. Sometimes 40 minutes, sometimes two hours... it is a joke really... two hours and what can you do? You have to sit and wait around for them to answer... and even when they do a lot of the time they are not helpful... or they give you the contact details for somebody else to go to them... really believe me.

I: OK. Yeah, yeah. OK. And so the next question is, have you ever contacted anybody like migrant help or MEARs with your phone?

SOR: Yeah, yes, of course. But for me, the same question for me... yes, but the the contact to the migrant health is free not to pay. OK, but contacted to the social worker... It's mostly pay of course, and already, myself, I contact to the social worker by WhatsApp is the perfect... but you need internet for this.

I: So do you when you contacted migrant help, or the social workers from Mears, do you find them useful? Are they helpful?

SOR: Yes, of course. And he talked about if we need anything you can contact directly to the migrant help and they will help and they support.

I: Have you had any problems when contacting them, like waiting a long time?

SOR: Yes, this is a long time... for about the 40 minutes and 1/2 hour we are waiting for because the queue... it's a lot at migrant help especially

I: OK. Have you ever contacted anybody like MEARs or migrant help with your phone?

Okot: Of course, Migrant Help a lot

I: OK. How would you normally do that?

O: Through a phone call... you have to ring them with a number that you can find online... you tell them your problem and they will fix it

I: And have you found them useful?

O: Yes, I find it useful in very useful, yeah.

I: Do you have any examples of when you've called them?

O: Which I no, which I can think. Of right. No, no, no, no.

I: Have you ever called them when you were in the hotel?

O: Yes, I have.

I: Do you have you ever had any problems when you've called?

O: Yes, but you know what you say the connection and... that they say... glitch a lot of the time... like the robot voice, you can't sometimes understand the questions that they ask you. This is a problem... and if you don't speak good English, many people have to use a translator on the call as well, which can make it complicated

I: OK... and a lot of people say they have to wait a long time for them to answer is this true?

O: Right. That's true. Yeah, yeah. Takes a long time sometimes, yeah. Sometimes you are waiting for like an hour... two hours... it is what it is. If you have a problem, you have to wait. Who else will fix it?

I: What about you? For you. What do you feel? Specific specifically for like applying for asylum though, do you think it's important?

Vadin: Applying for asylum?

I: Yeah, like your solicitors. Migrant Help...

V: I don't think so

I: Why not?

V: Talking about smartphone?

I: Yes

V: Because, you know, usually those things you don't do that over the phone... so you get mail or the message but then, you have to find the address of the appointment and seeing the address you go. But of course it's important. It's like something urgent comes up, for example. To book an appointment you have to have a phone, you have to have data to be able to contact somebody to fix a problem. Whatever that problem is

Question 4: Do you use your phone to contact the Home Office?

I: Does the Home Office use phones to stay in contact with you?
Gamal: No — I see on google that they have a number but I don't try to use it.
I: So the HO don't email you or anything?
G: They emailed me once when they said send me ID card. Always I get things about immigration: they send me emails all the time.
I: Do you read them?
G: Twice or three times, now I just delete them.

I: Do you have email contact with the HO?
Hafiz: Sometimes the HO email me, I can also contact them via email. Sometimes I email them via email and they get back to me but most often it is my solicitor I use my phone for. When I moved to Sunderland I contacted them [Home Office] to tell them my new address, they still thought I was in old accommodation, I told them I moved and updated my address through them

I: Okay, so the first set of questions I'm going to ask you are about you and your phone during the time you were applying for asylum. I know you are now settled, but you can think about when the were in that process
Mehar: Okay, that is fine
I: When you were applying for asylum, did you ever use your phone to be in contact with the Home Office and/or your solicitors?
M: Yes I did... I first arrived here in the UK... October 19th of 2019. After the initial interview, I had forgotten the case number they [Home Office] have given me and my family in our application. I had to email and ring them up to get the number again. This was a few weeks, but we got it in the end.

I: So when you were applying for asylum, did you ever use your phone to contact the Home Office and/or your solicitors?
Kaaamil: Yes, it was a lot of calls. With the Home Office. A first I did not speak good english when I came to the UK, so I was calling them [solicitor] with a translator... three way call on Whatsapp. After I got my decision, the Home Office emailed me with confirmation... after my first one I only heard from them via email. My second interview data was communicated through email. After I got the paper at my house [he shows me a photograph of his asylum application approval].
I: Why did you take a photograph of this?
K: Because it is important... to send to my wife, to send to lawyers, to apply for ID apply for jobs, they all ask for this... bank statements... they want to see this paper and I can send them via photograph.

I: Have you ever used your phone in getting in contact with the Home Office?
Yad: Yes, but only one time... I had to email them about a change of circumstances. Remember when I told you about my back? That time I had to email them because I could not walk up the stairs because of my back... I was emailing them to tell them about this [he takes a few minutes searching for the email, he eventually pulls it up and shows me the correspondence between himself and the Home Office representative] ... but they never got back to me in terms of making any changes, nothing happened.
I: So your accommodation was not changed?
Y: No, nothing [laughs] it was very painful, most of the time I had to sleep downstairs but the bathroom was upstairs

I: Have you ever used your phone to contact the Home Office?
Asad: I used one time... it was to apply for an ARC identity card [takes his wallet out of his pocket and shows me the ID card]... I had to email them first to send them my details... it was very helpful and now I have this card which helps me

I: Have you ever used your phone in relation to your asylum claim? Have you ever contacted the Home Office or your solicitors?
Maaz: The Home Office? No... I don't have their email, I have not been in contact with them for over two years, from when I first came here... I know you can email them for some things but I haven't. I have been here a long, long time... no contact, just waiting for another interview.

I: Okay, so the next set of questions are about your experience of having your phone when you were applying for asylum, are you comfortable with talking about this?
Palesa: Yes, this is fine
I: Could you tell me a little but about how you used your phone when you were applying for asylum?
P: At the time of asylum application, I did not use my phone at all really. It is important for me to tell you that I first came to the UK in 2017
I: So before COVID?
P: Yes, I came in Ocotober 2017 when I had my original interview in London and then I had my second interview in March 2018 in Newcastle when I got my papers. But this was not digital at all. What was digital thought, was when I was able to apply for family reunion a couple of months after this.
I: So, when you were applying for asylum, you did not use your phone to contact your solicitor or anything like this?
P: I mean we called and texted eachother, but our meetings were mainly in person. When I first arrived here, actually, the Home Office called me because you know... I didn't have a passport... so the Home Office called me to ask me about details of my application... they asked me about how I travelled here and things like that, but the person on the other end told me things about myself [laughs]... they spell out my surname and my date of birth... how did they know this? They told me the last time I was in the UK, the 4th of April in 2008 [laughs again]... they know everything! But this was the only time the Home Office every called me through my phone.

I: Have you ever used your phone to get into contact with the Home Office?
Habib: No, no... I don't have a number to get into contact with the home office
I: Do they ever email you?
H: I have email but... any email from the Home Office... maybe once

I: How do you use your phone as part of the asylum process? So as the daughter, do you know anything about when you first came to the UK... your parents, how they might have used their phones as asylum seekers?
Roda: yes. When we arrived to the UK, we didn't know about like smartphones, but when we start like a year, we find that smartphones were very helpful for contacting migrant help... organisations like that
I: so when you first arrived, you didn't have a phone as a family?
R: no... no phone
I: and... where were you when you first arrived in the UK?
R: we first arrived in London... and we just stayed a year in the hotel... because they didn't give us accommodation, I have a sister who is disabled so it was a bit hard for us to find this
I: what year was this?
R: 2019
I: so just before COVID right?
R: yes
I: so when you got moved out of the hotel, did you come to Sunderland?
R: actually no... we got moved to Wakefield, we just stayed around a month there then they just sent us to Sunderland
I: ...and were you in a house in Sunderland?
R: yes

Question 5: Do you use your phone to contact your solicitors?

I: Do you use your phone to contact the lawyer?
Gamal: I don't phone my lawyers, I am in contact with the interpreter the most... mainly through WhatsApp and phone calls. But I don't believe in them... their policies and things. It's not important for me to contact them... look our case, it doesn't need a lawyer. A lot of lawyers it just takes money... the interpreter just wanted me to sign... don't speak don't say nothing. We don't need lawyers.
I: Why not?
P: Because the lawyer only works after... if we get a negative decision, before not. When I talk about these things it makes me stressed. I believe there is one day the truth will appear.
I: Do you have any idea of when a decision will be made?
P: No, I've been here since December... I'm still waiting for an interview. Sometimes I get depressed and get so bad — I watch the door all day: the post.
I: And you have no idea when this will be?
P: No this is the worst thing... then you go to college and teacher starts to shout... it all builds up.

Hafiz: When I first came to the UK, I used my phone to find my solicitor, then for asylum applying... application... I don't need it. I mainly need it just to get my solicitor at the beginning... where can I find them, which is the best for me... and now I used my phone to contact them... how things are, going forward what will happen, these kinds of things. Is is [gestures towards phone on the table] important for me if I get an interview to get the email
I: What kinds of platforms do you and your solicitors use?
H: Mainly Whatsapp and calls through the app... it is easier than calls through a mobile number, I have three, you know

I: Did you ever use your phone to contact your solicitor during that time?
Mehar: Yes, always.
I: Was this through WhatsApp?
M: Yes, it is easier because I had a different number when I was in Denmark, from EE, but I had to change when I got to the UK... with WhatsApp, it lets you change your number but keep your history which is important... to keep in contact with solicitors when you change your number lots [laughs and picks up his phone from the table, scrolling through contacts. He turns the phone to me and shows me a saved contact. The name is in Arabic, but he tells me that this is his old number that he has saved in his phone, just in case].

I: With your solicitor, did you normally contact them via WhatsApp?
Kaamil: A mix of WhatsApp and normal calls, it was changing with COVID-19 because there was less face-to-face contact... but WhatsApp or calls is sometimes a problem because back then, people like me, always changing phone numbers, yeh?

I: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with your solicitors?
Yad: Of course, all the time... and my interpreter but I use them less now that my English is getting better. But sometimes they are important to translate complicated words or phrases, you know.
I: And how do you normally contact them?
Y: Always through WhatsApp
I: Have you ever met your solicitors or translator face-to-face?
Y: Never, only through calls and messages... you know it is helpful because I can send documents and pictures to both of them in the Whatsapp chat we have and it is very quick... but sometimes it is easier to meet people face-to-face, especially when it is something important or complicated
I: Do you use video calls or is it only normal calls?
Y: Normal calls only... and sometimes messages

I: Do you use your phone to contact your solicitors?
Asad: Sometimes I use my phone to email my solicitors... sometimes to send documents and things like that, sometimes we will call
I: Do you ever use anything like WhatsApp?
A: No... but I usually meet my solicitors in person, we just use emails to send documents... I have friends who use WhatsApp a lot with theirs, but they have never met them in person... my solicitor is in Gateshead so they are easy to get to, sometimes I get the bus or metro... I think this is better because it is easier to talk in person and understand what is happening with your case

I: What about your solicitors over that time? Have you contacted them using your phone?
Maaz: Yes sometimes... sending documents and things like that
I: What kinds of platforms do you use for that?
M: Platforms?
I: Like apps or ways of communicating?
M: We use email... it is easy for sending things or keeping track of different documents
I: No WhatsApp?
M: No, never. We usually meet face to face so it is not important to use Whatsapp... I have Whatsapp, but not for this.

I: Do you think it would have been useful if contact with certain people or organisations were digital at the time?
Palesa: Yes, definitely... it is super useful to be able to contact important people like your solicitors, maybe like sending documents or replying to emails. I know this now because of my family reunion case. During lockdown in COVID 2020, I had to wait for the Home Office to review my appeal for my case and my daughter, my lawyer... I could not meet them in person... so they video called me on WhatsApp to tell me the outcome and we were both so happy... smiling and celebrating. But now I use it a lot because of my case for a family reunion... it started during COVID and still has not been sorted today [laughs and shrugs]. Now if I want to speak to my lawyer, I speak to him on the phone to communicate.
I: Do you use WhatsApp too?
P: Yes a lot, WhatsApp is good because you can do everything on there... sending documents, voicemessages... sometimes my lawyer sends me things and I sign them on there... it is very easy to do it this way rather than having to travel to see them.

I: And what about your solicitors? How do you use your phone to get support or advice in the asylum process? Lawyer?
Ishan: Yes of course I use it for that... I connect with him a lot using my phone... asking about anything new in my case...
I: And just calls? Or things like email or WhatsApp?
Is: For me, just calls mostly. I WhatsApp him sometimes... with documents or small messages, but a lot of the time we call because it is easier
I: Is it the same for you? [SEB]
Santi: Yes... same for me... MH send me information for a lawyer you know... information for dentist, hospital, the health centre. It's all given through my phone. I talk to my lawyer a lot during some weeks on WhatsApp... I send them questions, documents... things like this [...] it is a very easy way to communicate, we video call for our meetings... I think it is good [...] I have never met them in person.. It's all given through my phone.

I: And your solicitors, do you use your phone to stay in contact with them?
Tamir: My gmail, I contact them though my gmail... whatever problem or whatever issue that I have I just email them [...] gmail is very important for this... as an advocate for African human rights, my gmail, I am no longer active...

I: Do you use your phones to stay in contact with your lawyers?
Nala: yes... Whatsapp always
Hamid: I'll tell you how we are using WhatsApp, our neighbour is a very nice neighbour... they have wifi and they gave us their password so we can use it in the house, use it to use WhatsApp and things like this... we are always nice with them and they are nice with us... they said no problem we can use their wifi... we have...
N: before there were other people there and now there are other people coming, they didn't give us anything... now it is good people, they give us access

I: How do you use your phone as part of the asylum process?
S: Before our interview... we used our phone to contact our lawyer a lot...
I: How would you normally contact them?
S: Phone calls... a lot of Whatsapp too...
I: How did you use Whatsapp?
S: um... we use a lot of messages on there... especially in the time before the interview to check documents, make sure we were ready for it... it was very helpful for us... but it is also important to meet in person sometimes, but it depends... some friends we know don't do this
I: Don't meet in person?
S: No... only meeting their lawyer with their phone... this is good but it is not the same, you know?

I: And what about your solicitors? Do you use your phone to contact your solicitor or lawyers?
Salar: I contacted my solicitor but it's not often.
I: Do you have meetings in person or is it all online?
S: No, only only online, only from WhatsApp.
[translation]
S: Now he [Baba] is more talking about his health and he says I want to cheque out myself... But because of my father and my grandfather, they had cancer and we try when every six months I... I check out myself. But they can't do it here. GP told him you are not registered with us. I don't know. Something strange.
I: Can you ask him if he uses his phone to stay in contact with his lawyer?
S: And the lawyers stopping contacting... long time I contacted different things... I don't know organisation what they call that company, I don't know, but I contact to them two times. Yeah, they we have spoken together. I told him he needed solicitor. They told me, OK, just give me details. I gave them. And today again he's told me, I didn't... no one is not contacting me and I don't have any solicitor.
I: That's not good.
Baba: No, chance.

I: Do you contact MEARs too?

Amira: No not Mears

I: Okay, what about your solicitor?

A: Definitely my solicitor, like everyday... this is one of the most important things being here as an asylum seeker... I am able to contact them whenever I need to

I: How do you normally contact them?

A: Usually through Whatsapp... we message on there... sending documents things like this... we also use gmail sometimes to book in face-to-face appointments, but mainly whatsapp for me. It is good... very easy for me. : And what about Mears?

A: No, I don't contact Mears

I: Your solicitors?

A: Yes, always, I am on the phone with my solicitor a lot, like almost everyday, sending documents, ID things like this.

I: How do you normally do that? Like... do you use Whatsapp?

A: yes, we use Whatsapp a lot... also gmail, but a lot of the time it is Whatsapp. It is very easy for me this way... on Whatsapp you can do a lot of things like voice notes, call, video call, send photographs... it is very important

I: OK, so your phone, do you use it to contact your solicitor?

Okot: Yes, yes, yes, often.

I: How... how do you normally contact them?

O: OK... On WhatsApp, you know. With the SIM card, the Internet and contact through WhatsApp. Normally I just WhatsApp them and they reply to me... it is very easy to contact them this way.

I: Have you ever met them in person or is it all on your phone?

O: I met in person twice... usually only through my phone... calls, messages, voice notes, this kind of thing.

I: OK. Do you think it's useful that you can contact them with your phone?

O: It is helpful, yeah... because it is so easy... sometimes it can be very hard for people to contact their solicitor, especially if they don't speak very good English... for me, I am lucky because I do speak English... but still the phone is very helpful, a lot quicker than travelling to somewhere like Newcastle, where you would pay for the bus and these things.

I: Yeah, yeah. OK. So the first part of the interview is about how your phone helps you as an asylum seeker. So do you use your phone to contact your solicitors or lawyers?

SOR: Yes, of course... both of them.

I: How do they normally do it? Is it calls, is it WhatsApp?

REN: WhatsApp and e-mail.

SOR: Both both of them it's by e-mail and WhatsApp and he said is contacted by directly. And by the by the WhatsApp, yeah.

I: OK. Have they ever ever met them in person? Or only through the phone?

I: Do they meet the lawyer in person as well, or is it only through their phone?

SOR: OK... Yeah, any members. But sympathy. But see me I need. I think your question is about the how to contact or the solicitor or then yes, both of them is say contacted with the solicitor directly with the solicitors in person.

I: OK. And how about you, do you, how do you contact your solicitor?

SOR: I'm already in contact with this letter by e-mail. It's. But sometimes, by the direct contact? Yeah, direct.

I: And do you think it's useful to be able to contact them with your phone?

SOR: It is very useful. I think that the e-mail is very useful for us because... sometime the translator or interpreter cannot fit for us well. Yeah, it's the e-mail is perfect for us. For me. I'm talking about the myself. Yeah.

Question 6: Overall, do you think having a phone as an asylum seeker is important?

Gamal: Phoning directly... this makes so much difference.
I: What about things like WhatsApp?
P: Whatsapp is always good friends, girlfriend... someone to text most of the time. For something serious or urgent, you always use normal call. For the interpreter, its not useful. I call him in WhatsApp, I call him in normal. Both are the same.

I: Overall, the smartphone and your asylum application process are not linked?
P: I can tell you something important... people who come to the UK, they get ideas or contacts through social media. They can advice through these things. This is before they come... like there are a lot of Arabic groups, they say go here go here these countries are good. It's like selling something, you can find the people who will take you. They are facebook groups... there is a huge impact of social media on immigration. It's like an infection, some people go to other countries to apply for asylum because they see it on social media. They see that they are growing up, getting better in life... some people really have issues and don't have places to live. This is a huge problem — all asylum seekers are not the same. Not all of them deserve this — asylum is like if he have problem in his country... something like that, there is no place to go. It's a... deep thing. Some people they come for university... most of the people they are liars... they lie. If you lie good, you get what you want. This is true what im telling you. Some people change their nationality — they are not. I: And you think social media is part of this?
P: It helps a lot... a lot a lot. You told me before about instagram... imagine you have these groups and you check facebook maybe 20 a times a day, or 100. Imagine everyday you are seeing these stories and news and pictures. After 1-2 months a year, even if you don't have a problem you say you want to go. Even people share their stories... i say in interview. To use it for the interview... to say these lies in their interview. With names, with everything. Of course they change small things. Like someone say this story and get permission to stay, you can use this story. They went to the interview and know everything: they know exactly what they will say. You get permission. For me I was in the first interview, they asked me if I was in a prison. Ol said yes, and she said because I don't have my residence in Lebanon: it was end. They have a prison underground — she asked me how many days or months: days but I don't remember. The interpreter said how do you not remember the days in prison? I told her for me, these things... I don't put it in my mind, I'm living to forget these things. She sees that i am different... they are used to hearing direct response. She sees that I have not prepared an answer.

I: So my final question in this section is do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
Mehar: Of course, without it I would not be able to contact my GP, MEARs, or even FODI so easily... it is very helpful to me and my family. As a new person, in a new city, the phone becomes central to life, even for simple things like translation at the GP or when you talk to people from the Home Office, to make sure details are correct and things like that... it is important to understand these things so you don't make a mistake.

I: So, overall, do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK was helpful?
Kaamil: Yes, but when I take the ID to home office, I came out of the system as an asylum seeker, I'm no longer in that system. But everything was through the phone... now the organisations shift for different things, but I still need my phone to be in contact and keep up to date

Hafiz: honestly, no.
I: Why not?
H: Why not... because when I go, I want to contact with my solicitor, I know two minutes give him call... talking without thinking. You need to be sure 100% when you are talking to them, sometimes you call and talk about nothing important... it is good to know what you are talking about when you do this, sometimes I am absent in real life when I am waiting for a call. You know last week... Sometimes this makes things worse because of waiting for a phone call. With my solicitor and asylum claim, the phone is not good for me, it is distracting... You can't concentrate on your case, because I contact solicitor so many times about silly things and made a mistake, now I'm in trouble. With no phones, I would be able to concentrate more on this and not make mistakes. If they were face-to-face appointments and you knew what you were going to talk about beforehand, it would make it easier... for me, at least

H: But outside of this, the smartphone is so important, when I moved to Manchester... finding a museum you know, it is so important I couldn't do it without it. Finding friends in durham you know, even buying a train ticket, I couldn't do it.

I: Do you think there anything I've missed in this section that would be important to note down in relation to claiming asylum?
H: Hmm sometimes I search on google what is going on in the UK. Like when I first got here, learning about the culture... I knew nothing, you know... the language, different things like that google is so important for... On Facebook, sometimes I look up people in similar situations to see how they got their residence or visa. This is not good. People lie and give you wrong advice... I don't listen to them. But these groups are really popular on Facebook, people giving advice or tips - I try not to use them because they often are full of false information.

I: So overall, do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
Yad: I think so, definitely. Having my solicitor on Whatsapp with the translator has been very helpful and is much quicker than having to arrange meetings face-to-face. If I need to send a document for example, I can do it instantly, without having to go home and find it and bring it back. I think sometimes MEARs and Migrant help are less useful because there is a lot of waiting involved... one time I called Migrant Help in Sunderland because our big blue bin [recycling] was stolen and they said they couldn't help. We were told to ring the Council but I have no idea how to do this, I asked here [FODI] and still don't know. Sometimes the phone is not useful in this way.

I: So overall, do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
Asad: Yes definitely, it is helpful because you can get in contact with people quickly like your solicitor or GP, it is very useful to google these things. Having my phone also makes it easier to set up the appointments, sometimes you need to meet people face-to-face, but having your phone to make the appointment first is easy and then finding your way there.

I: So in relation to your experience of claiming asylum, do you think that the smartphone is helpful?
Ishan: Yeh so important because without phone you can't communicate with other people, you have to have a phone and internet connection to connect with people... without it, how can you do this?

I: Is there anything else that you think is important to mention about having a phone whilst being an asylum seeker?
Palesa: You know... the phone has opened my eyes to a lot of things. I would say my phone is my best friend here. Things people or the government don't tell you... or make difficult to find out... you can often find out by searching on your phone. For example, I never knew I could renew my i-card online. I asked lawyer to help to do it the first time, because you know, permission to work is complicated. But I found out how to renew by searching on google. I went online and looked on the website, they ask you about the date of expiry but it told me that some details were missing — where I am from, my date of birth — I went on the government website to try and find out how to change this but the information on there was so complicated and there was no simple explanation. It was really confusing. For asylum seekers, finding out information like this is so important, but it can sometimes be very difficult to find the answer you are looking for, especially on official websites like the Home Office. What they have on there is... very basic... or sometimes too complicated to understand, especially when my first language is not English. Because of this, my phone is mainly about making calls, navigating new places here, buying things online... like I went to London a couple of weeks ago... without my phone I would have been so lost, I bought my ticket on my phone too. It makes life so much easier. But, let me tell you... when it comes to immigration... when it comes to applying for asylum... the phone, is not really something I would say is beneficial or meaningful... for me it doesn't always mean positive things. Say... there are a lot of questions that I would like to ask you, or ask somebody, but you cannot find the answers anywhere. Nothing is straightforward... every asylum case is different, every individual is different, you cannot find the right answers for you. It is useful in some cases, like recently when I registered for my local GP near my home using the app I have on my phone, I discovered that organ donation is a choice: without my registering on the app I would not have known this... I don't want that... so I ticked the little box for me and my daughter when I registered us. My phone was the only reason I would be able to know this importation

I: Do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
Habib: Yes, of course... when I have a problem, I need help... being able to call them is very helpful... sometimes you have electric, you know electric?
I: Yes
H: Sometimes when the electric is not working, we have to call Migrant Help and our housing manager to get it fixed... if you have problem in the house you have to get somebody to come and fix it... gas and electric normally

I: So overall, do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
Tamir: All asylum seekers need a phone. Nobody can take it from them. Because you know... we don't have family here, we don't have family here... speaking to you now... my family are in Africa... my step-brother even I was connected with I lost connection with, I lost connection, I cannot reach them now... they lost their properties, their families, they lost everything. So we need a phone. The first things asylum seekers should have is a phone. Data. We need support for data, for phones. Without a phone, being an asylum seeker is like you are not existing... because you've lost everything... we are seeking refuge and safety here... you need to be able to check and communicate with your people back home, you can't access them without a phone because it is a matter of communication through the phone, this is a problem.

I: So do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
Hamid: very important... without a phone.... Now it is part of life, especially when you are waiting for solicitors, waiting for home office, waiting for charities... everything is online even courses or volunteering

I: Do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
S: Definitely... without a phone it would be so difficult to be an asylum seeker here... how can you stay in contact with lawyers... even small things like reporting problems with your home or case... the phone is... life.

I: So, do you think as an asylum seeker, it's important to have a phone?
Salar: Yes, sure. Very important. Without phone what would we do? We cannot do many normal things... the phone is so important for our mental health... not going crazy, you know.

I: Do you think that the smartphone being part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?
Roda: the phone is really important for asylum seekers... especially to contact migrant help because they will help for everything... they now have a platform to contact them directly
I: yes I've heard about this... it's an online form that you fill in right?
R: yes you fill it in online and they will... there is a we chat as well. You can chat with them in person and they will answer more quickly than a call
I: yes... because I've heard from a lot of people that when you call migrant help or means you often have to wait a long time, do you find this?
R: yes (laughs)
I: so is it faster doing it through the platforms do you think?
R: yes definitely

I: So on that note, the rest of the questions are more about your everyday life in the UK, but outside of applying for asylum. So do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Amira: For me, the smartphone is my entertainment, you know... we aren't allowed to work... this means most of us have to stay in the house and there is nothing to do a lot of the time... it is really bad for you... your mental health you know? But when you have a phone, it helps because it... occupies your mind you know? You can watch movies, use things like facebook, instagram, twitter... it helps to take your mind off other things, it is so important. I don't have anything like a TV either so having the phone to watch things is good for me

I: OK, so do. You think as an asylum seeker, it's important to have access to the Internet and a phone?
SOR: Yes, very, very important for us because we cannot contact another people because we don't have, we don't have any car... if you want to go to there must be sometime, maybe by phone, by e-mail. We can't do anything.
(translates)
Sometime we say in our our language... like the quilt... like the drinking the water, he said in the our language, he say like the phone use the phone like the drinking the water. It's for my language. It's very funny. This sentence, you understand?
I: Yeah, certainly. It's very important.
SOR: He said about that very, very important for us.

I: So overall, do you think as an asylum seeker in Sunderland, it's important to have a phone?
Okot: Having a phone as an asylum seeker... it's important to have a phone. I think it's important because in case anything happened to you outside, like who you need to contact, without a phone, who can you contact? But for me, my phone is important more for socializing... especially because I have moved from around the UK for the past 9 years of my life... a lot of my school friends are in London so I use a lot of social media to keep in contact with them... this is important for me because, you know, Sunderland and Middlesborough where my parents are now living is very different (laughs)... they are places you have to get used to... without my phone I think this would be very hard. But yes, I also think it's something that can distract you from you... you know stressful, problems, you know.
Vadin: Yes... sometimes scrolling or swiping for a long time can be tiring... it creates problems for you even if it feels like you are not bored or not lonely. This is a big problem in the hotel because... we have very little to do. We cannot work, we cannot just go out into the city because we have no SIM, no connections, little money. It is a problem. The phone is your friend, yes... but it can also be very dangerous... it is easy to fall into a trap. You can't live without nowadays but... it is not without its' problems.

Question 7: How is your smartphone important to you in your everyday life?

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Tamir: this is what I was explaining before, everything is on my phone... it is the only thing we have to connect with people, even children now, they need a phone... even if you have family, you need to contact people to support you... even organisations, you don't know where they are or how to contact them, you need your phone to find out... solicitor, you don't know where to find them or how to contact them, you need a phone to find out... maybe some face to face meetings but not always, if you have a phone you can contact them... if I have meeting with them, the only way you can make an appointment is through the phone. This is important for me, why I need my phone

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Hamid: everything is online now, even when you've applied for asylum... you will need to find your job online, everything is online now... everything you apply for is online... looking for jobs, giving a phone number, having online profiles... having a phone is so important, strong yes
Nala: when we first came here we didn't have a smartphone, so we don't know anything about the charity about Sunderland.. we don't know anything we just stay in the house, go for groceries, and then come home... when we got the smartphone, we slowly slowly began to know things
N: first time we can here they gave us £10, ST* gave us £10... first tenner from FODI... we used it to buy mobile data...
I: so when you had your phone, did you find it useful for becoming integrated into the community?
N: yes of course... I go to my friend... was it after lockdown or before lockdown?
H: after lockdown I think...
N: I go to to my friend and she gave me £50 to buy a smartphone

I: OK. The first questions are about how your phone is important for you as an asylum seeker.
Salar: He [Baba] says without phone I don't have life [laughs]. He says all my life is the only phone. He says when I don't have that, I am not sleeping well... I become crazy... He says sometimes even I have data, but I don't use exactly... but he I am unhappy when I see my phones without data and I says he says, how I can contact to my friends if I am without phone?

I: And how about you, do you think your phones important to be an asylum seeker?
S: For me? Yes, sure.
I: Why?
S: Why? Because it's today's technology is the technology without technology. If you can't contact it is not easy. Even before I be here without phone, it's very, very difficult. When you send one message, one the letter to. For my family, for someone in a different city, it need time. But phone is very easy and quickly. You can do what you... For him it is important because he is doing research for girlfriend [both laugh]... Yes, for for single person is like this. Sure, every night they are not sleep all night they are spending... Tinder [both laughs]
S: Hello... my name is John Travolta. No, no, me, I am sleep all all night.
Baba: Girlfriend sleep. Ohh no.

I: Okay... So the rest of the questions are more about your life in Sunderland, so not directly as an asylum seeker. Yeah, just living in Sunderland. Why? How or how is your phone important for you living in Sunderland?
Salar: How is the phone is important for me?
I: So like what sort of things do you think your phone is important for... as a new person living in Sunderland?
S: He [Baba] says his phone is more important because even in Sunderland, anywhere it's important because... how I told you. If I contacted my family or I contacted my solicitor, Doctor, GP, anywhere, migrant help... you need a phone only by phone you can contact with them. Even I use e-mail or something I must use my phone. Yes, this is why the phone is important.

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Hamid: everything is online now, even when you've applied for asylum... you will need to find your job online, everything is online now... everything you apply for is online... looking for jobs, giving a phone number, having online profiles... having a phone is so important, strong yes
Nala: when we first came here we didn't have a smartphone, so we don't know anything about the charity about Sunderland.. we don't know anything we just stay in the house, go for groceries, and then come home... when we got the smartphone, we slowly slowly began to know things
N: first time we can here they gave us £10, ST* gave us £10... first tenner from FODI... we used it to buy mobile data...
I: so when you had your phone, did you find it useful for becoming integrated into the community?
N: yes of course... I go to my friend... was it after lockdown or before lockdown?
H: after lockdown I think...
N: I go to to my friend and she gave me £50 to buy a smartphone

I: OK, so the. Next question is outside of your asylum application. Not in relation to the asylum application. How is your phone important to you? So like in your daily life, how would you say your phone is important for you?
SOR: OK. He... he talked about... I'm already contacted to the school, for his son, for his children... and contact to the any part of the like the FODI... like any organisation it is useful to them. But sometime, what is more useful to them is the Internet. We can use Internet is very useful, but I don't understand what's the aim of your question... the aim of your question is why it's important or how it's one problem.
I: So... like how do you use your phone in your everyday life? So like maybe contacting family, learning English thing games? Does that make sense?
HER: Snap, snap, man.
SOR: Yes, we already have talked about the... using the phone for... for because you don't know anywhere in the Sunderland, he said I use the map. We already might use the need the Internet and it's very useful for him... and about Soran... he was talking about the YouTube for learning English, yes, and contact for the school, so yeah.
I: How about you?
SOR: For me, I'm. Already I use it for the... not YouTube for learning English, but in the another site like the BBC and I'm already I'm a... educational people. I'm already a certificate. I'm reading the any... any side of about about the biology about the... my special IP... it's very, very useful. Sometimes I listen the song or sometime I heard the... I also, I'm watching that film. Documentary film... because I want to learn the the history of the England and the culture of this place.
I: Do you watch them in English?
SOR: In English, sometimes yes. Little bit. Yeah is that if the subtitle I understood everything. But without subtitle... that's is hard for me. Yeah.

WhatsApp

I: Do you use WhatsApp with your neighbors?
Gamal: Yes we have started, but sometimes we talk in person more. Especially if i don't see their kitchen light on. But they are not very good, they don't see the message or haven't realized that I've sent one - they say 'oh why did you not knock...' but social media makes us lose our privacy - people know when you're online, people say why didn't you answer me. This annoys me, I don't like it.
I: Do you think people care less about privacy now? With most people posting things on social media?
P: Yeh this is a problem... it is not safe. Especially not for people with lots of followers

I: So what would you say is the most important app you use in your everyday life?
Ishan: For me I use Whatsapp the most because i have a lot of friends there, i use for calling, messaging, to send photographs or documents... it is personally very important for me... I use instagram a lot, but not in the same was as WhatsApp...

I: So what would you say, if you had to pick one app on your phone, which one would be the most important for you?
Nala: I would say Whatsapp... because I want to contact my friends, my solicitor... everything is in there
Hamid: you have more than five group chats on there... six
N: ten, twenty I have everything on there
H: she's always on WhatsApp.. I have no patience for that... I use WhatsApp but I would say news is the most important for me
N: He's a politics man
H: yes politics, but I just want to be able to keep up with the news... when I talk to people I want to know what is going on to be able to talk to people... it is always changing... like I was reading this morning that they are giving questionnaires to people to speed up the asylum process... I like reading news about Pakistan too, my home, we have a very bad political situation back there so it is important to me to keep up with the news back there... our government is corrupt... we watch them

Family

Hafiz: The most important thing for me is contact with my mother on WhatsApp everyday... messaging, calling, video calling everything. This is so important, the most important.

I: Why is this important for you?

H: ... she is the closest person to my heart, I do everything for my mother. If she called and said come back to Syria, I would do it straight away. She told me to leave, so I left. She's my mom, I'm loyal. Being able to stay in contact in this way is so precious to me, without it I don't think I would be able to stay here without her. I need to be able to contact her, see how she's doing, see my family, you know.

I: So the questions now are more about your everyday life in Sunderland, you don't have to speak about anything directly related to you being an asylum seeker. Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?

Mehar: The first thing I think of is my family... even staying in contact with my wife and children, the phone makes it so much easier

I: How old are your children?

M: I have three, one 12, one 6 and one 4

I: Do any of them have a smartphone?

M: Just the older boy, you know, he is in school so he needs the phone to communicate with us and his friends when he goes out by himself. But the phone was also important for us when we were finding schools and researching them - to know where to send your children is very important. The schools also use calls to keep in contact with us

I: So do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?

Moiz: Yes, I'm here long time now in the UK it is very important. A lot of the time I talk to my family face to face through video... My family are back in Pakistan... we moved before I came to the UK from Afghanistan. I video call my wife and children 3 or 4 times a week it is very important for me to see their faces and hear their voices... it makes me feel less lonely here especially because I live alone

I: And, what would you say, when you do have your phone, is the most important thing you use it for?

Akiliu: Facebook and social media is very important for me to talk to my friends and family who are not in Sunderland, especially my wife, I miss her so much. I also like reading the news a lot - keeping up to date with what is going on in the world is important to me... probably being able to use online banking too - sending money back home sometimes, or seeing my balance... I use everything on my phone... seeing the GP or applying for medication, you know I have problems with my depression sometimes, I use the apps to order medication or making sure when it is available to pick up

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?

Asad: My phone is so important in everyday life... I don't think I could not live without my phone... it has everything... for me one of the most important things is being able to stay in contact with my family back home. Everyday we use WhatsApp... we have a group chat with my parents and brothers and sisters and sometimes we will do a group video call, maybe one a week. This is so important for me, especially to see my parents and see how they are doing... to see their faces. If I have enough data I also like to use my phone in my own time to relax or have fun... I use google searches a lot, I like to learn about different things, random things [laughs] that I've seen on videos or heard about from people.

Santi: Okay for me... I maybe, four months ago I come here... Sunderland, I have very much friends in London or the center of you know Birmingham, but here I don't have friends and I... I talk with a friend from Manchester and she send me a contact number for one friend here in Sunderland and for me it is very... its important you know for messaging on WhatsApp, I talk with her on WhatsApp a lot and she tells me information she has for me... my family everyday we use WhatsApp... we have a group chat with my brothers and sisters and sometimes we will do a group video call, maybe one time a week. This is so important for me to be able to see them and connect.

I: So WhatsApp is important for staying in contact with friends?

Santu: Yeh, it is very important for talking with friends... for information here in Sunderland, the drop in, charities, food banks and activities ... all of these things are much easier to do with the phone

I: And what about your friends and family back home? Do you use your phone to stay in contact here?

Ishan: Yes... a lot... I use the phone to contact and chat with my family, you know it is so important... now I am here and they are there, so far you know without phone and internet it is impossible for me to be able to stay connected to them. But before I communicate and talking to them... speak to him.... Speak to her.... It is important to have a phone to communicate with my family and friends in my country, for me the phone is so important

I: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with your friends and family back home?

Habib: Yes some of them, but you know... where I live back home, in Sudan, there is no data or internet... my family, they don't have phones or internet, it is very hard... sometimes I buy top-up on my phone to call them... which can be hard to get into contact with them unless they are in certain places at the time... it can be three months, four months before I get to speak with them... sometimes they don't have data or signal so it is very hard for both of us... because my area in Sudan we don't have internet at all, when I want to contact my family, I have to call my friend who has a phone to then get into contact with my family... they will use his phone sometimes

I: Did you have a phone back home?

H: Yeh yeh I have a phone... but with no internet, a small... Nokia... you know this one?

I: Yes

H: No internet yeh

I: When did you first get internet?

H: The first time I was able to connect to the internet was in Libya, I think in 2019... 2018 actually...

I: How else would you say your phone is important for you?

S: For me... my phone is important for keeping in contact with friends and family... especially those that are living outside of Sunderland or the UK... without this, even though my family are here with me... I think it would be very lonely... I like knowing that my friends and family are safe... especially those that are living back home still

I: And how do you keep in contact with them?

S: Whatsapp... always. Sometimes Facebook if they post on there, but mainly we talk on Whatsapp... Whatsapp is good for this because you know when your friends are online or they have seen your messages. I like to video call them too a lot. This is important for me

I: How do you normally stay in contact with your family?

Salat: How?

I: Yeah, like what apps do you use?

S: Yeah. Yeah... WhatsApp... Yeah... WhatsApp. And he also says Facebook?

I: How about yourself... WhatsApp? Facebook?

S: Facebook no, I hate it. Nothing like that. I don't like it. I don't know... only WhatsApp. I use more often. Yeah, just WhatsApp. It is more easy, even if you are checked and if you are following checking well the camera for when you are open camera for Facebook or for Viber or for WhatsApp. The WhatsApp is more and more or less than Facebook and yeah... the Facebook is is get a lot of data, yeah.

I: So overall, would you say that having a smartphone as part of your experience of claiming asylum in the UK is helpful?

Amira: Yes, exactly... so so helpful. Without it you cannot do anything here... it is very hard without phone... even leaving the house. But it is also important for things like communicating with family. Let me tell you one short story... after what happened in my country I had to leave... it was not safe for me to stay, I didn't care about where I was going, like the UK, I just wanted to be safe... to live without danger or stress. So when I left, my father was the only person who knew... not even my mother knew I was going to leave. On the journey to the UK, I didn't have a phone... I never had a phone back home... so my family did not know if I was okay or not... they did not know if I was even still alive. Then, when I first arrived in the UK... it was during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and we were put into a hotel in London for 10 days... we were not allowed to leave our rooms, we couldn't go outside or anything. During this time, I had no phone. I had the money to buy one... some people they don't and this is why they don't have phone... but I was wanting to buy one, but because of COVID, I went those 10 days without one... my family had no idea I had even arrived in the UK or was safe.

I: So the first time you had a phone was in the UK?

A: Yes... my family have phones but I just didn't want one... I don't like it... but it is so important for me now to be able to stay in contact with them.

Streaming platforms (music, video, audio, news)

I: Do you use your phone at the gym?
Gamal: I listen to music usually
I: How? Like... do you use a specific app or streaming service?
P: Spotify - some times Arabic sometimes English - I use the recommendations. When im in the gym I don't use my phone. I like house music
I: Why Spotify?
P: Spotify saves battery, it uses less battery than something like YouTube - the sound is clearer. The adverts are annoying though, they know everything about me, what I like [laughs]

I: Outside of social media, what else do you use your phone for?
Kaamil: I watch a lot of YouTube... you know I work all day, I come home and I watch YouTube... lots of different videos, you get good information. When I first moved into my flat I didn't have a TV, so I used my phone to watch different videos on YouTube, that kind of thing...

I: What would you say is the most important app on your phone?
Moiz: Umm... sometimes I watch football, sometimes I watch cricket matches... my country have a cricket team and I like to watch it on my phone especially when I'm alone, it helps to pass the time and I like to watch the sport... especially my own country

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Aklilu: In the UK, since 2013, I use my phone all the time, it is a different phone... sometimes I lost [laughs], sometimes I change... give it back to the shop... but I've had a phone the entire time here because it is very important for me. I watch YouTube, I watch facebook video, BBC videos in English and I read the news in my own language from back home... you know, I am a smart man [we both laugh]... I do all these things on my phone, it keeps me busy. I like to watch videos when I am at home by myself, it gets lonely, it is something to occupy your mind, you get that?

I: Do you watch videos?
Asad: Yes, YouTube is very important for me... I always like to watch videos when I have enough data especially because we don't have a TV at home. Sometimes I will watch English videos or translation videos to help me with my ESOL classes, but I don't do this very often as it is very draining for my data.

I: Is there anything else that you think is important in your everyday life with having your phone now? Maybe, do you play games... listen to music?
Habib: Of course, yes... both are important for me... I like listening to music, this one is very important. I also like football, I watch and listen to football on my phone a lot... I don't have television so I have an app that I can watch and listen to football on. This is very important for me.
I: And you listen to music as well?
H: Yes... this and video games... everything... it is important for me especially when I am at home... you know sometimes I stay up until like 2am, I cannot sleep. Having my phone with me is so important, it lets me take my mind off things, watching videos, listening to music, playing games... they are so important for you to keep going

I: So what would you say, if you had to pick one app on your phone, which one would be the most important for you?
Nala: He's a politics man
Hamid: yes politics, but I just want to be able to keep up with the news... when I talk to people I want to know what is going on to be able to talk to people... it is always changing... like I was reading this morning that they are giving questionnaires to people to speed up the asylum process... I like reading news about Pakistan too, my home, we have a very bad political situation back there so it is important to me to keep up with the news back there... our government is corrupt... we watch them

Social media

I: What about social media?
Gamal: I dont like, all facebook videos about i don't know who died.... all about death. You agree?
I: I dont like facebook. What about instagram?
P: In a way... to stop Instagram also.
I: Do you use instagram a lot?
P: No really... not anymore. Sometimes i stop it, i get stressed from it, i stop. Because instagram is an infection - same thing.
I: Do you not use social media to stay in contact with family?
P: I do, WhatsApp... everyone makes instagram... but I stay in contact with her [MOTHER] directly through Whatsapp.

I: Do you use social media?
Hafiz: Social media is good for leisure time, free time, to make friends in the beginning. For friends, I don't recommend social media, I have bad experience of it. I meet friends from college and FODI. Sometimes I go shopping eat food, things like that. But it is better in person than on social media. Facebook and Instagram... I would like to try TikTok but (laughs)... I have friends that have told me its not useful because it takes up too much time. I much prefer meeting people and my friends in person, it is not natural on social media you know, you cannot talk freely or in the same way. I also have too many friends on there... it is exhausting... over 1000 you know. [H* picks his phone up off the table and scrolls through his WhatsApp chats alone - an unending list of both saved names and unsaved numbers]. But this is not good for you, it's why I started using my old phone again, to try and stop using social media all the time

I: And do you use your phone for social media at all?
Mehar: Of course, I have Facebook... Instagram... I mainly use them to keep in contact with friends and family, Syrian news... especially for people who are still living back there or have moved elsewhere. It is important for me to be able to keep in contact with these things... I also sometimes use Facebook to buy things
I: Marketplace?
M: Yes... things for the kitchen, our children, it is good.
I: Do your children have social media?
M: The oldest one does
I: How do you feel about that?
M: It is hard sometimes, but they mainly use it for funny things you know... sharing videos and things like that...

I: So now, outside of your asylum application, do you find having a smartphone useful for your everyday life?
Kaamil: Of course... social media, I have everything... Facebook, Instagram... but sometimes I don't like it. It is too hectic. It is good for making friends... but you know, sometimes you add people on there that you've met one time. I don't like watching lots of people's stories that I don't know, it's boring. I would rather video call my actual friends and have a conversation with them, than see them on social media
I: It can be tiring no?
K: Yes all the time you have to be watching people, it is not good for you

I: Outside of your family, how else is your smartphone important to you?
Moiz: I watch a lot of videos on my phone, especially when I am in the house... I also use a lot of apps to stay in contact with my friends. This is important for my friends back home, but also friends that I now have in Sunderland... they live all over the city, and some in Newcastle, so it is important that I can contact them to stay in touch... I use things like Whatsapp, messenger, snapchat, Instagram... all of those apps
I: What do you think about social media?
M: [laughs] it is good for certain things sometimes, but others... it is only real talking sometimes... a lot of things you see on there are not real life, it can be exhausting. But it is also a good way of keeping up with peoples lives back home who I don't get to see anymore, seeing their pictures and videos can be very good

I: Do you use a lot of social media?
Y: Facebook is very important for me of course... in my country we have lots of problems with women and men... did you see what happened with the women and the hijabs?
I: I did
Y: It is so bad... I hate my government and had to leave... but Facebook allows me to see everyone, back home, my family, it is important for me to see their posts or their photographs that they put on there, it is like a way to stay connected with them, you know? I don't want to be there, in my country, but I can still see the people I care about online

Asad: I also like to watch Instagram reels, they are so funny... sometimes I end up spending a lot of time on there though. It is not good for me [we both laugh]
I: Yes me too
A: Yeh, I even have the screen time warning that I set on my phone to let me know when I've spent a lot of time on there, but a lot of the time it pops up and I always just pass through it [laughs again] it is too addictive!
I: Do you like using social media?
A: I don't like... I mean... it is good but I am not fussed too much. Sometimes I write things on my story on Facebook or Instagram but not too often. I only connect with a few people back home, my family and close friends... some people from school maybe. I also have new friends from the UK on there, but I don't like to use it too much... seeing other peoples posts can sometimes be tiring. I like the Instagram reels because they are not my friends, they are just videos that you can watch and learn things... sometimes I will use social media to watch streamings of sport, mainly football, you know I love to watch it but it is hard here in the UK. Back home you could watch it anywhere, here not really

I: What do you think about social media? Do you use it very often?
Palesa: Yeh, I use social media a lot on my phone... mainly Facebook to send messages to family, see what they are up to back home, I like watching dancing a lot on there... I find videos and TV shows to watch about dancing. Facebook is also good for keeping up to date with news and information, especially about what is going on back home in my country. But I would say WhatsApp is more important for me personally than Facebook because I have a lot of my family on there... we have group chats that are so important for me... sending photographs of my daughter growing up, for example, or receiving voice notes from my parents. It is very special to me.

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Maaz: I use my phone all the time... it is very important for me. I have trouble sleeping a lot, what time do you sleep?
I: [laughs] usually around 10-11pm?
M: For me, sometimes I don't sleep until around 2am or 3am... I use my phone a lot during these times. I think it doesn't help me to sleep, but it helps me in a different way, you know? I can scroll on social media or read the news when I can't sleep... without it what else?
I: Yeah I get that
M: Social media is good... I like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram... all of them.
I: Do you keep in touch with your family back home through them?
M: No... I like to use them to keep up with the news, especially what is going on back home in Bolochistan. You know... we've spoken about this before... but my country is very dangerous because of the impacts of British rule... they came and put borders in places... people do not like this, it has caused so much violence and fighting. When I use twitter, I can keep up with the situation back home... sometimes I tweet about it, most of the time, I use it to get up to date information about events that are happening

I: What about social media? Is this something that is important for you both?
Ishan: Yes for me, I use social media everyday... For Facebook I have a lot of friends on there that I communicate with... I use WhatsApp a lot for my friends here but also my family... so it is very important for me... so good... it is so easy to communicate in this way
Santi: I use a lot of apps... Duolingo, do you know Duolingo?
I: Yep
S: Duolingo is very nice, very much popular and easy for me... it is not a British English it is American, it is a little bit different... Duolingo exists for me as a popular page... I use YouTube a lot... for me twitter is very important for staying up to date with news in my country and poeple over there... the politics, you know?

I: Is there anything else that you think is important that your phone allows you to do?
Hamid: one thing I very much like... because my son is going to school... in nice moments I like to take photos... small videos, memories of him growing up. He plays cricket a lot so I take photos a lot... when he came here he was too short... now I show him these photos (laughs)... they are memories of our life, of our son. They are very important to us... good times here
Nala: and you can see your old friends... yesterday I had a message from my friend... you know I haven't seen her in 14 years... and she sent me a message on messenger... I said oh my god... this is amazing
H: the phone is so good for these things... but it can also run your life
N: yes sometimes it can be hard... a lot of depression... like you see something online and it changes how you think or see things
I: like social media?
N: yeah social media, I think it can cause depression
H: it is bad for you... especially if you are reading news all the time or updates on your social media... big depression.

I: Do either of you like play games? Use social media?

Salar: He [Baba] says I visit everywhere. It's Snapchat, Instagram everywhere. But no game, no.

I: OK. And is social media important for him?

S: For social media... yes. Why? I wish... this is my wish... because I see some different place before I didn't see, and I know I get some information before I don't have information like that... because more important for me.

I: Do you use social media?

S: Not so much often because... I'm already busy with my college already improve my English. You know, it's still my English. Not I don't like my English anyway, but I want to improve my English. I am more following my session in my class, not following other things... I don't spend my time... my free time for swimming, some time for walking, yes.

I: OK. And is there anything else you would say is important? That you use on your phone.

S: He says he says I lost something like a gym in in my country... but now again from phone I... I using my phone and I watching some some gym... to do it at home... he says he when you are asking me about phone, I watching what I look in my phone, I looking more like gym... Yeah, I watching the social media and looking and I more I following for gym. And he says, I looking for gym. [translates]

He says only sometime I I contacted for my family and asking them if they are okay. They are good... no good. This is why his phone is more important for him.

I: OK.

S: And he says he says because I am without... because the phone is more important for me everywhere, even in that home, because I am without job... and I really like my job. His job is making wardrobe. Wardrobe worker. He's a carpenter.

I: So if you had to pick the most important thing you do on your phone, what would it be?

Roda: Umm, gmail. It's really... like because I have lots of friends in gmail and I can send email to them, and they will quickly respond to me

I: Okay... do you use social media?

R: Yes I use a lot... snapchat and instagram mainly... and a lot of tik took most of the time... I like to watch a lot of funny videos... people that make funny ones... or sometimes sad videos, something like that... if like, for asylum seekers its really good to be keeping busy, because you can't work, we dont have permission to work...

I: A lot of free time right

R: Yes, without the phone and without data, it is really hard

I: Is there anything else that you think is important that your phone allows you to do?

Hamid: one thing I very much like... because my son is going to school... in nice moments I like to take photos... small videos, memories of him growing up. He plays cricket a lot so I take photos a lot... when he came here he was too short... now I show him these photos (laughs)... they are memories of our life, of our son. They are very important to us... good times here Nala: and you can see your old friends... yesterday I had a message from my friend... you know I haven't seen her in 14 years... and she sent me a message on messenger... I said oh my god... this is amazing

H: the phone is so good for these things... but it can also run your life

N: yes sometimes it can be hard... a lot of depression... like you see something online and it changes how you think or see things

I: like social media?

N: yeah social media, I think it can cause depression

H: it is bad for you... especially if you are reading news all the time or updates on your social media... big depression.

I: Would you say that you use social media a lot? What do you think about it?

Amira: sometimes important, sometimes not. I think it is good for when you are in the house by yourself... it can be very lonely... so having friends on there to talk to, play with... it helps me a lot with my mental health, you know. But I also think social media can be very bad for you sometimes, it can have bad effect on your life, a lot of the time I think I am wasting my time, scrolling and scrolling... it is really addictive which is bad for you. But overall I use it, it helps me for the majority of the time.

I: Yeah. OK. Do you like to use social media a lot? Do you use social media?

SOR: Yeah, he, he said. I used the social media, but not too much. Two or three hours per day, yeah.

I: Is it important for you?

SOR: He said no, it's not important, but he say sometime we bored... and the social media, we can we can relax it, yeah. [translates] Yeah, we both do that. We don't have any work and you cannot go to everywhere. And... but about me, I use the social media, but not too much. I don't have a Snapchat like him. I don't have the Facebook only Instagram and... I like it... I'm using the Instagram because some of the popular people in the Instagram talked about the English... sentence of the English and translate new sentence or new word and translate to the other language which is useful for me, yes.

I: Do you like social media? What would you say is the like is the one that means the most?

Vadin: For me I would say Facebook, yeah, because you can scroll through friends, you know. It helps you to stay in contact with people from back home... their lives, what they are doing... it can be very hard when you come to the UK and you don't have anybody here that you know, or are your friends... Facebooks lets you keep in the loop with them. But I don't like. But it's necessary for me to use it. Yeah, I don't like that, but I spent much time on the phone. You just don't notice it, you know.

I: Do a lot of your friens or family back home have social media?

V: Some of them... in family, they're just WhatsApp messages. Even one of my family members, they have like Instagram and Facebook. They don't. They just use WhatsApp messages. This is fine... WhatsApp messages because it makes life easier. For example, for us... but I'm here they are there, there is like a connection that we can make still through WhatsApp. But my friends... they use a lot fo scioial media like Facebook and Instagram but I try to not use a lot because it can be very bad for your mental health... I like to go outside, ride bikes, walk talk to people... not be sitting on my phone in my hotel room. This is not good for you.

Games

Gamal: I do many things... but they are not as important.
I: I'm interested in those things that you don't think are important
P: Like sometimes, rarely, I play games with my mother and this needs smartphone
I: What kind of games
P: Bowling, darts...
I: What kinds of platforms do you use? Like is it a specific app? Or do you place over Facebook?
P: They are specific apps. I don't like to play games, never. But I like to play games with people... especially my mum.
I: Is she good at the games?
P: Some of them... she begs me to [laughs]. I downloaded again, days ago. Do you play games?
I: Not alone.. sometimes but only with people
P: This one is very good [PULLS OUT SMARTPHONE TO SHOW ME THE APP], you can play with people from different countries, all over the world... darts, bowling, billiards... yesterday I played with random people because I couldn't sleep and my mother was sleeping. I played two - three matches of... there is a game I don't know the name of it... I will show you [see picture]
I: Do you talk whilst you are playing
P: Of course...
I: On the app or on video call?
P: We usually videocall at the same time... this is why I'm looking for a laptop so I can do them at the same time

I: Do you play games on your phone?
Kaamil: Of course! I play a lot of PUBG... all my friends are on there... I go online and they all pop up 'hello' 'hello'. I play almost everyday. It is good to connect with people over the game. I have friends from all over the world... back in Syria, Qatar, Saudi, the UK.

I: Do you ever play games?
Yad: No I don't like [laughs], do you?
I: No, not really
Y: I prefer to watch films or movies instead of playing games

I: Do you use your phone to play games?
Asad: Yes, a lot... I love to play games
I: You we're playing online pool with Rayan last week, no?
A: Yeh I love that one [unlocks his phone to show me the folder he has of games, opening one up to show me how it works, a bit like candy crush]
I: Do you play online or offline?
A: Sometimes I play online, again if I have enough data. Other times I will just play offline and then connect later. Games are important for me... they allow you to relax, take your mind off everything else

I: So what would you say is the most important app you use in your everyday life?
Santi: For me, I use very much Duolingo, it is like a game...
Ishan: Yeh and you learning you know
S: I study everyday, you can see on my app
Is: Yes Duolingo is also important for me, it makes me want to learn... I am on level 18... and I use a lot a dictionary app to translate specific words that I want to learn the meaning of... WhatsApp and social media I only use to contact my friends and family... only for that... for me Duolingo is very important... I need the English now I'm here in the UK and I hope that it will be useful for me to stay here

I: So for both of you, outside of being an asylum seeker, your everyday life, how would you say your phones important for you?
Okot: Video game.. video games... (laughs)... I play a lot because there is nothing to do in the hotel. I download video games to play by myself. Sometimes multiplayer if some of the guys in there also have a phone to play and want to play... but a lot of the time by myself. Also... Instagram, Snapchat for socials... like calling friends, chatting to friends... yeah that's how I would say it is important for me.

Spatial knowledge

I: And being in a new city for the first time, was your phone important?
Mehar: Yes, I use GPS all the time... google maps... putting in places I needed to find, looking at the map for places like the library, hospital, school... It is very helpful. Even things like getting the bus... knowing where the bus stop is, or finding out the times it will come makes life a lot easier

Gamal: Yes... because I'm addicted to my smartphone — like everyone.
I: why do you think you're addicted
P: It's not addicted... addicted... I've used it for years, so its now hard to give up on it. Because now it is so useful. For me, if you want my opinion, it helps me a lot by google maps.
I: What for?
P: To go wherever I want to go - even here. The FODI places - the busses, the train, everything. It tells you which train which bus... the problem is, im only using google maps - I've been here so many times, i still use google maps. If there was no google maps or smartphone, I would know these things. But now I save nothing in my mind... alright google tell me this.
I: [jokes about Jane having the bus timetable]
P: Maps is like the most useful thing for me - like serious things. Not something like facebook, instagram.
I: Why are they different?
P: Like... google maps is useful for everyday life - for some serious things. It takes you to other places, so you don't get lost. If you don't use it maybe you get lost. For people who travel on holidays or to other countries. But instagram and these applications, they are not important - it is for fun.
I: What do you mean for fun?
P: Because i can give up facebook and instagram - i could give them up - but it is important, I can't give it up.
I: Did you think maps were important for when you came to a new place
P: Imagine I come to Newcastle for the first time, I would be worried without getting back. If I didn't have smartphone or internet, i would be really worried. I would ask people, but i would be worried that they wouldn't be helpful - google maps makes me [struggles over word] independent. Google translate i use a lot - sometimes if I can't understand someone, i use translate. It is important, it helps a lot. Even if i speak to someone, there is a guy who speaks Portuguese - I use google translate in this situation.

Hafiz: So important, when I came to Sunderland I used my phone to find everything... the shops near my house, the metro. I use my phone to find FODI in drop in. So GPS is absolutely important. I also use it to find out information on websites like museums. It's a new place, the phone is so important to find out information about this. Without WhatsApp I couldn't contact people like you, for example. I need to use google maps or my GPS to find things, I like putting pins down on places I want to visit or eat in you know

[H* then shows me his google maps app, and walks me through a range of different pins that he has put on the map... where his friends live in Newcastle, places that he wants try their food, his local metro stations (both in Newcastle and Sunderland)]

[Later, H* also uses google maps to show me his street where he lives. This comes from a conversation prompted by the linguistic difference between 'house' and 'flat'. He uses google street view to give me a tour of his street, telling me about his neighbors - which ones he chats to, which ones he never sees, which ones are rich - and his relationships to them. This starts a discussion with knowing your neighbour, of which H* mentions in Syria it is normal to know and be friends with them, 'here - he tells me - it doesn't seem as normal. There are some people on the street that I know and can chat to when I see them, others [showing me on street view] I never see, they are introverts]

I: Would you say that your phone is important for getting around Sunderland? Or when you first came to get to know the city?
Y: Of course, Google Maps is always very important for anyone... even you! But it is so important... you know when you come to a new city, you know nothing about it. Google Maps is so important for getting around or finding important places like the GP or the library... it is also very important for translation, a lot of people when they first come to the UK... especially Kurdish people... know very little English. Google translate is so important... going to the GP for example. Sometimes they have translators but sometimes not. I rang 111 last week and they had no translators available, I am lucky now that my english is good and I didn't need one, but for some people it is very important

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Ishan: The first time I come here... you know... when you move to a new city... you have to have your phone, the first time I come to FODI, I came with my maps app... put the address in the phone and come here... this is so important. If I don't have phone I wouldn't know about here or be able to get here the first times. I know that you can use paper, but for me, without phone I can't get here... so i use it for my maps... a lot of places, you know the beach? The sea, I like it there I go down there with internet a lot of times, and college as well. This is why I think it is important to use the phone

I: When you came to Sunderland did you find it useful to have a phone to navigate the city? To find your way around?
Tamir: this is my leisure time, my hobby, I like walking a lot... to parks, to city centre... but this is my pleasure, i like the city and the sea... heritage, I like finding out about these landscapes... I have been so far as Penshaw, Newcastle... Gateshead... South Shields... I walk around to see how best i can understand the area, I like this town, when I read about Sunderland I send it to my family so they can also connect with the city... I think they have been here before [laughs]... this is the right place no doubt about it... I don't ever think about leaving or going to another city.... As a refugee... we use refugee week to explore other areas outside of the city... it is a beautiful place I like...

Language/ Education

I: Do you use your smartphones for college work or learning english?
Hafiz: For me no, maybe sometimes... rarely. I use it for google translate all the time - new words and things like that. If i get letter from Home Office, I use google translate to read it
I: Would you scan it with Google translate? [referring back to the start of the interview where H* used this technology to read through my consent form]
H: Yes for documents I will scan, if someone tells me a new work I will use the voice function to search it on theirs. But for learning english, I prefer face-to-face going to college. For extroverts like me, I prefer talking to people, practicing face-to-face. For me, I don't like this [holds phone up]. I need to be able to meet people and practice in person... I have a Ukrainian friend at the university classes, we sit together, you know... it is so much better, you can make mistakes, discuss it, you know... you don't get that really with online courses or watching videos on YouTube.
I: Do you use YouTube very often?
H: I watch YouTube sometimes, for example learning something or cooking somethings. In general I don't use it, mainly Facebook or Instagram ... but for things like cooking, fixing, or how to do something I will use YouTube.

I: Outside of your family, how else is the smartphone important for your everyday life?
Mehtar: I use it alot to find ESOL classes or functional skills courses... I am going to a functional skills course after this... math [we both laugh]. Sometimes they are online, sometimes you need to use google to find out if they exist, where they are, what times... things like this
I: And during COVID-19, were they online?
M: Yes, all the time over zoom... we all used our phones to connect to them

I: Going back to YouTube, did you ever use your phone for education purposes? To learn english?
Kaamil When I came to the UK, I told you, I don't speak good english. I used YouTube a lot to help me learn
I: What kinds of videos did you watch
K: Just education ones, you know, to practice what we did in college... oh but for me, a lot of college was online because of COVID. It was terrible. When I was in the classroom, I understood a lot of things. But then when COVID happened ohh... I couldn't understand nothing, there were so many people on the Zoom calls and it wasn't the same, it was really difficult to understand and concentrate

I: Do you ever use your phone to help with your English?
Yad: When I first started learning English it was very important because I would watch YouTube videos about English grammar, spelling things like this. I don't watch a lot of this sort of stuff now because my English is much better. I still watch Youtbe videos but in different ways... sometimes I like to watch YouTube about British films... I love film so I watch those to pick up new words or just listen to English speakers... sometimes I watch videos that are English and practice the Kurdish translation... it is important for me because I want to speak it very well... if I want to stay in the UK it is very important

Palesa: The phone has also been important for me personally for learning. I am currently doing my maths functional skills which I found out about through searching online. I did my english qualification during COVID in 2020... and it was almost all online, I did the learning and my exams online, after this I had to go into the college after the lockdowns. But after doing my English, I signed up for math too because... I wanted to learn... I tried to sign up for a lot of courses during COVID because there was very little to do, for everyone, but especially asylum seekers because you are so restricted in where you can go, what you can do... but they tell me that asylum seekers can only sign up for certain courses and usually only one at a time... how is this fair?
I: Did you phone help you in learning english and maths?
P: Yes a lot, outside of the classes I will always do extra learning on my phone... usually I will watch YouTube videos or find sheets online to print off to help me... without doing these extra things I think it would be really hard to remember... and my english is not too bad — I have always known little bits from back home, not like some people who come to the UK and know not a lot... when you are an asylum seeker, life can be very secluded, there is no... interaction or going out and doing things that you want to do really... and when you come come, you are also restricted, especially if you are living with people you do not really know... you don't have a lot of freedom to do the things you want to to access things you want to do... through my phone I was able to find things on Facebook to sign up for, or be sent things by FA* at FODI to sign up for... but you are also very aware of the limits of doing these things. One example I have is that I found out online that if I had registered my daughter at birth, I maybe would have not gone through the asylum route here in the UK, but through a different pathway... I never knew this. I would say in this case, my phone is my best friend... it has the information that nobody tells you as an asylum seeker.

I: Are you both at college? Do you use your phones to help you at college?
Ishan/Santu: Yes
Is: Of course I use it to search information everyday. It is important to communicate with your friends who also go to college... sometimes if he not come, I send him a message to check in with them... ask if they are okay or need anything, you know. This is important to me
I: And what about learning English? Do you use your phone to help you do this?
Is: Yes I watch a lot of videos
S: YouTube For me, YouTube is more easy... sometimes... the teachers online can speak Spanish and English... in college it is harder because the teacher only speak english and maybe sometimes I have a question and he don't respond nothing but you know... he don't understand me because of the translation from Spanish. This is a problem... but with internet there are teachers you can find that speak english... it is easier for me in Youtube or Google. Google Translate you need here a lot... internet you need for this. This is important for me... there are also lots of apps that can help you with English...
IB: For me, I can watch the English news... I try to listen a lot to help me improve my English skills. If I don't know something in the college, I will come home and try to learn... do the same course in YouTube. This helps me improve my English a lot.

I: Are you in college?
Habib: I am... but right now I am not in there... not studying right now
I: Ahh yes I remember you telling me last week [waiting for phone call from tutor to go back]
H: But I want to go back... I don't know maybe this week or next week when I go... they say you are late, you've missed classes... I think I need to wait to go back
I: When you're not in college, are you using your phone to learn English?
H: Yes I am learning English all the time. I listen to the news... BBC... music, videos
I: Do you use any specific apps to help you learn English?
H: Yes I have many apps to learn English... I have Duolingo... this is very helpful I like this one... nice app... I use everyday to keep up with learning and the game

I: When you first came to Sunderland, did you go to college?
Tamir: I started Action language classes, then interfaith classes in the first 6 months, in 2019 I enrolled in the Sunderland Bede college, I started level 1 and level 2 English... in 2022 finished with my L2 which I was supposed to continue with L3... but because of my status as a refugee, I was not allowed... with my status as an asylum seeker, I don't have the status to continue my education... this is another stressful thing for me because it is really painful... I want to continue my education... I want to do some courses like engineering but you have to do mathematics, but I dont have the support to do this because I am an asylum seeker... there are a lot of courses that I want to do but I cannot... right now I am doing a mechanical course with iCOS... I am very grateful for that, speaking now, if I was able to follow my education through the college to study engineering or English language, sociology, anything... but I cannot because there is no support due to status
I: Do you use your phone to help you with your English then?
T: I use my phone, my phone has helped me a lot... only that sometimes there are free courses that I join online... as I speak now I can't go online to learn this language, classes... it was free online, I used to join them, but for now I am not connected to them, I cannot assess them, my gmail account is needed to do this... they told me it was for safe keeping but I has been too long now... just waiting

I: When you both came to the UK, did you go to college or take any English classes?
Nala: no...
I: Did you have good English before you came to the UK?
Hamid: no, we just learnt by listening and practising... I know many languages and I can learn very easily, but I... I know the alphabet, small study in Pakistan but not very good
I: Do you use your phones to help you with learning English?
N: Yes, I am always going to Youtube to help me learn English, I remember my teacher always telling me never to give up... I can do it... the videos are very motivational... whenever I have time I watch videos to help me as I'm not going to college... I love to talk and listen because I think... when you have so much things in your head you can't read or write anything... when I go to the class, I can speak or write... my grammar is up and down and here and there (laughs) so I don't want to attend the class... I just like to learn with my phone by myself

I: Do you use your phone to help you learn English?
Solin: Yes a lot... because I have children, it is very hard for me to be able to go to college a lot... so I have to do it on my own, I use a lot of apps and things like this to help me with my English... I like duolingo and also YouTube... YouTube is very good for learning English because you can do it in your own time... but my English right now is not so good [laughs when SAR* translates]

I: Do you both go to college?
Salar: Yes, I go to college... he does not.
I: Do you use your phone to help you learn English?
S: Of course... Yeah, he [Baba] says yes. I use translator. Yes, yes, yes, yeah. I use my phone because I have some quite different dictionary. Yes it's really useful for me. Even a few days ago I bought one dictionary mini school dictionary. Yes, there's more.
I: Do you use? I remember you told me you used YouTube to. Help you with college?
S: Yeah, yeah, I use also YouTube for listening for listening and is more useful again.

I: Yeh I guess it is a little bit different for them because they would have been younger when you came to Sunderland... they have grown up with the language right
Roda: Yes of course... my sister is very good at english... they speak english better than me actually
I: Has your phone been important for you learning english?
R: Yes, most of the time I am watching videos in english... a lot in YouTube... and I also search on google for different things to help me with it
I: Do you watch like, TV shows or films in english?
R: Yes I watch a lot of films... I watch a lot of drama and comedy... I really like comedy, they are really useful for me

I: When you both came to the UK, did you go to college or take any English classes?
Nala: no...
I: Did you have good English before you came to the UK?
Hamid: no, we just learnt by listening and practising... I know many languages and I can learn very easily, but I... I know the alphabet, small study in Pakistan but not very good
I: Do you use your phones to help you with learning English?
N: Yes, I am always going to Youtube to help me learn English, I remember my teacher always telling me never to give up... I can do it... the videos are very motivational... whenever I have time I watch videos to help me as I'm not going to college... I love to talk and listen because I think... when you have so much things in your head you can't read or write anything... when I go to the class, I can speak or write... my grammar is up and down and here and there (laughs) so I don't want to attend the class... I just like to learn with my phone by myself

I: And, do you find that having a phone is useful for learning english? Do you go to college?
Amira: I'm not in college no, I always miss it... it is bad... but I find my phone so useful for my english and getting better... I like to watch movies or TV series in English to pick up the language more naturally you know... like having a conversation. I also like listening to english podcasts a lot, it is the best way to learn I think

Friendship

Mehar: The phone is also very important for making friends and meeting new people, like this guy [has his hands on KHA*] from Syria. Meeting Syrian people like you... in Sunderland... it is great
I: Did you meet online or through FODI?
M: We met at FODI, but now I have him on my phone... Facebook, WhatsApp... they are important for keeping in touch with people and having a network

I: I do, did you have a phone back home?
Akili: Yes I did, but there was no internet at that time in Ethiopia - I had SIM could make calls and things like that, but you could not get internet... you can now, you know I can contact my wife back there and things like that but it is more important here. I live outside of the city centre, I walk here almost everyday - around 40 minutes - sometimes I can get the bus, but everyday I come to the city because I have no friends where I live, it can be very lonely. But here, all my friends are here. I come to the city and meet them, sometimes for coffee, sometimes we cook at each others houses - I have five friends who live in the centre so it is good to come and meet with them.
I: And how do you make those plans if you don't have your phone?
A: Usually we make them with Whatsapp, but when my phone is in the shop we have to make them in advance, like old school [laughs]. I just have to come here and ring their doorbell.... it is simple.

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Yad: Yes of course, I have a lot of friends in Sunderland and the UK and my phone is so important to keep in contact with them, a lot of the time I go to college and then come straight back home or go for a walk to the sea.. you know the sea?
I: Yes, of course
Y: I don't have a lot of English friends here... but I have a lot of Kurdish friends who I meet a lot in the city centre... going for food, coffee you know those kinds of things. My phone is important to have to stay in contact and organise meeting with them, we use a lot of Whatsapp and social media like snapchat and Instagram to communicate.

I: So the following questions are about your life in Sunderland more generally than your asylum application. Could you tell me how you find having a smartphone useful or not in your everyday life?
Palesa: In my everyday life... my phone is so important... you know simple things like watching films, being able to talk to people on social media. You know, I have a friend in Newcastle, when I am going there, I don't know Newcastle very well. When we first started meeting I would always take a taxi from the train station to her house, which you know, is very expensive. When I started using my phone more, I was able to use it to find the bus routes... literally the walk from the station to the bus stop, onto the bus, and walk to her house... the phone even tells me how much to pay for a ticket. It has changed a lot for the better, I can go there now without worrying about my safety or how much the taxi will cost...

Palesa: I think the phone has also been important for me living in Sunderland to meet people in the community. Before coming here, I had no idea about FODI or other groups that let people come together, especially women in similar situations like me. It is very good for finding out information about what to do here... you know I never knew about the gardening group or the women's group without being on WhatsApp or online. When you first arrive in new places, something like this can make such a difference to the quality of your life.

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Habib: You know, my phone is very important because I don't have any friends... I have many friends in here [in the drop-in]... but many of other friends live in different cities like Birmingham... Manchester... being able to stay in contact with them is very important to me. I also am trying to learn english on my phone... YouTube or Facebook, Instagram... without phone I cannot sleep it is very important for me all the time in the day

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
R: Yes it is really important... because if i have friends like, so far from me, in any cities, any country, I can talk to them through my phone... I use my phone a lot to stay in contact with them this way... we FaceTime a lot, sending emails as well... sometimes I like to read news about asylum seekers in google to keep up to date with any changes
I: So, do you have friends back home who you stay in contact with? Or is it friends in Sunderland?
R: Yes friends in Sunderland... I talk to them all of the time on my phone, mainly snapchat and TikToks... we like to send each other
I: Are they from college?
R: Yeah college
I: And is it the same for your brothers/sisters/parents? Would you say they also use their phones in this way?
R: Yes definitely, my brother and sister mainly use their phones for games I would say... they are a little bit younger, they like to play with other friends, their friends from school

Shopping

Gamal: Now i start with eBay... I've been trying to find an ipad or laptop. I need something like this.

I: Why do you need one?

P: I need to back it up..., when i lost all my data, i lost all of my photographs. I want to be able to back this up. I need ipad because it is useful when you are in bed... you can watch TV, you can speak video call... I also watch documentaries on YouTube.

I: What kind of documenteries?

P: Nature, the planet, geography... about this. On YouTube, I also watch stuff about currency, economy

I: Do you watch the news?

P: Yes, but not like... I like to watch videos that explain the news. Just about currency - stock markets, everything. Not about other news... i dont care because it makes me stress

Palesa: it is also very good for knowing where to buy cheaper things, like for instance I recently downloaded the Tesco app on my phone and it tells me about how many points that I had collected, I had no idea about this. I was able to convert the points into vouchers to take my daughter out for the day... without this app I wouldn't even know that I had those points. The card itself — which I now keep on my phone — makes a lot of things in the supermarkets cheaper, and it is not just Tesco... Sainsbury's, Morrisons all have these things. Getting money off your shopping every so often can make a real difference

Community/volunteering

I: Do you find having a smartphone is useful to you in your everyday life? In which ways?
Solin: My phone is so important for me to be able to volunteer here. Each week I can use WhatsApp on the groupchat to find out what is happening, or I can message FA* or SA* to ask them where I have to be. For me, volunteering is very important... especially as an asylum seeker... when you don't have anything to do, stuck at home, to be able to use your phone to get out of the house is important for me.

Parenting

Solin: [laughs] oh my god... yes... they know more than me, they are so young! My daughter... she has her own tablet that she shares with her sister... they know everything... it is very helpful though, as a mother, to be able to have a tablet because I can be here with her, and she has something to do... she is happy to stay and play games or watch cartoons whilst I work... this is good. When she start school, I don't know what will happen...

I: does your son have a phone?
N: no... but he is always on our phones and talking about iPads... he knows every single thing, because his friends talk about it... he knows everything... we give him pocket money
N: yes he is saving money to get an iPad, I said no phone, but okay you can save the money to buy an iPad second hand or whatever
H: he uses our phone to study and things like that
N: yes because always his teachers gives him google homework... so he really needs it, he has to do it in our phones and luckily we have the wifi password
I: Yeah, I guess that's something as a teacher your wouldn't even think about
H: Exactly... in the lockdown he was given a laptop... google Chromebook... small laptop for 2-3 months with data too... it was very helpful for him to keep learning because at that time we had no neighbour no wifi...
I: did you have to contact the school for that?
H: yes, we had to inform the teacher about this

I: OK. And my last question is, do you? All have children.
SOR: Yes, yeah, yeah, all all of us
I: Do they have their own phones?
SOR: Yes, the elder one has mobile, but the two others no only... and he said only iPad. They use the iPad.
I: And do you have children?
Yeah, of course. We don't have the phone in the children though... because they are little... like 10 and 8 years
I: OK, OK and do. You think it's important as parents to have phones or iPads?
SOR: OK. He talked about, they talked about the iPad. It's useful for the children, but under our control, OK. And the iPad sometimes for the game. And sometimes for the YouTube. That's yeah.
I: OK. Is there anything that you think that I've missed that you maybe want to add?
SOR: They said no thank you... That they told no, we don't have anything to add. To add this, that's good message, but I have I think the Internet for... I'm talking about the children... the the mobile is not useful for children, also iPad. But if you can use the children iPad the *limited*... or only that weekend. Our children, have iPad, but... only under my control... at the weekend and the weekend in the three hours per day. We can do, we can survive with the children with the outside and go to the anywhere anywhere. Yeah, it's not important, but for for the asylum seeker, I think it's very, very important because as saying... Hermen or map, because you don't know anywhere... and sometime you you already use the post code and our our country we don't have the post code... you know that this possible where but, we don't have, we don't know where.
I: OK, perfect. Thank you. Thank you.

Question 8: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with FODI or other groups in Sunderland?

Hafiz: Hmm once or twice, on Whatsapp. Sometimes I contact SA* and ST* about different events. There was a time where we meet for coffee and things like that and I used WhatsApp to communicate this. But I generally don't have much contact with them anymore

I: And do you use your phone to stay in contact with FODI?
Mehar: Yes, WhatsApp all the time... a lot of the time on group chats but also contacting people individually like SA* or ST*... during COVID we had a lot of calls, sometimes on WhatsApp, sometimes on Zoom with ST*... a lot of English lessons with ST* were on Zoom at that time
I: Like ESOL classes?
M: Yes... I also was a 'COVID Champion' at that time, so I had lots of online meetings with FODI but also the council and NHS... this was very important for making our community safe. I would have one meeting with FODI and the council or NHS people, and then I would take that information and tell my community... like different changes in the rules, or trying to encourage people to get vaccines... it was very important, because you know not a lot of people knew about the vaccine or why they should get it... or people didn't realize that the rules had changed... it was a very hard time
I: So the phone was important for this?
M: Yes, definitely, it would have been impossible without it

I: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with FODI or other groups in Sunderland?
Molz: yes five years I've been volunteering here, the phone was important for me when I came in 2016 - I came here and BR* was my home manger, she brought me here and added me to the online things like the Whatsapp groups, it was very important for me at the time. Now not so much, I don't use any of those groups anymore because I am not a volunteer. Only sometimes I contact SA* or ST* directly when I need to find sometime out/get help.

I: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with FODI or other groups in Sunderland?
Yad: No not really. When I was in London... two years back... I definitely did to find help with applying for asylum because it was very new and I didn't know a lot about the UK... places to eat, where to play football... important things like this. But now I don't use it, I mainly just come to in-person things like this

I: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with FODI or other groups in Sunderland?
Asad: For FODI, yes we have a WhatsApp group for the volunteers stay in contact about events that are going on
I: Are you part of any other groups? Like FODI group chats?
A: Yes lots of other groups... there are groups set up for different events (Sunderland Centre group > FODI sun cultures > Skinstone Arts) where people can find out information about the different events like date and times and then after people use them to share their events/photos with eachother. I like this, it is important for... reflection. For example, with the Stories of Sanctuary the event finished last year, but I still have the group chat on my phone so I can look back at the photographs and videos to remind me of what it was like... nobody uses it to post anything anymore but it is nice to have as a memory.
I: So these chats have helped you?
A: Yes, they help you to connect to communities within Sunderland, getting in touch with them, understanding the details before, during the events people share photos... it is all great

I: How did you find out about FODI?
H: You know... my house they have a big like [gestures towards cork board]
I: Like a board?
H: Yes this one... they have a paper on there advertising this... I used my phone to look it up on google and to put the address into my maps to come here

I: So when you came to Sunderland, how did you find out about FODI?
Tamir: FODI... when I... I came to the UK I attend church, my first Sunday in Sunderland... I was in the Sunderland Minster, since then, all the 5 years in the UK... I start getting information there about FODI and other charities... this time I started finding out information, action AID, interfaith... and the rest of them... I am trying to bring refugees and asylum seekers to these organizations... it is important... ICOS international projects... those charities, I am so active with them, I am someone who doesn't like sitting by, I like helping out, getting involved in these charities it is my passion, nobody can take this away from me... I like working with people, I have passion, I have the ability...

I: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with FODI or other groups in Sunderland?
Roda: Umm, they can but you know, they don't speak well so I just use the smartphone to contact FODI... they will tell me Roda* can you do this... and I will send it to FODI on my phone, it is really helpful in this way for us

Do you ever use your phone to stay in contact with organisations that help asylum seekers here?
Gamal: Yes WhatsApp mainly ... I volunteer at one of them fixing bikes for asylum seekers in the city.
Does using WhatsApp make it easier to stay in contact with the organisation?
Gamal: Of course, how would I without it? Sometimes it can take a while for them to get back to me ... sometimes they say 'I'm really busy today I will call you back later' or 'I can't answer now' because they are busy ... busy all the time.

I: Do you use your phone to stay in contact with FODI or other groups in Sunderland? How did you first find out about FODI?
Amira: I first found out about FODI at the hotel - didn't know about WhatsApp group or anything like this... it was after a couple of months and I became a volunteer and got added to lots of different WhatsApp groups and things like that... they are useful for me to be able to keep up with things going on in Sunderland, especially because I now live in Stockton - I can look at the group and check whether I want to come into 'Sunderland or not

Question 8: Do you think that not having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?

Gamal: I can't think if I don't try, I can't give an answer. Maybe I will like it because I like to communicate with people, not just be at home and using my phone. Even for the google map, maybe I will save everything... use my mind more, in a better way. Instead of just using the google map. In some places, the smartphone makes the life boring. Before, like I can see myself when I grow up... I can see my nephews and other young kids, they are not enjoying themselves. I had my nephew one time, he tells me everything I get... not happy - because he's spending his life on his phone, he sees nothing from a different perspective. He only sees video games and social media... it's a bubble. He's living in the game - especially these aggressive games. Killing and things, this is not good.

Hafiz: In the beginning, it is useful. After one year, I come back to old phone now. Not always, because it occupies your mind all of the time. After midnight I get message form home, or something, it is really distracting. In the beginning it is important, learning everything about England, the language, you know, without the phone it would be so hard.
I: Do you think you could live now without a smartphone?
H: yes, now I think so. Contact with Home Office or Solicitor could both be in person but they are mainly using smartphones. Without the phone, it would be very hard to keep in contact with these two - paper works but it is way too slow. So I have to have a smartphone at the minute to be able to do these things... I love social media but it is exhausting... I have many friends, I have them all on social media over 1000. The main reason I have many numbers, because I can't... my WhatsApp is going all the time, it is exhausting. I have friends in every single city in the UK.
H: Do you have friends back home as well that you contact?
H: no only in the UK. The time difference does not matter. It is only two hours back home to talk to my mom.

I: Okay, so my final question then... do you think that not having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Mehar: Absolutely... without a phone it would be so difficult to be in contact with people...You cannot know to contact GP, friends, family
I: Do you think it is all positive?
M: No... sometimes I want to give it up, throw away technology [laughs]... sometimes I don't want to see anyone online. It is necessary to take a break... to find a balance, otherwise it can be overwhelming

I: So my final question... do you think that not having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Kaamil: I think because now I speak english good, it is not as big of an issue. Without the english skills, it is vital... for translation, for contacting people. If you don't speak good English, it is very hard for people. You have two exams - ESOL (speaking and writing, both online during COVID). But more wider, I think it is definitely important when you first arrive.

I: And final question, do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Moiz: Not harder, at first I came here I didn't have a phone but now it is important. Before I understand 5 or 6 languages, I use translation a lot it is very important for me. [MU* takes out his phone and shows me his WhatsApp app, clicking onto a conversation with who he tells me is his son, and copies a message into google translate. He translates the audio, not for language but so he can hear it. He tells me he does this with all of his children's and wife's messages so he can hear it.]
I: Do you ever use WhatsApp voice messages so you can hear each others voices instead?
M: No, never.
I: [Scrolls onto his other WhatsApp chats and shows me his correspondence with a solicitor] I also contact my solicitor through WhatsApp
M: Why do you have a solicitor? [MU is a settled asylum seeker]
I: Because we are trying to get family reunion - having a solicitor is very important for this

I: So do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Aklilu: Of course, much harder, much more depression it makes me feel lonely, when I have my phone I have all of my friends in front of me. Without it I feel lonely everyday and everywhere - especially in my house. I can watch news, watch videos, talk with people... everything when I dont have my phone feels lonely. Now I am waiting for Monday, this is the late time I want to give it back to the shop

I: So final question... do you think that not having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Yad: Yes definitely. It is the most important thing... For example going to GP: finding the postcode, taking me to the address, listening to music on the way for relaxing. I cannot live without it. Even living in a shared house... you know almost all of us live in shared bourses until we get papers, it is important for keeping in touch with them and being there for people... I have one friend who speaks very little English so I call for them and translate to them.

I: Final question, do you think that not having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Asad: I spend a lot of time on my phone... it is a part of life... people can't live without their phones anymore it is a habit. Of course, when we arrive we dont know nothing about the UK: shops, food, places. We don't know this, we have to have a phone to find these things and be able to go to places. For me, it is so important to keep in touch with friends/family without this, I would be very lonely, depressed. I think it is also good for problems with language and translation... google translate is very important when your english is not so good.

I: And my final question, do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Habit: Of course, before I don't know too much in the phone, but now I know. When I first come to Sunderland I didn't know anything about the city or different places... like gym, beach, tea places... now I know because of my phone, I can go there, meet my friends and we can explore. Before, none of this... it can be very lonely without your phone in this way.

I: So final question, do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Palesa: Of course it would be very hard. Look, I have a young daughter, she is at school in Sunderland If I don't have my phone and there is something wrong with my daughter I will not know. If there is information from back home, or an emergency I won't know. To be a good parent here is to have a phone. If I am to do anything to help my daughter when she is not with me, how can I? If my phone is not with me, I cannot do a lot of things. Phone is a life saver - it is irreplaceable. For this generation, for modern time this era we live in, you cannot live without it. Especially during COVID-19, learning and raising children it is so important for.
I: Out of interest, does your daughter use your phone?
P: [laughs] of course... my daughter uses my phone oh my god... she knows how to navigate tik tok and instagram, sometimes she comes home from school talking about tik tok videos she has seen or different dances, I don't know how she gets this information. She comes home and asks me 'mummy can you get tik tok on your phone' and I keep telling her no... she is too young for that... she is 5. It makes me laugh, but they are so smart knowing how to navigate the different apps, but for me as a parent it is scary.

I: Do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Ishan: Yes
Santi: Yes, without a phone, your life is... not easy here. You know, it is really hard to find physical things anymore... like for a dictionary or english course... it is hard for us to access these things... digital makes it a lot easier.
Is: For me, I use library books app... I listen too much to improve my english... it is online audio books... Charles Dickens I like listening to... you can listen and learn at the same time... without my phone my life would be so hard. A lot of things you have to use google maps, without phone you can't find anything. The phone helps me to find places and people, without phone I don't think life would be easy, especially here in the UK... so hard. You have to have a phone to live in the UK.
I: and there is no support for the phone?
S: No SIM cards, nothing
Is: Only FODI that helps us

I: So overall, do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?
Amira: Definitely, without a phone life would be so hard...
I: What would you say is the most important thing on your phone for you?
A: The most important thing is having communication with my family, for me, there is no other way to communicate. We mainly use WhatsApp - video calls, voice calls it depends on the situation... but yes, that is the most important for me I would say

I: Is there anything else you think I have missed or would like to add to this interview?

Tamir: No... I just want to make sure that people in power, people in authority know... they should not sit back and see the masses of people waste... we have talent, we have opportunity... as I speak now, I can do drumming, I can sing, I can dance, I can explore, I study, I can speak five languages, I can even... people need to be given the space, we cannot do these things if we don't have the right documents... our talent... to give back to the community, we are deprived to do so... without this knowledge, these experiences.... We cannot do this without the authorities, asylum seekers have a lot to offer... in Sunderland, we need the space to be able to do this... to show our talent. We are talented people... we are not only here to live... we are not criminals, we are here to give back. If we can open the space for us, asylum seekers can do more. They can do more. And to do this we need expenses, because we don't have permission to work. Those that come behind us need our support... being here for 5 years... we have lost everything, we are losing our brains, physically, mentally, spiritually.... you are killing our knowledge and talent... I have this... I have a lot, but I am not given the space... if you are not refugee you are not legible, you are not existing.

I: So overall, do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?

Nala: yes very hard... if you don't have a smartphone you are not connected... before when I don't have a smartphone I felt very bad, always hiding my phone not showing people... everyone say give me your phone number give me your WhatsApp number, I'd say... okay I forgot my phone I forgot the number, next time... switch off the bell...

Hamid: very cheeky

I: does your son have a phone?

N: no... but he is always on our phones and talking about iPads... he knows every single thing, because his friends talk about it... he knows everything... we give him pocket money

N: yes he is saving money to get an iPad, I said no phone, but okay you can save the money to buy an iPad second hand or whatever

H: he uses our phone to study and things like that

N: yes because always his teachers gives him google homework... so he really needs it, he has to do it in our phones and luckily we have the wifi password

I: Yeah, I guess that's something as a teacher you wouldn't even think about

H: Exactly... in the lockdown he was given a laptop... google Chromebook... small laptop for 2-3 months with data too... it was very helpful for him to keep learning because at that time we had no neighbour no wifi...

I: did you have to contact the school for that?

H: yes, we had to inform the teacher about this

I: Do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?

Solin: Of course, for me... a lot of my life is on my phone... my friends, my family... to live in the UK without being able to talk to them or see them would be very hard for me... it can be very lonely as an asylum seeker here, even with my daughters and husband... my phone is too important to me.

I: Do you think that **not** having a smartphone would make your life in the UK harder? In which ways?

R: Smartphones are really important for asylum seekers, as I said before, and to keep them busy as well... not thinking too much too much about their situation, it is good to take your mind off things.

I: Do you think that it can also do the opposite?

R: Actually, sometimes phones make you better to not think about the situation; if someone has a hard situation, for example me, I can use my phone, watch videos on YouTube or TikTok, something like that. You can forget, like just for a moment, but in that moment it is so important.

Alternative narratives

Hamid: honestly, when people find out that you don't have status they treat you a different way... they treat you a different way... and we really learned this the hard way, we have lost many friends in our time here when they realise you don't have status or are seeking asylum... we've stopped telling anyone now... one day you tell them and the next day they change

Nala: yeah it's so bad... the first time it happen i was so upset and stressed, after this I tell myself I don't care

H: it's so hard to go through this time and time again... especially... let me tell you about my child, he is ten year old and we had to stop him telling his friends, he has so many friends from school, we had to tell him to stop telling people at school... he's just a child you know... he doesn't know what it means to be an asylum seeker here... he keeps asking us how he is different, when am I going to have my status... I don't know what will come but still it is hard... he is 10 years old... we don't have to answers to give him, we've been kicked around like a football in the time we've been here, here, here... after I telling you we have asylum we will be able to live our lives, finally.

N: this is why we like coming here

H: yes, when you come here... it doesn't matter if you have status, if you don't have status... you feel welcome here... they treat us like people not asylum seekers

N: when we have status, we want to treat the people like same... even helping them or something like this

H: we don't want to be... treating people differently because of their past ... it's too much here (points to head)... we keep smiling, she keeps laughing, but...

N: because people, they don't like you if you are always sad... well I find this, people always like it when you come smile whatever, sharing happiness so I change my face cover... now it is fake everything

H: we are people you know, status or no status shouldn't really matter how you treat people... why they keep changing after they know... one person who we use to live near, he was very nice with us, after he find out... the second time we tell them, he keep turning on us like that... but still we are here and good. We try to think about ourselves too much, for us it is important to have our son safe... but it is tricky when he keeps asking us questions, it really hurts our hearts... it gives us pain... that is the worst thing he says why why why

I: and he's just a kid right

N: yeah he's fine... okay, but after ten years you are able to apply for British citizenship

N: for our son... this is what we are doing now... slowly slowly slowly we make money and save for the application for him. Next Monday we are going to start the process... at least he will have something, we will not be on the same case, but at least we can give him safety