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Central Capabilities to Well-Being in the Context of Forced Migration: A Scoping Review of Capability Approach-Based Literature

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Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the Capability Approach-based literature relevant to forced migrants' valued capabilities to well-being. Its primary aim is to identify the capabilities that are of centrality to well-being within the context of forced migration. This research applies Naz's (2020) methodological argument, identifying the elements of the ideal list of capabilities to well-being by reviewing literature, in the context of forced migration. Following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework for scoping studies, seven electronic databases were searched, resulting in the inclusion of ten peer-reviewed journal articles in this research. Using descriptive and thematic data analysis methods, this study reveals that forced migrants value three key capabilities: the *Capability to Legality*, which involves being able to be legally recognised and secure; the *Capability to Education*, which emphasises being able to be educated at various levels of learning; and the *Capability to Sociality*, which encompasses being able to be socially connected. While broader scoping reviews and further empirical studies are still highly recommended, the capabilities identified in this review have the potential to inform policies and services relevant to the context of forced migration, ultimately improving the overall well-being of forced migrants in host societies.

Keywords Forced migration · Capability approach · Central capabilities · Well-being · Scoping review

Introduction

Imagine being forcibly uprooted from your home, torn away from everything familiar and dear to you. Forced migration, a haunting reality for millions around the world, emerges as a phenomenon transcending borders, cultures, and

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continents, leaving in its wake countless individuals grappling with the quest for well-being. This complicated phenomenon has captured the attention of various stakeholders at the national and international levels, including researchers and policymakers, who have proposed humane interventions and integration strategies to improve the well-being of individuals with forced migration backgrounds.

The enhancement process of people's well-being necessitates initially identifying their well-being aspects—capabilities—various things individuals have reason to value being or doing (Sen, 1985, 1993). Subsequently, enhancing the well-being of individuals with forced migration backgrounds, through policies and services, necessitates first identifying their capabilities. Accordingly, it is imperative for the proponents of the Capability Approach to undertake an exploration focused on identifying the capabilities central to the well-being of forced migrants in host societies.

This research applies Naz's (2020) methodological argument, identifying the elements of the ideal list of capabilities to well-being by reviewing the literature, in the context of forced migration. Through scoping and mapping the Capability Approach-based literature published in the research area of forced migration, the primary aim is to identify forced migrants' valued capabilities to well-being in host societies. The overarching research question is, therefore, set out as follows: What is known from the existing literature based on the Capability Approach regarding the capabilities central to the well-being of forced migrants?

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the enhancement of the overall well-being of forced migrants in host societies. This is because the capabilities identified have the potential to inform immigration, integration, welfare, and humanitarian policies, as well as their corresponding services, relevant to the context of forced migration. Furthermore, the research makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing methodological debate within the Capability Approach community regarding the identification of central capabilities.

This paper is structured in six main sections. It first introduces forced migration as the *Research Context* then proceeds in the *Theoretical Background* by giving an overview of the Capability Approach to well-being. Subsequently, the methodological framework adopted in this scoping review is described in the *Methodology* section, after which the central capabilities are presented in the *Findings* section. The paper ends with a *Discussion and Conclusion*.

Research Context: Forced Migration

Forced migration is a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion (IOM, 2019). It encompasses individuals compelled to flee their homes and who are often categorised into different legal or political groups, including *refugees*, *trafficked persons*, *stateless persons*, *asylum seekers*, and *internally displaced persons* (IDPs). These categories are distinguished from the category of *labour migrants* based on the forceful circumstances that led to the migratory movement (Stankovic et al., 2021).

Forced migration is a complex phenomenon that encompasses not only individuals who qualify for international protection but also anyone who experiences displacement due to various existential threats (Castles, 2006). These can arise from socio-economic and state fragility, armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, environmental degradation, climate change, development projects, or natural disasters (Zetter, 2018). Forced migration often has various socio-cultural, economic, and political consequences for populations at both destination and origin and for the migrants themselves (Becker & Ferrara, 2019). The impact of forced migration on the latter varies, depending on factors such as the individual's personal characteristics, the drivers of migration, and the responses from both national and international communities (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2013).

According to the UNHCR (2024) global trends report, the global population of individuals forcibly displaced had exceeded 117.3 million people by the end of 2023. This population often face a range of legal, social, and economic hurdles when integrating into host nations, as evidenced in studies conducted in countries like Türkiye (Akar & Erdoğan, 2018), Jordan (Sahin Mencutek & Nashwan, 2020), and beyond. These multifaceted integration challenges have captured the attention of some scholars who argued for protection strategies that go beyond resource provision toward creating enabling conditions to facilitate the development of the capabilities of individuals undergoing forced migration. Landau (2008), for instance, argued for protection as capability expansion to free refugees from any sort of commodity dependency syndrome. In a similar vein, Kim (2012) argued that efforts towards supporting refugees should focus not only on granting protection but additionally and more significantly on what capabilities should be guaranteed.

Theoretical Background

The Capability Approach: Well-Being and Central Capabilities

Originally drawn from the works of the Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen (1979, 1985), the Capability Approach is one of the most widely agreed upon and controversial approaches in political philosophy, development studies, welfare economics and social policy (Ray, 2014). It is a broad multi-dimensional framework for evaluating the social arrangements of society and the intrinsic experience of development (Robeyns, 2005a). It is, furthermore, a normative evaluative space for an individual's well-being that is based on neither utilities, opulence or resource holdings nor acquisition of basic needs or primary goods, but on the *substantive freedoms—the capabilities*—to choose a life one has reason to value and the abilities to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being (Sen, 1993, p. 30; 1999, p. 74).

Sen's (1985, 1993) Capability Approach relies heavily on the normative argument that well-being concerns an individual's capabilities—various things people

have reason to value being or doing. Since the approach was introduced, the issue of identifying capabilities that are of centrality to a specific purpose, such as leading a dignified or good life has highly been controversial within the Capability Approach community (Claassen, 2011). On one hand, Martha Nussbaum (2003) argued for endorsing a specific list of *central human capabilities* to make the Capability Approach operational to social justice. Drawing from the Aristotelian roots of the concept of *Eudaimonia*, or human flourishing, Nussbaum (2011) proposed a list of 10 capabilities that are central to a life of dignity. These are, in short, *life, bodily health and bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, and control over one's environment*.

On the other hand, Sen (2004) refrained from identifying central capabilities and endorsing a canonical list, arguing that in a democratic society, this should be the responsibility of public discussions. Rather than sticking to a philosophical theory, Sen (2004) argued that individuals must consider local consensus building through dialogue to identify capabilities that are relevant to their context. Robeyns (2003, 2005b) supports Sen's (2004) argument against endorsing a universal, one-size-fits-all list of capabilities, reasoning that different capabilities are relevant to different contexts and purposes. Hence, in the process of identifying relevant capabilities and formulating a list tailored to a specific context for policy implementation, Robeyns (2005b) asserted the necessity for the approach to be more epistemologically justified and politically legitimate, going beyond mere philosophical propositions and empirical investigations. Consequently, she introduced five selection criteria, arguing that the initial step should involve drawing an ideal list of capabilities. Accordingly, Naz (2020) proposed a methodology to identify the elements of an ideal list of central capabilities to well-being by reviewing existing literature relevant to the studied context.

Methodology

A scoping review was chosen as an approach to reviewing the existing literature as it is well-suited to describe the range of research being done in a specific field of study. Thus, this research was conducted according to Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework for scoping studies. The framework follows a five-stage approach: (1) *identifying guiding research questions*, (2) *searching for relevant studies*, (3) *selecting studies to be included in the scoping review*, (4) *charting the data and collating*, and (5) *summarizing data and reporting results*.

Stage 1: Identifying the Research Question and Eligibility Criteria

The following research question guides the scoping review: What is known from the existing literature that has adopted the Capability Approach regarding the capabilities central to the well-being of forced migrants?

While there are numerous conceptualisations for and perspectives on well-being, the literature included should align with the normative argument of the Capability

Approach; that well-being concerns an individual's capabilities—various things people have reason to value being or doing (the analytical lens and focus). The timeframe was set to include only those scholarly journal peer-reviewed studies published between 1979 and 2021. The commencement date of 1979 was chosen because it marks the year when Sen (1979) first introduced the concept of Capability in *Tanner Equality of What?* Only English-written literature was included, due to the cost and time that would be required for the translation of foreign language materials.

The inclusion criteria set were that the literature had to (a) be a peer-reviewed article, (b) be published in an academic journal, (c) be written in English, and (f) be published between 1979 and 2021. However, the exclusion criteria set were that literature would be rejected where any of the following cases applied: (a) had been written in an undefined migration context, (b) had not been written in the context of forced migration, (e.g., labour migration), (c) had not adopted the Capability Approach as a theoretical framework, or (d) had not highlighted capabilities reasonably valued by forced migrants themselves to their well-being (i.e., to address epistemology-related concerns and to align with the normative argument of the Capability Approach regarding well-being).

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

Seven electronic databases were searched between November and December 2021 including Scopus, Web of Sciences core collection (Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)), JSTOR, ProQuest (Social Science Database), ProQuest (Sociology Database), Wiley Online Library, and Academic Search Premier (EBSCOhost – Philosopher's Index).

The study population is forced migrants including *refugees*, *trafficked persons*, *stateless persons*, *asylum seekers*, and *IDPs*. However, a prior search was conducted using all the above-mentioned terms individually and no relevant studies were identified for either trafficked persons or stateless persons. Thus, subsequently, these have not been used as search terms. This is foreseeable, as they are not commonly applied terms in academic literature.

The following combination of search terms was therefore used: (“Amartya Sen” OR “capability approach” OR capabilit* OR “capability-based” OR “Martha Nussbaum”) AND (refugee* OR displaced OR immigrant* OR migrant* OR emigrant* OR asylum).

The search was limited to:

- Scopus: (search in Title, Abstract, Keywords), a peer-reviewed article from a scholarly journal source, English language, and social sciences as a subject area.
- SSCI: (search in Topic), article, and English language.
- JSTOR: (search in Abstract), article from scholarly journal source.
- ProQuest Social Science and Sociology Databases: (search anywhere except full texts), peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journal sources, and English language.

- Wiley Online Library: (search in Abstract), article from scholarly journal source, and sociology as a subject area.
- Philosopher's Index: (search in Abstract), a peer-reviewed article from a scholarly journal source, and English language.

Stage 3: Selection of Studies

The electronic databases' search yielded a total of 1278 hits exported into Endnote 20 reference management software in which 753 duplicates have been identified, which were then merged. This significant number of studies was acquired by deliberately pursuing a broad scope, avoiding limitations on the concept of well-being. Additionally, it can be attributed to the frequent use of the word *capabilities* outside the literature of the Capability Approach. The titles of the remaining 848 literatures were screened manually to exclude irrelevant ones. Then, the abstracts of the remaining 133 were examined and checked for relevance to the research question and eligibility criteria, which resulted in 38 literatures remaining. The full texts of these literatures were then retrieved and read in-depth, and consequently, 28 literatures were excluded due to their irrelevance to the research question and the specified eligibility criteria. The selection of the relevant studies process resulted in 10 journal articles included in this review. Figure 1 gives more details about the search process.

Stage 4: Charting the Data

Key pieces of information from the relevant 10 journal articles were charted and entered into a data charting form using an Excel spreadsheet on which the following key information was recorded: author(s), year of publication, study location, objective(s), study population, methodology, and important results. Table 1 shows a description of reviewed research articles.

Stage 5: Collating, Summarizing, and Reporting the Results

A descriptive data analysis method using Microsoft Excel was performed to describe the main characteristics of all included studies. The added value of the review is not only in analysing the findings of the included literature descriptively but also thematically, using ATLAS.ti 9 qualitative data analysis software. The thematic data analysis method has become increasingly common in conducting scoping reviews (see, e.g., Essex et al., 2021). The method was adopted to locate the common passages in the included literature relevant to forced migrants' central capabilities to well-being. The synthesis of the themes followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) guidance for thematic analysis. A conceptually-driven thematic analysis approach was adopted, using the normative argument of the Capability Approach—that well-being concerns an individual's capabilities, the various things people have reason to value being or doing (Sen, 1993)—as an analytical framework for the findings of this literature. The *intentional* approach to meaning

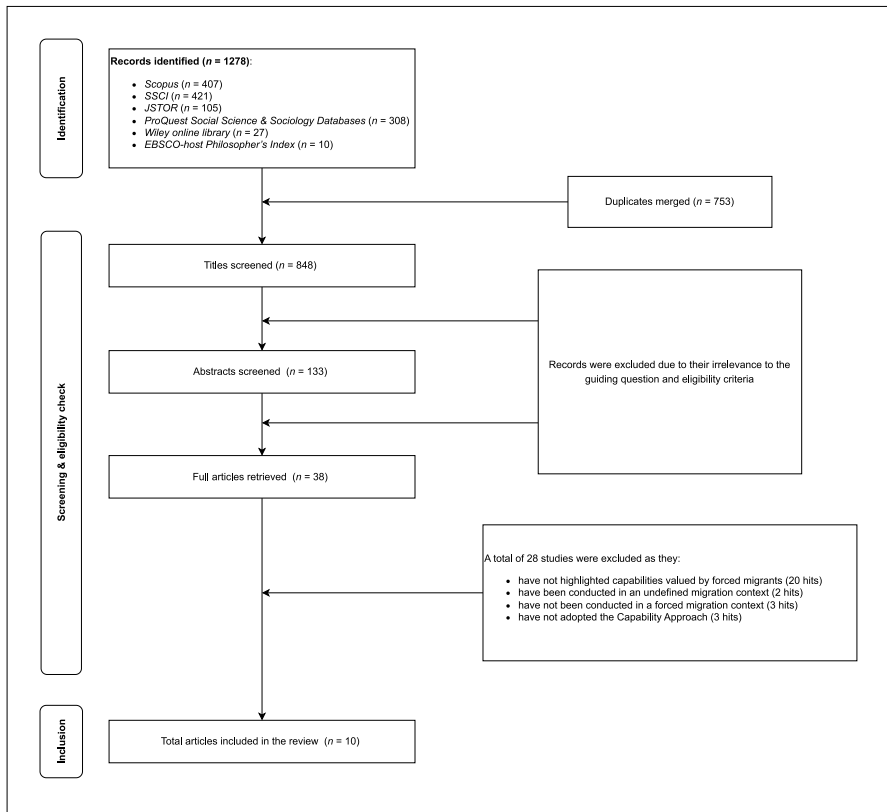


Fig. 1 Detailed search process

through language introduced by Hall (1997) was adopted. This conceptualisation asserts that language conveys a person's unique perspective on things, their reality. Therefore, the process of my understanding of meaning in the included literature is mainly informed by an *empathic* orientation to data introduced by Ricoeur (1970), as cited by Willig (2017), to identify explicit semantic meanings in data. Semantic meanings were identified across the included literature, and from these, patterns of shared semantic meaning—subthemes and themes—were synthesised around a central organising concept. As an example of the analysis, in the studies of Agboli et al. (2019), Chase (2019), and van der Boor et al. (2020), forced migrants valued legal recognition, legal security, legal certainty, permanent residence, citizenship acquisition, as well as discussed their reasons for valuing these elements. Thus, I argued that all these valued elements contribute to the same core idea or central organising concept that I refer to as *Legality*. The same analysis process was applied while developing the other themes. Finally, I reviewed the emerging themes collaboratively with the research advisors to ensure their relevance to the research topic and analytical framework. Table 2 shows the development of themes.

Table 1 Description of reviewed research articles by author(s), year of publication, study location, objective(s), study population, methodology, and important results

Author(s) and year of publication	Study location	Objective(s)	Study population	Methodology	Important results
Agholi et al. (2019)	Belgium	Examine the empowerment migrant women with (FGM/C) experienced as a result of taking part in health-promoting activities	A total of 9 migrant women seeking asylum in Belgium Aged between 18 and 50 years	A qualitative study design: Individual interviews	Capabilities to <i>Practical Reason, Affiliation, Emotions, and Play</i> were reinforced, while <i>Control Over One's Environment</i> was diminished Granting refugee status is truly empowering
Chase (2019)	The UK	Explore the capabilities of asylum-seeking young Afghans during their transition to institutional <i>adulthood</i> , and the relationship between fulfilling these capabilities and well-being	A total of 31 asylum-seeking young men from Afghanistan	A qualitative study design: In-depth interviews and longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork	Well-being means enjoying <i>safety, freedom and choice</i> , and accessibility to a range of rights and protections that all are contingent on legal recognition
van der Boor et al. (2020)	The UK	Explore the characteristics of the <i>good life</i> for female refugees post resettlement in the UK	A total of 16 refugees from different countries including Azerbaijan, Sudan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Iran and Syria	A qualitative study design: Four focus group discussions Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach	Legal security, social cohesion and personal agency are three interrelated themes essential to living a <i>good life</i>
Clarke (2014)	The UK	Explore the diverse effects of the educational services of (RCOs) in refugees' lives	A total of 71 refugee service users from different ethnic/national backgrounds and other 23 key respondents	A qualitative study design: Semi-structured interviews A multiple case study approach	Different manifold social factors affecting genuine access to education Capability to be educated enlarges other capabilities

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s) and year of publication	Study location	Objective(s)	Study population	Methodology	Important results
Molla (2019)	Australia	Investigate higher education aspirations, opportunities, and experiences of young Africans refugees	A total of 10 young Africans refugees Born in a sub-Saharan African country and between the ages of 18 and 30	A qualitative study design: In-depth interviews Case study approach	Significant disparities in navigational capacity with high levels of aspiration for high education Little or no ambiguity regarding the value of education for refugees' economic well-being and social integration
Cin and Doğan (2020)	Türkiye	Explore the way by which refugee students in Türkiye construct pathways to higher education	Syrian refugees university students aged between 19 and 27 Have been living in Türkiye for at least 4 years	A qualitative study design: 15 semi-structured interviews	High aspirations for education due to personal and social benefits Multiple factors influence genuine access to higher education
Mkwanzanzi and Wilson-Strydom (2018)	South Africa	Illustrate how marginalised migrant youth experience multidimensional disadvantages while realising their educational aspirations	A total of 28 participants (26 marginalised migrant youth from Zimbabwe, and two migrant representatives) Aged between 18 and 35 years	A qualitative study design: Face-to-face narrative interviews Narrative and thematic data analysis	Personal, social, economic, and institutional disadvantages hinder the realisation of educational aspirations Being educated enhances participants' financial security, self-esteem, and social participation

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s) and year of publication	Study location	Objective(s)	Study population	Methodology	Important results
Mkwananzi and Cin (2020)	South Africa	Illustrate how the capabilities of migrants are supported and impacted by <i>Albert Street School</i> , and how these capabilities lead to aspirations for public good	A total of 28 participants (26 marginalised migrant youth from Zimbabwe, and two migrant representatives)	A qualitative study design: In-depth interviews and focus group discussions Data collected between 2014 and 2016	<i>Albert Street School</i> addresses different forms of disadvantages Through being educated, participants gain respect and recognition from society and realise their personally and socially good aspirations
Andrade and Doolin (2016)	New Zealand	Explain the process by which the use of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) contributes to the social inclusion of refugees	A total of 53 resettled refugees in New Zealand Recipients of the module <i>Refugee Programme of the initiative Computers in Homes</i>	A qualitative study design: 39 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, Thematic data analysis	Five different capabilities valued by refugees and realised through ICTs were identified including, communicating effectively, understanding a new society, being socially connected, etc
Thorne (2020)	Jordan	Explore how a skills development programme empowers local and Syrian refugee women	A total of 11 women (7 locals and 4 Syrian refugees)	A qualitative study design: Semi-structured interviews conducted in 2018	The programme contributed to the well-being of women Capabilities valued by women include meeting new people, forming friendships with locals, pursuing employment, etc

Table 2 Development of the themes

Reference	Sub-theme	Theme
Agboli et al. (2019) Chase (2019) van der Boor et al. (2020)	Legal recognition and refugee status Legal security Citizenship Future uncertainty	Capability to legality
Clarke (2014) Molla (2019) Cin and Doğan (2020) Mkwananzi and Wilson-Strydom (2018) Mkwananzi and Cin (2020)	Employment prospects and financial security Educational aspiration Knowledge and skills Community respect and recognition Social good	Capability to education
Andrade and Doolin (2016) Thorne (2020)	Self-esteem and social participation Social connection and networking Effective communication	Capability to sociality

Although the included articles might be relevant to several emerging themes, they were sorted in this table based on their strongest argument

Findings

General Description of the Articles

The studies included in this scoping review were conducted in seven countries: Australia, Belgium, New Zealand, Jordan, South Africa, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom. Three out of the 10 studies were conducted in the United Kingdom, with two in South Africa. Furthermore, most of the included articles were published in either the *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, or the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, with two studies in each. While the ten included studies were published between 2014 and 2021, four of them were published in 2020.

All the included studies adopted qualitative study designs, gathering data through interviews and/or focus group discussions. The target population was refugees in most studies, whereas asylum seekers were mainly studied by Agboli et al. (2019) and Chase (2019). No relevant study was identified in the internal displacement context. In the studies of Mkwananzi and Cin (2020), and Mkwananzi and Wilson-Strydom (2018), Zimbabwean migrants with different immigration statuses, including refugees and asylum seekers, were studied. In addition to forced migrants, the studies of Cin and Doğan (2020), Clarke (2014), and Thorne (2020) collected data from different representatives, stakeholders, or locals. Table 1 shows an overview of the included studies.

Forced Migrants' Central Capabilities to Well-Being

Capability to Legality: Being Able to be Legally Recognised and Secure...

The state of being legally recognised, secure and living with limited uncertainties regarding legal status has been highlighted by many scholars as being of high

centrality to forced migrants' well-being. For example, Agboli et al. (2019) interviewed asylum-seeking women who had undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). The study adopted Nussbaum's list of *central human capabilities* as a framework to examine empowerment experienced through taking part in health-promoting activities. The women interviewed argued that obtaining refugee status is truly empowering. They argued that it provides them with legal recognition and protects their rights under the law, including voting rights, employment opportunities, education, and the ability to expand their life choices. However, they also argued that being granted full citizenship would provide an even more effective mechanism for legal security and living with fewer uncertainties.

The importance of legal recognition in the context of forced migration was also highlighted by Chase (2019). The author conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study with asylum-seeking young Afghans during their transition to institutional *adulthood* in the UK. The Capability Approach was adopted as a framework to understand what participants value for their well-being. Enjoying safety, freedom, choice, and accessibility to a range of rights are fundamental for their well-being. However, all of these were highly contingent on migrants being legally recognised. Furthermore, participants argued that by granting indefinite leave to remain (ILR) or full citizenship, they would experience greater legal security and reduced uncertainties. Similar findings were highlighted by van der Boor et al. (2020) who, by applying Sen's Capability Approach, explored the characteristics of a *good life* for female refugees post-resettlement in the UK. Based on data gathered through four focus group discussions, legal security (i.e., feeling protected by the law) was argued to be one of three interrelated themes essential to living a *good life*. Being legally recognised and secure through granting refugee status, and later full citizenship, were argued to be central for displaced persons with respect to having their rights protected, enjoying freedom, developing a sense of certainty about the future, and aspiring to forward-looking capabilities.

Based on the analysis, the *Capability to Legality* presents a central capability for not just asylum seekers, as demonstrated by Agboli et al. (2019) and Chase (2019), but also refugees, as indicated by van der Boor et al. (2020). Consequently, if the *Capability to Legality* is perceived as not only being legally recognised but also legally secure, all forced migrants have, arguably, similar aspirations with different realisation processes.

Capability to Education: Being Able to Be Educated at Various Levels of Learning...

The importance of being educated and gaining aspired-to knowledge for forced migrants' well-being has been highlighted by many scholars. For instance, Clarke (2014) employed the Capability Approach to explore the diverse effects of the educational services of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) on refugees' lives in the UK. In addition to exploring the manifold social factors that influenced genuine access to education, refugees' capability to education was instrumental as it enlarged other capabilities that are indispensable to refugees' well-being, including (1) capabilities which facilitate everyday tasks (to engage in reading, writing, and speaking with healthcare professionals), (2) capabilities

which enable respondents to support their family (help children with homework), (3) capabilities related to improved education and employment prospects (pursue higher learning and searching for employment), and (4) capabilities which enable other valued ends.

Guided by the Capability Approach, Molla (2019) adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate higher education aspirations and lived experiences of young African refugees in Melbourne. Despite the racism experienced by some participants, there was little or no ambiguity among them regarding the value of education in their lives. This steadfast belief in the importance of education manifested as a high aspiration for being highly educated, owing to the centrality of knowledge and skills gained for their economic well-being and social integration. Similarly, Cin and Doğan (2020) adopted the Capability Approach to explore the ways in which refugee students in Türkiye construct pathways to higher education focusing on the conversion factors that influence their capability to education. Interviewees had high aspirations for being educated, and valued this capability to their well-being, due to not only the personal benefits it might afford (escaping the precarious working conditions of the informal labour market) but also the potential wider social benefits (improving other people's livelihoods and working for the public good).

In a similar vein, Mkwanzani and Wilson-Strydom (2018) adopted the Capability Approach to illustrate how different disadvantages hinder the realisation of educational aspirations of Zimbabwean marginalised migrant youth living in Johannesburg. The participants asserted that being educated and gaining the knowledge they aspired to enhance their financial security, self-esteem, and social participation; factors that are all key to their well-being. Similarly, as argued by Mkwanzani and Cin (2020), having the capability to educate Zimbabwean marginalised migrant youth at Albert Street School holds instrumental and intrinsic value for forced migrants' well-being in terms of gaining respect and recognition within society, as well as fostering the realisation of their aspirations for personal and social good.

While Clarke (2014), Molla (2019), and Cin and Doğan (2020) highlighted the importance of the *Capability to Education* specifically for refugees, Mkwanzani and Wilson-Strydom (2018), and Mkwanzani and Cin (2020) emphasised its value across other categories of forced migrants, including refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented individuals. Nevertheless, drawing a conclusive statement on the variances in the *Capability to Education* among different categories of forced migrants is challenging due to the limited information provided in the included literature.

Capability to Sociality: Being Able to Be Socially Connected...

In their pursuit to explain the process by which the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) contributes to the social inclusion and well-being of resettled refugees, Andrade and Doolin (2016) argued that ICTs are a needed resource to develop a collection of five valuable capabilities. Starting from Sen's Capability Approach as a theoretical lens, different capabilities valued to refugees' well-being and realised through ICTs were identified. These include the capability to *communicate effectively* and overcome language barriers,

understand the new society through accessing informational websites, and *social connection* by interacting with family and friends.

Apart from ICTs, similar findings were highlighted by Thorne (2020) who studied, from a capability perspective, the way a skills development programme empowers local and Syrian refugee women in rural Jordan. The author argued that this programme contributed significantly to the well-being of refugee women in terms of enhancing the development of their expressed valued social capabilities, including social connection (meeting new people, forming friendships and interacting with locals), and effective communication (speaking more confidently to strangers and to people in positions of authority).

The two studies on the *Capability to Sociality*, conducted by Andrade and Doolin (2016) and Thorne (2020), primarily focus on refugees, which makes it challenging to draw definitive conclusions about the realisation of this capability among different categories of forced migrants. However, given that access to services often varies based on migrants' legal status, it is likely that some differences exist. This highlights the necessity for further research into each specific category of forced migrants.

Discussion

As data analysis has shown, three capabilities were thematically identified from the literature studied, which are valued by forced migrants to their well-being in host societies. They are as follows:

1. *Capability to Legality*: being able to be legally recognised and secure...
2. *Capability to Education*: being able to be educated at various levels of learning...
3. *Capability to Sociality*: being able to be socially connected...

The *Capability to Legality* presents a central capability for asylum seekers, as demonstrated by Agboli et al. (2019) and Chase (2019). This capability first serves as the foundation upon which the development of other forward-looking capabilities often depends, particularly those related to health, employment, education, etc. This is because the entitlements in host societies often depend on a person's legal status. However, the asylum decision-making process is often sluggish and burdened with bureaucracies. Phillimore and Cheung (2021) argue that the temporal uncertainty regarding legal status has deleterious impacts on the well-being of asylum seekers. Therefore, the *Capability to Legality* also mitigates the uncertainty associated with asylum seekers' legal status and the processes involved.

The *Capability to Legality* extends beyond the scope of merely being legally recognised to being legally secure. While legal recognition ensures a high level of legal security, being legally secure entails more than just legal recognition; it also involves the security of legal status. Paparusso et al. (2017) showed how changes

in immigration policies over time influence migrants' status mobility in various ways, and hence their capabilities to stabilise themselves in the host country. This point resonates with Wolff and de-Shalit (2007, p. 84) concept of *secure functionalities*, emphasising that individuals value not only enjoying a certain level of functioning—in this case, being legally recognised—but also the ability to sustain it over time, thereby being free from worry.

As shown by van der Boor et al. (2020), even after being granted refugee status, refugees often pursue citizenship for greater legal security. This pursuit arguably arises because refugees continue to grapple with chronic fear and uncertainty over their liminal legal status, making it difficult to plan for the future they aspire to, especially given the immigration policies changing influenced by political instabilities. Grace et al. (2018) terms this point as *Violent Uncertainty*, describing it as a form of violence imposed on refugees. It is enacted through systematic personal, social, and institutional instability, injecting fear into basic daily interactions. Notably, the literature that highlighted the importance of *Capability to Legality* in the lives of forced migrants was conducted in Belgium (Agboli et al. 2019) and the UK (Chase, 2019; van der Boor et al., 2020). This focus might be attributed to the similar uncertain experiences of forced migrants in these contexts, which share extended waiting periods for initial asylum decisions and temporary residence permits granted to refugees (see also ECRE, 2024; Stewart & Mulvey, 2013).

Research findings also clearly underscore the significance of forced migrants being able to be educated at various levels of learning. The *Capability to Education* is evidently central to forced migrants' well-being due to both its instrumental and intrinsic value. Instrumentally, it acts as a catalyst for forced migrants to develop further necessary capabilities, including employability (read, e.g., Dijk, 2022). Additionally, it holds intrinsic value as forced migrants gain respect and recognition from society, as well as develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of social belonging. The instrumental and intrinsic value of the *Capability to Education* in the lives of forced migrants was consistent across all research contexts of the five literature pieces included in this theme (the UK, Australia, Türkiye, and South Africa). This universal value could be attributed to education being regarded as one of the basic human capabilities essential to well-being. Its absence would substantially disadvantage any individual and is considered foundational to various capabilities necessary to lead a good life (see also Terzi, 2007). In Walker's (2006, p. 163) account, it is stated that Sen identifies education as one of a relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well-being. Likewise, Nussbaum (2011) views education as a fundamental entitlement that a just society should endorse, requiring affirmative government action.

The rights to education for forced migrants are often dependent on their legal status in host societies. Asylum seekers and refugees, in principle, have rights to various formal educational opportunities in countries where the *Capability to Education* is valued (i.e., the UK, Australia, Türkiye, and South Africa). However, having rights to these opportunities does not guarantee having the *Capability to Education* (Walker, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that developing forced migrants' *Capability to Education* requires more than merely granting them rights

to education. Various socio-cultural, economic, institutional, and environmental disadvantages hinder forced migrants' ability to convert the educational opportunities they have rights to into genuine access to education. For example, studies by Lambrechts (2020), Baker et al. (2023), Akar and Erdoğan (2018), and Mkwanaenzi (2018) illustrate these barriers in the UK, Australia, Türkiye, and South Africa, respectively. Given this, I strongly argue for the broad provision of educational opportunities for all forced migrants, regardless of their legal status. Additionally, it is essential to create enabling conditions that help in converting these opportunities into a genuine *Capability to Education*.

Last but not least, research findings clearly underscore the significance of forced migrants being able to be socially connected. This is because social connection with others constitutes a fundamental aspect of the human condition, as well as being core to a sense of belonging and well-being of forced migrants. However, social isolation and loneliness have been prominent challenges in the context of forced migration. It is evident that experiencing loneliness, social isolation, and disconnection significantly impact the well-being of forced migrants (see, e.g., Strang & Quinn, 2019; Baillot et al., 2021). The findings of this review indicate that forced migrants place significant value on their ability to maintain ties with family and friends back home, build reciprocal relationships with locals, and establish social links in a new society as integral aspects of their overall well-being. This point aligns with the stance presented by Ager and Strang (2008), emphasising that various forms of social connections—such as bonds with family and within one's ethnic, national, or religious community (*social bonds*), interactions with individuals from different national, ethnic, or religious backgrounds (*social bridges*), and links with the structures of the state (*social links*)—are crucial for the integration of forced migrants in host societies.

The development of forced migrants' *Capability to Sociality* requires effective communication with local populations and active participation in activities that bring joy and fulfilment. This is especially important for helping them cope with the challenges and stresses that often accompany displacement from their home and community. However, effective communication and active participation necessitate linguistic capabilities as a prerequisite. In both Jordan and New Zealand, where the *Capability to Sociality* is valued, distinct social conditions arise. For instance, in Jordan, the predominant language is Arabic, which facilitates smoother communication and participation for Syrian refugees who share this linguistic background with the host community. Conversely, in New Zealand, the refugee population is linguistically diverse (Immigration New Zealand, 2024), with many refugees speaking languages other than English, the primary local language. This linguistic diversity presents unique challenges in fostering social connections and necessitates additional language support and resources to enable effective communication and active participation. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that other social conditions also influence forced migrants' *Capability to Sociality*. For instance, while prejudicial attitudes, discrimination, and racism against forced migrants negatively impact their well-being, welcoming and inclusive societies enhance forced migrants' social connectedness with locals, thereby improving their overall well-being.

Conclusion

The enhancement of the well-being of individuals with forced migration backgrounds, through policies and services, necessitates first identifying their well-being aspects—capabilities—within host societies. By scoping the Capability Approach-based literature, it can be concluded that the *Capabilities to Legality*, *Education*, and *Sociality* are of high centrality to forced migrants' well-being in host societies. While the Capability Approach proves to be suitable for research in forced migration (see, e.g., Dijk et al., 2022), the scant number of articles included in this review highlights the urgent demand for additional studies within its framework. Specifically, a more in-depth exploration through empirical works is essential to address the question of which capabilities force migrants value to their well-being.

I fully support Nussbaum's assertion regarding the broad operational applicability of her list of *central human capabilities*. Simultaneously, I endorse the recommendations put forth by Sen (2004) and Robeyns (2003) arguing for the identification of context-dependent capabilities. While Nussbaum (2011) notably emphasises the centrality of education and social connection, *Capability to Legality*, has not received much attention. It is not a shortcoming in Nussbaum's list but rather a foreseeable aspect, considering that the *Capability to Legality* holds particular importance in the context of forced migration.

Despite many similarities in the living conditions of forced migrants, significant diversities persist. Consequently, it is crucial to acknowledge that the significance of the identified capabilities may vary across different contexts and phases of the forced migration process. For instance, the *Capability to legality* might be particularly crucial during the asylum-seeking process, while both the capabilities to *Education* and *Sociality* may become more relevant during the settlement phase. Therefore, democratic discussion and empirical investigation for these capabilities are still needed for policy design and implementation.

The identified capabilities, central to the well-being of forced migrants, extend beyond their specific context; people in diverse living conditions may similarly value them. The universal resonance of these capabilities suggests their broader significance across various contexts, emphasising their importance for individuals facing different challenges and circumstances. Furthermore, the identified capabilities, although significant, may not fully encompass all aspects contributing to the well-being of forced migrants. However, the capabilities identified in this review have the potential to inform immigration, integration, welfare, and humanitarian policies, as well as their corresponding services, relevant to the context of forced migration.

Limitations

A limitation of this review lies in its exclusive reliance on literature adopting the Capability Approach. This approach might inadvertently exclude valuable insights from literatures that, while not explicitly adopting the Capability Approach, still highlights the *beings and doings* that forced migrants value for their well-being.

Recognising the potential richness of perspectives outside this specific framework is crucial, and future research should explore a more diverse range of literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the well-being aspects of forced migrants in host societies.

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Declarations

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