
EUROPEAN STUDIES
THE REFUGEE RECEPTION CRISIS IN EUROPE
Andrea Rea
Marco Martiniello
Alessandro Mazzola
Bart Meuleman (eds.)
Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations
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Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations

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Preliminary Remarks

The following chapters are based on the work of a research team comprised of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers and research directors from three Belgian universities – including Université libre de Bruxelles (leader), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (partner), and Université de Liège (partner), and national *rapporteurs* from five European countries – including Germany, Sweden, Hungary, Greece, and Italy. Belgium represented the main case study and the other national case studies were chosen based on preliminary research on the policy system, public opinion, and geopolitical position. The selection focused on: relative tolerance towards asylum seekers and refugees in the policy system/public opinion (Germany and Sweden); strong opposition (Hungary); geopolitical position as a main arrival/transit country (Greece and Italy).

The Belgian team conducted field research from February 2017 to February 2019. Research activities included a European cross-national comparative analysis of public opinion and qualitative analysis of mobilization in all the involved countries. In Belgium, further research was undertaken into practices and discourses concerning asylum seekers and refugees, as well as their point of view about the reception system and its actors. The Belgian research team are the book editors, the authors of Chapter I, and the authors of Chapter VII concerning the Belgian case.

Chapter II to Chapter VI have been authored by the national rapporteurs and concern the five European countries mentioned above. National rapporteurs were given specific templates in order to produce their chapter/report. The templates included three main sections. Section 1 focused on migration flows before, during, and after the 2015 reception crisis, relevant political environment, and relevant pre-existing citizens' initiatives. Section 2 focused on relevant citizens' initiatives that emerged from the reception crisis of 2015 (focusing on actors, networks, practices and

their relationships with the political and NGO environment). Section 3 focused on the consequences of mobilization on the political environment, on the politicization of the migration/refugee issue, and on the reaction of formal political parties.

INTRODUCTION

The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations

Andrea Rea, Marco Martiniello, Alessandro Mazzola
and Bart Meuleman

The Long Summer of Migration

The beginning of 2015 saw the arrival of significant numbers of migrants via the deadliest migration route, according to the International Organization for Migration's own data:[1] the Mediterranean Sea. On 20 April 2015, 800 people drowned in the Mediterranean in Libyan waters, not far from the Italian island of Lampedusa. Rescue workers managed to save only a few people. After this tragedy, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, demanded that European leaders mobilize more search-and-rescue operations to help save people at sea.[2] The Italian government, however, complained of a lack of solidarity among the other member states of the European Union regarding the urgency of the rescue and relief operations required in the Mediterranean. On 13 May of that year, the EU Commission published its European Agenda on Migration, which notably included the proposal to relocate people arriving via the Mediterranean route from frontline member states to states in the interior of Europe, in order to better distribute the reception and processing efforts for newly arrived migrants. The proposal, contested by the countries of the Visegrád Group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), aimed to respond to the repeated requests from Greece and Italy to be relieved of the burden of having to process and register all the asylum applications for migrants arriving via the Mediterranean under the Dublin III Regulation, which stipulates that the country

[1] Source: Missing Migrants Project: 1,456 dead in 2014; 3,328 in 2015; 4,481 in 2016; 3,552 in 2017, https://missingmigrants.iom.int, accessed July 5, 2019.

[2] *The Times*, "U.N. Refugee Chief: Europe's Response to Mediterranean Crisis Is 'Lagging Far Behind'", 2015, https://time.com/3833463/unhcr-antonio-guterres-migration-refugees-europe, accessed July 5, 2019.

that constitutes first port of entry into Europe is responsible for assessing applications for asylum.

During the summer of 2015, the so-called "long summer of migration" (Hess et al. 2016), hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war zones, mainly from Syria, took to the Balkan route (a land route that passes through Turkey, Greece and the Balkans), giving rise to one of the largest movements of migrants in Europe in recent years. The most remarkable feature of this movement was not only the incredible numbers of people who were on the move, but the media coverage it received. All media outlets reported on it extensively, while journalists and researchers (Crawley et al. 2017) themselves joined the exodus to better understand why, and more importantly, how people move. In addition, there was the contribution of migrants themselves to their own visibility. Using smartphones, people documented their own exodus, producing photos, videos and texts and disseminating them through social media. The European public were given live access to this mass movement of people via all media platforms, particularly social media (d'Haenens, Joiris and Heinderyckx 2019).

On 28 August 2015, the Austrian authorities discovered the bodies of seventy-one asylum seekers in a refrigerated truck abandoned near the Hungarian border. UNHCR spokesperson Melissa Fleming denounced the lack of cooperation between the European countries in dealing with this mass movement of people through their territory.[3] She also denounced the new business of people smuggling. Via the Balkan route, large numbers of people arrived in Hungary, the first external border of the EU, where they were herded and confined to camps, becoming stranded there as a result of the application of the Dublin III Regulation.

On 29 August, the asylum seekers stranded at Budapest's Keleti train station decided to set off on a so-called "march of hope" towards the Austrian border in hopes of being able to cross into Austria, and then later into Germany. On 31 August, during a visit to a refugee reception centre in Dresden, Angela Merkel announced, "*Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das*" (We have managed so many things – we will also manage this situation), a declaration that marked the beginning of a shift in German policy regarding the situation. Then, on 2 September, the publication and viral circulation of a photo of the corpse of Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian child washed up on a Turkish beach, provoked an outpouring of "pity at a distance" (Boltanski 1993) in European public opinion towards the arrival of migrants. On 5 September, Angela Merkel decided to suspend the application of the Dublin III Regulation (Blume et al. 2016) and buses and trains were chartered to shuttle asylum seekers from Hungary to Germany, passing through Austria. Asylum seekers were welcomed at German and Austrian stations with applause, gifts and an outpouring of offers of practical help (Blume et al. 2016; Karakayali and Kleist 2016). For the first time since 1989, Europe's borders opened up, though only partially, as it was only for Syrians that terrestrial border crossings were facilitated.

[3] M. Fleming (2015), Bodies found dead in a truck near border, while asylum seekers flow into Hungary, *UNHCR*, https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/8/55e06ff46/bodies-found-dead-truck-near-border-asylum-seekers-flow-hungary.html, accessed July 5, 2019.

The mediatization and politicization of this massive movement of people contributed to forming reactions to it, both among the European public and within the EU governments, whether the reaction was an openness to the migrants' need for protection or an outright refusal to help. Germany's policy of openness led to a shift in the structure of political opportunities (McAdam 2008; Tarrow 2005), and this shift in political direction in turn pushed asylum seekers to change their own migration routes, preferring to head towards Germany or Sweden (Crawley et al. 2017). The Balkan countries, particularly within the Schengen zone, as well as Austria and Hungary, became only transit countries. Angela Merkel's political attitude also served to authorize the expansion of the Refugees Welcome movement, whose culture of hospitality spread through several European countries (Della Porta 2018; Pries and Cantat 2019).

However, that openness and hospitality, demonstrated in particular in Germany, widened and accentuated the stark differences in attitude among the various European states, as other countries adopted a stance of hostility and rejection towards the asylum seekers. The Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, an opponent of the German policy, decided to close Hungary's border with Serbia on 15 September 2015. Europe seemed sharply split between the "welcome culture" (Funk 2016) on the one hand, which was spearheaded by Germany and which initially also included Austria and Sweden, and a complete refusal to receive any asylum seekers on the other, an attitude most strongly observed in the Visegrád Group countries, who were calling for a total closure of borders.[4]

The long summer of migration basically instigated a European political crisis. While certain countries demonstrated openness to receiving asylum seekers, others voiced their strong opposition to it, going so far as to erect fences along their external borders, most notably the border between Hungary and Croatia, and that between Bulgaria and Turkey. Schengen border controls were largely re-established and fences were built, even within the European Union itself. In October 2015, Hungary completed the construction of a fence along its border with Croatia; in November 2015, Austria began the construction of a fence along its Slovenian border, while Slovenia built a razor-wire fence along its Croatian border. This practice of militarizing borders (Ritane 2009; Bigo 2003) was intended to prohibit people from crossing the border and was also a way to prevent them from being able to apply for asylum in any European country (Crépeau 1995).

The receptiveness in public opinion towards asylum seekers changed direction abruptly in November 2015 with the terrorist attacks in Paris, and shifted even further with the series of sexual assaults perpetrated in Cologne, Germany during the New Year celebrations at the end of that same year. These two events together gave rise to an increasing fear of the newcomers, whose Muslim identities were linked to the menacing spectres of terrorists and rapists. The closure of the borders along the entire Balkan route definitively trapped asylum seekers in Greece, where transit camps were

[4] *The Economist*, "Hungary says a border fence with Romania may be next", 2015, https://www.economist.com/europe/2015/09/16/hungary-says-a-border-fence-with-romania-may-be-next, accessed July 5, 2019.

set up, for example in Idomeni, before these, too, were dismantled. Finally, the accord signed on 18 March 2016 between Turkey and the EU blocked, once and for all, the mass arrival of asylum seekers.

Who Is a Migrant? Who Is a Refugee?

Alongside the new arrival of large numbers of migrants, numerous debates unfolded in the media and the political arena to determine how best to refer to those who left their countries and travelled to Europe during that summer of 2015.[5] These debates about proper categorization aimed to establish legitimacy for the reception of asylum seekers, who were mainly coming from Syria. The categorization of "refugee", especially when referring to a humanitarian reason for leaving one's country, such as fleeing a war zone (for example, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq or Sudan), was much more likely to evoke empathy in public opinion (Fassin 2011). Conversely, when the designation of "economic migrant" was applied to those seeking better conditions for their lives, it was viewed less favourably as far as public opinion was concerned. Thus, the category of "refugee" tended to be associated with a "deserving migrant", while "economic migrant" was more often thought of as an "irregular" and "undeserving" migrant.

The stakes of categorization are strictly political, in the sense that the choice between one term and the other not only determines people's access to certain rights but also affects the moral dimension of migration policy (Carens 2013). The category of migrant is more a question of sociology, geography or political science than one of law. Following the IOM's definition, migrant is "an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM). The legal category is that of "foreigner". In national legislation, foreigners' identities are categorized according to one of the four major purposes for seeking entry into new territory: economic, familial, humanitarian and study-related. The mobile foreign person is also given an administrative identity, depending on the legislation of the respective state. The identity of the migrant is thus ascriptive. The receiving state possesses both the power and the sovereignty to classify foreigners and thus determine who does and who does not have the right to enter into and stay on its territory. The classification of migrants according to migratory careers (Martiniello and Rea 2014) is always more complex, because according to the subjective experience of the migrants themselves, their reasons for leaving are often due to multiple factors (Anderson 2014; Crawley et al. 2017). It is therefore the implementation of the migration policies of states that determines the usual categories of "economic migrants" versus "refugees", or "regular migrants" versus "irregular migrants".

The category of "refugee" refers to the nomenclature applied by international law. The 1951 Convention (1967 Protocol) defines a refugee as any person who has:

[5] *The Economist*, "Europe's refugee crisis. Migration creates a deepening gulf between East and West", 2015, https://www.economist.com/europe/2015/09/15/migration-creates-a-deepening-gulf-between-east-and-west, accessed July 5, 2019.

> a wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.[6]

This categorization is given *prima facie* validity by the UNHCR in territories adjacent to war zones, but is subject to investigation in European countries. In this matter, there are four European directives that regulate European asylum policy (Guild 2009). However, the processing of asylum applications is handled by national institutions that do not apply a unified methodology across the various European countries, but which instead employ different processes for different modes of reception and have varying procedures for access to the labour market, access to housing, etc. Since 2004, furthermore, the status of subsidiary protection was added to the European legislation. The protection is given to third country nationals or stateless persons "who do not qualify as refugee[s] but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin […], would face a real risk of suffering serious harm […]."[7] The actions of European states, institutions and agencies, in essence, are not independent variables: their actions, taken together, contribute to the creation of migrations (Geddes and Scholten 2016).

With regard to the origins of the people on the move and the main reason for their exodus, it quickly became clear that the category of "refugee" was the most appropriate to describe their situation, and that the political response anticipated from the EU states was one of humanitarian action. Nevertheless, many media outlets, as well as official bodies like Frontex, described the asylum seekers as illegal immigrants. This false qualification was mobilized in order to fuel the political controversy over what stance to adopt towards the migrants. Crossing borders without the proper documents, such as a visa, does not in itself constitute an illegal act if the one crossing is doing so in order to demand asylum (Crépeau 1995). For this reason, in 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe declared a preference for "the term 'irregular migrant' to other terms such as 'illegal migrant' or 'migrant without papers'. This term is more neutral and does not carry, for example, the stigmatization of the term 'illegal'."[8] Several analyses of both media and political discourse in 2015 show

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[6] UNHCR, *Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees* (Selected Articles), 1951/1967, Article 1 definition of the term "refugee", https://www.unhcr.org/4ae57b489.pdf, accessed September 13, 2019.

[7] Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004, *on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted*, 2004, L 304/14, Article 2 (e), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:304:0012:0023:EN:PDF, accessed September 13, 2019.

[8] Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 1509: *Human Rights of Irregular Migrants*.

that this recommendation was not followed in any systemic way (e.g.: Berry et al. 2015).

"Refugee Reception Crisis" Rather than "Refugee Crisis"

In the media and in political debates, and sometimes even in scientific output (Krzyżanowski et al. 2018; d'Haenens et al. 2019; Bets and Collier 2017), the long summer of migration was referred to as a "refugee crisis" or as the "European migrant crisis". In this book, we (like many others) argue that it was rather and above all a "refugee reception crisis". The qualification of "refugee crisis" essentially hinges on the abundant use of superlatives, particularly in the press, to describe the "unprecedented human mobility"[9] of 2015. Even experts in the field of refugee studies could not escape making such apocalyptic statements (Bets and Collier 2017). The media witnessed a surge in the use of terminology that elevated these events into the realm of the exceptional, mobilizing the media rhetoric of the "*jamais vu*" [never before seen] (Bourdieu 1997). For instance, the media made repeated claims that Germany would be hosting one million asylum seekers.

The assessment of the extent of this exodus corresponded to the specific agendas of the institutions producing the information: the media on the one hand and international institutions on the other. News outlets competed with one another to capture readers, listeners and viewers with gripping images and powerful numbers. International institutions such as Frontex, UNHCR, IOM and Eurostat all provided different data that kept count of different units and givens. Frontex counted the number of illegal border crossings within the EU; UNHCR the number of migrants and refugees arriving by country; the IOM the numbers of those who died in the Mediterranean; while Eurostat kept track of the number of asylum seekers registered within the EU.

The stakes of this counting of migrants are numerous. The numerical assessment firstly fuels the public perception of these events as either an encroaching menace or a humanitarian disaster. Secondly, it helps provide a better understanding of the extent of the political action taken by both the EU and its individual states. Finally, it highlights the use and misuse of the data by public institutions, the media and scientific researchers. A good example of the political exploitation of statistics are the tallies kept by Frontex. On 13 October 2015, a Frontex tweet declared: "More than 710,000 migrants entered EU in first 9 months of 2015, Greek islands remain most affected." These figures were significantly higher than those published by the UN. Nando Sigona, Professor at the University of Birmingham, reacted in another tweet, asking whether these figures included double counting, that is, counting more than one border crossing for the same person. Frontex admitted that yes, they had double counted migrants entering the EU without any consideration of the effects that the diffusion of such information might have.[10] Indeed, it is this double counting that was

[9] IOM, *World Migration Report*, 2015, http://publications.iom.int/system/files/wmr2015_en.pdf, accessed July 5, 2019.

[10] N. Sigona (2016), "Seeing double? How the EU miscounts migrants arriving at its borders", *The Conversation*, https://theconversation.com/seeing-double-how-the-eu-

the origin of the dissemination of hugely exaggerated statistics regarding the scope of these events.

Though the exceptional nature of the migration of 2015 cannot be denied, the estimated figures provided by the media and by international institutions contributed to the creation of a moral panic. What unfolded over the course of the summer and into the autumn months of 2015 fits very well with the definition that Cohen (1972) laid out of the stages of a moral panic: something is perceived as a threat to society; the media depicts the threat in simplistic ways; the symbolic representation of the threat provided by the media arouses widespread public concern; and, finally, policymakers respond to the threat by enacting new policies. A study commissioned by the UNHCR analysing the press coverage of this exodus demonstrates the role played by the media in the framing of the long summer of migration. While a preponderance of humanitarian themes appeared in the national press, the data and the way it was mobilized contributed to framing the exodus of 2015 as a threat, especially in countries where the media is extremely polarized, such as in the United Kingdom.[11] The definition of the exiles as a threat was reinforced by the usage of categories such as "illegal immigrant".

According to data published by Eurostat in 2019, the EU received 1.3 million applications for international protection in 2015, and 1.2 million in 2016. After the agreement between the EU and Turkey, the number of asylum seekers dropped drastically in 2017 to around 700,000.[12] Given the profuse claims of the exceptional nature of events, it must be noted that the reception of just over 1 million asylum seekers represents only 0.2 per cent of the entire population of the EU. In this regard, the EU states demonstrated their eurocentrism by refusing to acknowledge the burden that the reception of asylum seekers, particularly Syrians, was having on neighbouring countries. The countries that actually received the highest number of asylum seekers were mainly Turkey (3 million) and Lebanon (1.5 million). In Lebanon, that number represents 25 per cent of the country's total population. In Europe, the number of asylum seekers received varied widely between the different states. Four states (Germany, Hungary, Sweden and Austria) together received around two thirds of the EU's total number of asylum applications in 2015. However, if the numbers are tallied in proportion to each country's total population, the countries that received the most asylum seekers are Hungary, Sweden, Austria, Finland and Germany. Countries with long histories of receiving asylum seekers took in numbers well below the European average, including the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom.

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miscounts-migrants-arriving-at-its-borders-49242, accessed, July 5, 2019.

[11] UNHCR, *Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries*, https://www.unhcr.org/56bb369c9.pdf, accessed July 5, 2019.

[12] Eurostat, *Asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU-28 Member States, 2008–2018*, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics, accessed September 12, 2019.

A further misuse of statistics led to the repeated characterization of the long summer of migration as "the greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War."[13] Here, too, it is necessary to contextualize events in relation to one another. The events of 2015 were often compared to the crises of 1990 and 2000, which saw a major influx of asylum seekers from the Balkans. However, both the population and territory of the European Union evolved throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Most of the comparisons made were to do with the total number of asylum seekers and not to their numbers relative to the total population. Since 1989, the European continent has been confronted with a number of major waves of migration. The fall of the iron curtain re-established the possibility of East–West mobility. The largest-scale migration was that witnessed by Germany at the beginning of the 1990s, with the arrival of 3.2 million *Aussiedlers*, that is, Germans who had been residing in the Eastern Bloc countries. The war in the former Yugoslavia drove the EU to receive numerous asylum seekers in both 1991 and 2000. During the Kosovo war of 1999–2000, the EU received just as many asylum seekers as in 2015 in terms of total numbers, and proportionally more people than in 2015 if taken relative to the total population of Europe.

Why, then, was the reaction so disproportionate? How to explain the formation of such anti-immigration times (Massey and Magaly 2010)? There are at least four factors that can be identified to explain why the current social and political contexts are unfavourable to immigration. Firstly, while Europe has mainly experienced commodified and labour immigration, the reception of asylum seekers implies that the state may be temporarily suspending the selection mechanism of acceptable immigrants as per the "guest worker" model. Secondly, the sudden and mass arrival of so many asylum seekers, as in 2015, 2000 and 1991, introduces a disruption of the regular arrival of new migrants (those who come for family reunification purposes, as workers, students or asylum seekers) and increases the overall visibility of migration, which then attracts the hostility of far-right parties. Thirdly, the increased visibility of migration is also a consequence of the policy of closing the borders of the EU and the construction of the irregularization of migration (Jansen et al. 2016), that is, the construction of "Fortress Europe". The increase in "remote control" measures (Zolberg 2006; Bigo 1996; Guiraudon 2002) that seek to control access to new territories even before travellers have left their countries of origin means that migrants are relying more frequently on smugglers and the migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørensen 2011) and taking routes that are more and more dangerous, which also consequently makes them more and more visible. Fourthly, public opinion is becoming increasingly unwelcoming of migrants or any victims of war and persecution. To all of these we can add the five conditions of European discontent in 2015 identified by Lucassen (2018) following a historical perspective: the discomfort with the integration of migrants coming from North Africa and Turkey (1970s), the growth of social inequality (1980s), the fear of Islam (1990s), the rise of the radical right (2000s) and Islamist terrorism (2000s).

[13] *The Independent*, "We are now facing the greatest refugee crisis since WWII", 30 July 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/mary-creagh-we-face-the-greatest-refugee-crisis-since-wwii-10428251.html, accessed July 5, 2019.

Finally, the long summer of migration can be qualified as mainly a crisis of refugee reception in Europe or even a crisis of European solidarity because of the lack of agreement on how to distribute the task of handling the migration. The EU was incapable of proposing any coherent and convergent policy to manage it. In addition, the two main mechanisms of immigration and mobility policy, the Schengen accords and the Dublin III Convention, were suspended. Contrary to what happened in 2000 with the war in the former Yugoslavia, the EU did not trigger the Temporary Protection Directive.[14] To find a way out of the crisis, the European Commission proposed, on the one hand, a hotspot approach whereby certain locations at the external borders (mainly in Greece and Italy) would be responsible for processing requests for asylum, and on the other, a resettlement system for refugees arriving in Europe shared between member states on the basis of objective criteria (economic power, demographics, rates of unemployment, number of refugees already received, etc.). Given the many political differences within the EU, the plan decided upon in July and September 2015 to resettle 160,000 people over the course of two years was planned to proceed on a voluntary basis. Finally, to put an end to the long summer of migration, the EU signed an agreement with Turkey on 18 March 2016, establishing the right to select which asylum seekers would be granted entry. The agreement stipulated that asylum seekers arriving in Greece by their own means be returned to Turkey in return for a one-to-one resettlement exchange of refugees present in the country. This agreement, based on the principle of outsourcing migration control, led to a significant decrease in asylum applications in Europe after May 2016.

Attitudes Towards Migrants and Refugees: Polarized Opinions

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the problematization of international migration and the reinforcement of EU external borders, in the context of the global financial crisis, have increased the polarization between anti-immigration and pro-immigration attitudes and opinions in Europe (Lahav, 2004). According to DiMaggio et al. (1996), public opinion polarization includes two features: dispersion and bimodality. "Public opinion on an issue can be characterized as polarized to the extent that opinions are diverse" (DiMaggio et al., 1996: 694). However, diversity of opinions is not enough to identify polarization, as it needs to be also characterized by bimodality: "public opinion is also polarized insofar as people with different positions on an issue cluster into separate camps, with locations between the two modal positions sparsely occupied" (DiMaggio et al., 1996: 694).

In a study entitled *How the World Views Migration*, carried out by Gallup (Esipova et al. 2015) at the behest of the International Organization for Migration, research revealed that across the regions of the world – with the notable exception of Europe – people tended to want levels of immigration in their countries to either remain the same or increase from present levels. European citizens had the most

[14] Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between member states in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof (heretofore known as the Temporary Protection Directive).

negative attitudes towards immigration, with 52 per cent of those surveyed saying that they thought immigration levels should decrease. Nevertheless, opinions, even within Europe, were mixed. The regions that wished to see lower immigration rates were Southern Europe (58 per cent), and Eastern and Northern Europe (56 per cent). Citizens of Greece (84 per cent) and Italy (76 per cent) showed the greatest desire to see immigration levels decrease; they were also the countries that were most confronted with the reception of newcomers. Citizens of the UK (Northern Europe) also polled as hostile to rising immigration rates (69 per cent). People in Western Europe (including France, Germany and Benelux) were more willing to accept the current rate of immigration, at 45 per cent, while 36 per cent wanted to see it decrease.

The inaccurate perception of the actual numbers of migrants is one of the reasons behind negative public opinion. As reported in the IOM's 2011 *World Migration Report*, in a study of eight migrant-receiving countries, researchers (Transatlantic Trends 2010: 6) found that respondents were inclined to significantly overestimate the size of the migrant population. Surveys showed that in the United States the public believed that immigrants made up 39 per cent of the population in 2010, far from the actual 14 per cent they represent. The same distortion of perception versus reality was found in a number of European countries as well: in France, 34 per cent versus 8 per cent; in Italy, 25 per cent versus 7 per cent; in the Netherlands, 26 per cent versus 11 per cent; and in Germany, 24 per cent versus 13 per cent. Gorodzeisky and Semyonov (2019) showed that overestimating the numbers of migrants had a negative impact on people's attitudes towards migrants and also heightened their concerns about immigration.

Research on public opinion reveals that anti-immigrant sentiment has increased throughout Europe over the last three decades (Semyonov et al. 2006; Meuleman et al. 2009). The European Commission's Eurobarometer 84 survey, published in November 2015, indicated that immigration, for the first time, had become the number one concern for Europeans (58 per cent). Negative perceptions towards non-European immigrants were most pronounced in Slovakia (86 per cent), Latvia (86 per cent), Hungary (82 per cent), the Czech Republic (81 per cent) and Estonia (81 per cent). Conversely, those countries that had the most positive perceptions of non-EU immigrants were Sweden (70 per cent), Spain (53 per cent) and Ireland (49 per cent). Eurobarometer 85 (2016) revealed that immigration was still the issue that concerned Europeans most, ahead of terrorism and the economic situation.

In the literature, some scholars have shown that individual factors are the most important when it comes to explaining people's attitudes – negative or positive – towards migrants. Multiple studies (Kleemans and Klugman 2009; Esipova et al. 2015; De Coninck et al. 2018) reveal that those with the lowest education levels, the lowest incomes, the highest perceptions of deprivation and highest levels of unemployment were those who tended to demonstrate more negative attitudes towards migrants. However, identifying the dependent variables in the creation of negative attitudes is not enough to understand how these variables work. The group conflict theory (Blumer 1958; Blalock 1967) framework taken up by Van Hootegem and Meuleman in Chapter I of this book provides an oft-substantiated claim (Quillian 1995; Meuleman et al. 2009). This theory holds that intergroup competition is the

foundation of the construction of negative perception among ingroups, who feel threatened by outgroups – such as immigrants and ethnic minorities. Competition for goods, such as work or housing, leads native groups who are at the same economic level as new migrants to develop more negative attitudes towards the newcomers. For example, countries with higher rates of unemployment generally demonstrate more marked hostility towards immigration. If competition for jobs is one source of threat, the endangering of the welfare state is another. The Scandinavian countries with the most powerful welfare states (before they began deteriorating over the last two decades) witnessed the development of a welfare chauvinism (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990). Citizens saw new migrants as jeopardizing the welfare state by abusing it (Van Der Waal et al. 2010; Reeskens 2012). For this reason, people who had traditionally voted left began voting for far-right parties (Kietchell 1997) whose political agendas turned immigrants into the "new undeserving poor" of Western societies (Bommes and Geddes 2000). However, a comparison of the data collected by the European Social Survey in 2008–9 to that of 2016–17 (Heizmann et al. 2018) shows that welfare chauvinism did not increase after the long summer of migration.

In Chapter I of this book, Van Hootegem and Meuleman analyse the evolution of European perceptions towards immigrants since the beginning of the 2000s, demonstrating a relative stability of perceptions over time. The economic crisis of 2008-9 and the 2015 refugee reception crisis did not create an overall trend towards a more negative climate of public opinion regarding immigration, asylum seekers and refugees. Still, their research confirms the existence of major national disparities in Europe, with a striking difference observed between the countries of Western and Northern Europe on one side, and the countries of Eastern Europe on the other. Since 2012, Eastern Europe has shown the most significant increase in terms of the perception of threat associated with immigration. Van Hootegem and Meuleman reveal that immigration is perceived as a threat for economic reasons, and because it endangers a sense of national identity and culture.

Contrary to the assertion that is sometimes made, namely that people's attitudes and government policies towards immigration seem to be generally aligned (IOM 2011), Van Hootegem and Meuleman highlight the existing disparities in Europe between these two factors. In the countries of Eastern Europe, for example, negative public opinion is in line with the politicization of the issue and the government's policy stances. Conversely, in Western European countries, the researchers show that institutional support for more generous policies showed a significant increase from 2002 to 2016, even though the rate of negative perceptions remained stable. In those countries, the general atmosphere of negative opinion contrasts with permissive migration policies. The existence of the opinion–policy gap (Morales et al. 2015) is influenced by the intensity of the public debate surrounding migration, as well as its prominence. Public opinion measured by poll data tends to reflect people's opinions towards the legislative state and not towards actual policy implementation (Ellerman 2006).

Negative perceptions towards migrants are not purely attributable to individual factors, however. If conflict theory is operational at the individual level, it cannot be applied when comparing different countries to one another. Van Hootegem and

Meuleman's research reveals how the way the issue is framed by the media and in political debates affects preferences when it comes to immigration policy. Belgium is among the most restrictive countries in terms of preferences for asylum policies, but polls indicate no actual increase in negative attitudes. On the other hand, within Belgium there are completely opposite policy preferences being expressed. While attitudes towards migrants in Flanders and in the French-speaking part of Belgium are aligned, public policy preferences are not. The population of Flanders, for example, would like a policy that cracks down on citizens providing accommodation to migrants, while the francophone population is less inclined to support such a thing (EOS RepResent 2019). Despite the alignment of negative attitudes in both parts of the country, the far-right party Vlaams Belang, which is hostile to migrants, is powerful in Flanders and nonexistent in the francophone part of Belgium. Policy preferences are thus more structured by the framing of the issue in political debates and political party propositions than by attitudes towards migrants alone.

Civil Society Mobilization

Research on the links between attitudes towards migrants and policy preferences over the last twenty years has led to a re-examination of the theory of social cleavage structures and how they manifest in European society. Historically, social cleavages are based on social class or ideological differences (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In recent years, however, immigration, which divides societies into insiders and outsiders, people with or without immigrant backgrounds, has also become a source of social cleavage that not only polarizes public opinion but in fact crosses the boundaries of traditional cleavages (Kriesi et al. 2006; Van der Brug and van Spanje 2009). This polarization of both attitudes and practices, particularly the opposition between hostility and hospitality, was especially prevalent during the long summer of migration.

However, this polarization was already at work even before the arrival of asylum seekers during the summer of 2015. In Germany, the grassroots movement Refugees Welcome began its activities in November 2014,[15] and in 2015, it spread to other European countries: Austria, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland, Belgium and Italy. The movement was mainly concerned with the accommodation of asylum seekers, asking why refugees should not be able to live in flat-shares or private homes instead of closed centres. Through the use of Facebook, they facilitated accommodation for newcomers by matching people together. A study carried out by Berlin's Humboldt University and Oxford University (Karakayali and Kleist 2015) found that there was a 70 per cent increase in people volunteering for projects concerning refugees. The majority of the new volunteers were women, mostly between the ages of 20–30, with a high level of education and living in big cities. They cited the state's lack of action as the motivation behind their involvement.

[15] See: #IamHuman, *Grassroots movements and the refugees: Refugees Welcome and PEGIDA*, 2016, https://wpmu.mah.se/nmict161group1/2016/02/27/grassroots-movements-and-the-refugees-refugees-welcome-and-pegida/, accessed July 5, 2019.

However, not all citizens were so welcoming of the refugees. Also in Germany, in 2014, a far-right, anti-Islam organization called Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) was established, and the anti-migrant demonstration they called for in Dresden in January 2015 gathered more than 15,000 people. Pegida, with its mission to fight against immigration and denounce the "Islamization" of Germany, was not the only organization operating in Europe with such an agenda; similar groups popped up in a number of other European countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, Switzerland and the UK (Berntzen and Weisskircher 2016). Though completely opposed both politically and ideologically, Refugees Welcome and Pegida made use of the same contemporary tools for collective mobilization (blogs, Facebook and Twitter).

Nevertheless, hostility towards refugees was less pronounced in the public sphere than acts of hospitality. During the long summer of migration, countless citizens used their own personal vehicles to shuttle refugees from Hungary to Germany, designed smartphone apps to provide train schedules or the location of the nearest hospitals, organized donation drives for clothing and medicine, distributed meals, and, above all, hosted refugees in their own homes (Crawley et al. 2017). Many studies have been carried out on the surge in acts of citizen solidarity with migrants during the long summer of migration by inscribing it in the perspective of the creation of a new social movement (Ataç et al. 2016; Römhild et al. 2017; Sutter and Youkhana 2017; Della Porta 2018; Feischmidt et al. 2019).

This book is a contribution to this debate. It analyses, over time (2015–18), the practice of hospitality and solidarity towards refugees since 2015 by reconstructing the history of the social mobilization, collective action, networks and organizations, mobilized actors and political responses of that time period. This analysis also includes the actions and perceptions of asylum seekers themselves, specifically presented and discussed in Chapter 7 concerning the Belgian case. Some studies have shown that concrete situations engaging asylum seekers or undocumented migrants can lead to positive reactions and opinions based on emotion and compassion (Stattham and Geddes 2006; Ellerman 2006; Düvell 2007). This was most definitely the case during the long summer of migration. Ordinary citizens engaging in day-to-day activities came to witness first-hand the difficulties that asylum seekers were subjected to, whether in terms of administrative and institutional procedures, or the precarity of their social and sanitary conditions.

Some authors see acts of citizenship in these forms of mobilization (Isin 2008; Della Porta 2018), presupposing a politicization of both the actors and their actions. This potential evolution merits interrogation, because nothing, save for normative orientation, indicates that this is the only possible path. It is a perspective resulting from the literature on contentious politics, which considers that the political motives of mobilized actors are prerequisites for collective action. But the mobilization of a considerable number of volunteers and ordinary citizens during the long summer of migration is an entirely new phenomenon when compared to the usual forms of collective action carried out by traditional activists (NGOs, trade unions, No Borders activists, etc.) defending migrant rights. The moral and emotional motivations behind this action deserve to be examined without the creation of a schematic opposition

between depoliticized humanitarian action on the one side and politicized acts of citizenship on the other (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019). While civil society action often falls under Barnett's (2014) classic definition of "humanitarian aid" (with its tenets of impartiality, neutrality, independence and shared humanity), it would nevertheless be wrong to dismiss the meaning that Agier (2011) gave to "humanitarian government" and Fassin (2011) to "humanitarian reason", a modality of paying attention to suffering without providing answers in the form of law and justice.

The recent work that has been done on hospitality (Stavo-Debauge 2017) is a valuable contribution that helps us avoid falling into the trap of a reductive opposition between humanitarian action and political action. Acts of support for and welcoming of asylum seekers, in particular hosting them at home, are referred to under the general term of "hospitality", whereby the definition can vary from the limited concept of "humanitarian aid" (Barnett 2014) to the more expanded one of "cosmopolitan democracy" (Archibugi and Held 1995). The term "hospitality" was first used because the actions it references relate to fulfilling the immediate needs of asylum seekers, and because the motivations for the action are rooted in emotion and empathy towards asylum seekers (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018). Volunteers and ordinary citizens did not initially mobilize in order to voice a political demand for increased rights for migrants. However, the event of encounter (Deleixhe 2018) between ordinary citizens and asylum seekers might serve to politicize citizens. The organization, coordination and institutionalization of the movement can also contribute to the politicization of citizens who, since 2015, have been invested in acts of hospitality (Della Porta 2018). Finally, the actions undertaken might also be part of what Vandevoort and Verschraegen (2019) call "subversive humanitarianism", that is, morally motivated actions that acquire a political dimension because they are opposed to the government's political orientation. By analysing these acts of hospitality over time, this book also discusses the possible structural modifications of the social movement to support migrant rights depending on the actors mobilized (civil society) and their proposed actions (hospitality).

In cities, actions of hospitality find space, social groups and opportunities to flourish, while at the same time fuelling fears and threats of social, ethnic and spatial segregation. As several chapters show, the opportunity structures specific to each national context serve to either favour or limit how actions of hospitality, particularly those undertaken by civil society, are inscribed in time. Both spatial and local dimensions play a central role here (Glorious and Doomernik 2016; Bontemps et al. 2018). These dimensions might be at the root of the well-known NIMBY (not in my backyard) phenomenon, where migrants are associated with both social and cultural threat. In multi-level political regimes where local authorities possess significant autonomy, the disparity between national and local political orientations becomes a political opportunity for the increase in hospitality actions towards refugees. This is particularly apparent in the United States with the development of sanctuary cities (Ridgley 2013), but also in Germany and Belgium, as two contributions in this book demonstrate.

Motivations and Frames of Mobilization

The first common element across the different contributions included in this volume is the fact that the long summer of migration has had an evident impact on civil society in Europe. Regardless of the geopolitical situation of each case, whether they are first arrival, transit or destination countries, a large and diversified set of attitudes and practices emerged, became more or less systematic and structured, and ultimately questioned the relationship between politics and citizens. Only in rare instances did citizen's reactions indeed align with political stances. In most instances, mobilization concerning the inflow of migrants seeking asylum has taken the shape of demonstrations against political decisions or the government's position on the migration issue. Whether they be negative or positive,[16] intended to reject or welcome newcomers, the actions taken by citizens made visible their dissatisfaction and criticism towards the way their political elites and institutions attempted to manage the situation. Overall, if opinions remained relatively stable before and during the 2015 refugee reception crisis, as mentioned above, civil society mobilization increased in all the countries studied, showing specific characteristics in terms of the typology and motivation of the actors involved, the practices put in place, the issues represented, the relationship of mobilized groups with the network of existing organizations and institutions, their structures and profiles, their evolution and transformation over time, and their outcomes.

Concerning the typology of actors involved in the mobilization, one common element to all cases is the participation of individuals without previous experience of active support to asylum seekers, migration-related issues, or even any form of mobilization. This element is integral to the fact that the summer of 2015 marked an unprecedented solidarity wave in Europe, with some cases like Germany standing out with half to two thirds of the population taking action to assist newcomers during the peak of the reception crisis, as highlighted by Hinger, Daphi and Stern in their contribution. Another interesting point is that mobilization, both positive and negative, is generally localized in urban settings, with the exception of certain particularly problematic concentration areas such as the Serbian/Croatian border in Hungary, or the Greek islands hit by mass arrivals. Citizens with a migration background were also active in support activities in Germany, Belgium and Sweden in particular.

Positive mobilization springs from a range of motivations that are relatively stable in all the contexts studied here. Firstly, it is politically driven as it embraces the problem of formal access to rights (Monforte and Dufour 2011), including issues of citizenship and recognition of undocumented people, but also more generalized political elements such as demands for civil/human rights and anti-capitalism. Mobilization linked to this order of motivations is also aimed at having a direct impact on national politics, on the policymaking process and on the implementation of field practices, including in those contexts where institutions show relative "openness" towards asylum seekers. Citizens often have the objective of correcting – or more precisely, suggesting corrections to – state policies, and they mobilize accordingly,

[16] "Positive-" and "negative-" are used here as synonyms for "pro-migrant" and "anti-migrant".

such as in the case of the struggles for the regularization of "*sans-papiers*" described in the chapter about Belgium. Mobilized citizens and civil society collectives also direct their activities towards reforming field practices, including a lack of local communication from institutional actors to citizens in locations with a high concentration of asylum seekers, low-quality reception practices and the management of reception structures.

The political element characterizes negative citizen mobilization only in those contexts where strong far-right groups already existed before 2015. The aforementioned Pegida movement in Germany, the Greek far-right party Golden Dawn and various anti-immigrant paramilitary groups in Hungary are all examples in this category. Although they mostly carried out violent attacks and actions, this kind of negative mobilization only bears the clear purpose of changing state policies in the case of Germany, where the government's approach was particularly inclusive, at least in the initial period of the reception crisis. In other contexts, and particularly in Hungary, negative mobilization appears to be consistent with state policies. It structures itself as a strategy to integrate field practices aimed at controlling access when the reception system is clearly no longer effective, and even close to collapse. In the case of Italy, furthermore, negative mobilization is always political, but it is only driven by citizen initiatives on rare occasions. As described by Ambrosini in his contribution, opposition to the arrival of asylum seekers in Italy comes mostly from local governments themselves, and it only rarely involves the spontaneous mobilization of citizens.

Secondly, mobilization is driven by motivations connected to specific socio-cultural beliefs. On the one hand, positive mobilization such as participation in volunteer activities is driven by the principle of "humanitarian solidarity". As noted above, this principle is often identified as a key element in the social dynamics of the refugee reception crisis (see for example Della Porta 2018; Krasteva et al. 2019). The contributions in this volume demonstrate that this kind of motivation does not only dominate positive mobilization in those countries characterized by a positive philosophy of reception and a relatively open approach to migration and diversity (for example, the "*Willkommenskultur*" in Germany or the "exceptionalism" of Sweden). Solidarity is largely the strongest catalyst for collective and individual pro-refugee mobilization, and has an evident impact on practices, particularly in the initial period of the long summer of migration. Donations and emergency help such as the distribution of food and clothes are indeed the most common practices among volunteers and civil society groups involved in support activities. This is also true in those contexts where public opinion is more critical of migration, where institutions take a more restrictive approach, and even in countries like Hungary where civil society is traditionally not very proactive (Milan 2019). As highlighted in existing scholarship, solidarity engagement, especially within the different aspects of migration, often conveys a political message or motivation (Mezzadra 2010), can become an act of demonstration (Walters 2008), and can often take the shape of a "governmental norm" (Fassin 2007). The analyses proposed in this book are no exception. However, the cases of civil society groups and individual citizens involved in humanitarian solidarity mobilization presented here do not show an explicit political stance. On the contrary, they operate independently

from political groups, at least at the beginning of their involvement between 2015 and 2016. They are not generally influenced by formal political groups, although in some cases like Greece and Italy they count militant members of radical left-wing, anarchist and anti-capitalist circles among their participants. Significantly, these trends can be seen as consistent with citizen's critical perspective on institutions highlighted above, in a time of growing scepticism from citizens towards formal political representation.

On the other hand, negative mobilization may also be seen as motivated by socio-cultural beliefs. In this sense, the organizations and citizens who mobilized against the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers share a perspective inspired by the traditional discourse about the demographic threat of the Global South, including tropes such as ethnic substitution, opposition to "foreignization" and more generally an exclusivist conception of the national community. Van Hootegem and Meuleman explain how the perception of cultural threats revolving around national identity, norms and values has significantly increased, especially in Eastern and Southern Europe, during the reception crisis period. Differently from humanitarian solidarity, however, the socio-cultural beliefs embedded in negative mobilization are directly represented by formal political parties or movements. Theodoros Fouskas, in the Greek case, highlights how a process of enhancement of the nation state based on the differentiation between citizens and migrants gives way to manifestations and violent episodes of intolerance. Similarly, Maurizio Ambrosini notes that the principles motivating negative reactions such as the conception of the national territory as "private property", or the envisaging of the national community as the victim of an invasion, are all represented by the anti-immigration party, the Lega, and its leader Matteo Salvini, and are key elements in the recent repositioning of the party rhetoric and agenda along an anti-migrant, ultra-nationalistic stance (Mandin and Mazzola 2016). The Hungarian case, even more explicitly, shows that xenophobic social beliefs are completely integrated into the policy system and the actions and decisions of the Orbán government. Aspects of these tropes, however, especially if connected to material concerns such as threats to the labour market, the welfare system or institutional structures, have generally been absorbed by all political parties and have gained consensus in the bipartisan political debate in Northern Europe as well. As shown in the following chapters, this even happens in countries such as Germany and Sweden, which are perceived to bear a more progressive approach to the migration issue.

The Collective Dimension of Mobilization

Whether driven by political or socio-cultural motivations, positive mobilization seems to have both a collective and an individual dimension. On the other hand, negative mobilization is almost never individual. Evidence here, and the ethnographic sources in the Belgium chapter in particular, show how support for asylum seekers often springs from the individual will to act and contribute. On the negative side, this kind of personal dynamic is not observed. It must be noted that positive engagement is much more widespread, present and regular in the cases studied here, although negative actions are often more visible and mediatized, but are short-lived and only occasional. Acts of violent protest are limited in number, but are relatively recurrent

in those contexts where far-right groups are stronger and more structured. In any case, both positive and negative forms of mobilization mostly pertain to the creation, activation, consolidation, interaction and evolution of groups and networks, and thus it is the collective dimension that remains central to our focus.

The 2015 reception crisis led to the emergence of important civil society organizations, collective citizen initiatives and networks. As discussed in recent scholarship, these groups have strongly affected the relationship between civil and state actors (see for example Verschraegen and Vandevoordt 2019). Starting from the long summer of migration, mobilization has occurred through new groups and structures, but also through dormant organizations that reactivated and existing organizations that changed their mission, embracing the issue of asylum seekers and refugees. The nature of their activities and their principles changed over time; they adapted to the changes in the migration situation, the needs of newcomers and the policy structures surrounding them. The studies in this book look at three specific dimensions. Firstly, the focus is on the typology of organizations and interactions within the network of different collective actors active in the reception of asylum seekers. Secondly, they look at the interaction between civil society groups (both formal and non-formal organizations), state actors and structures of governance. Thirdly, they include views on the outcomes of civil society collective mobilization, and the reception crisis as an example of political momentum.

As mentioned above, the typology of organizations involved ranges from new collectives to previously existing groups that reactivated or changed their activities. Concerning these latter groups, not all countries (such as Greece and Hungary, as we will see) could rely on a strong pre-existing landscape of organizations. In Germany, a large part of the support is provided by organizations that are not directly connected to the migration issue, often set up or driven by people with a migration background. Specific established networks always play an important role in the stimulation of citizen participation in support activities. In Italy and Sweden, as we will see, religious organizations and their networks of volunteers activated immediately. Not only did they share information and promote awareness-raising campaigns, they also emerged as first-line actors in the reception of asylum seekers and the resolution of refugee-related tensions in the public debate.

Concerning the first point on the interaction within networks of mobilized organizations, our cases show several interesting elements. Although examples of horizontal cooperation are observed, some of the research reveals forms of conflict between organizations, generated by a lack of coordination and mutual acknowledgement, above all between subjects with different profiles. In particular, informal volunteer groups often clashed with official volunteer organizations. Conflict is observed in the Belgian case, where civil society organizations implemented activities in parallel to the Red Cross, that is, the state-designated actor for managing reception practices. The situation seems to be completely different in Greece, where pro-migrant civil society groups coordinated through a voluntary open assembly. Bevelander and Hellström, in the chapter on Sweden, point out that informal and formal organizations not only cooperated but often merged, and characterize this condition as necessary for the support activity to exist and remain stable.

Secondly, the interaction between civil and state actors and structures is an aspect that deserves much attention. This is because the reception crisis represents a key moment in which civil society has reacted more or less explicitly to the problems, gaps and failures of political institutions and institutional policy measures. In doing so, citizen organizations and NGOs made visible the "organized non-responsibility" (Pries 2018) that characterized the approach of the EU, and the indifference of many European countries during the reception crisis. To begin with, it is important to note that mobilized actors in civil society often changed their motivations and adapted their scope during the reception crisis. In general, groups motivated by solidarity embraced political demands and also shifted to politically driven mobilization, showing that the two categories described above are not exclusive or conflictual, but rather overlapping. This is due to two main factors that are common to all the cases observed. First, participation in solidarity activity lowered over time. Second, several non-formal organizations started to take on a structured form, to professionalize their activity and, in some cases, to politicize it. In Germany, for example, the huge popular participation in support activities at the start of the crisis did not last long. However, support organizations took on a professional profile and were able to keep on running their activities. Similarly, in Belgium, participation decreased but forms of spontaneous solidarity engagement turned into formal organizations characterized by political engagement, shaping specific frames of mobilization towards a form of "political solidarity".

The relationship between civil society and local or national institutions is not only something that occurred in the field as a consequence of spontaneous engagement. To varying extents, all the country cases demonstrate that forms of cooperation with civil society actors were not only expected but also fostered by governments, following a multi-actor governance principle (Van Heffen et al. 2000). The Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) in Italy, for example, is structured around the principle that local governments should rely on civil society organizations to manage the access of asylum seekers to the protection system. In other contexts, non-governmental actors are officially designated to manage reception practices, such as in the case of the Belgian Red Cross. As well as cooperation, however, civil society groups and institutions often engaged in open conflict at the local and national level. With regard to the creation and progressive politicization of migration-oriented volunteer organizations in Hungary, which were increasingly critical of the Orbán leadership, the government reacted with specific measures to oppose and limit their activities, such as the creation of an unfavourable tax regime for NGOs, emblematically labelled "Stop Soros".

Concerning the third focus of analysis, interesting elements emerge in the following chapters regarding the outcomes of civil mobilization and, more generally, the political consequences of the 2015 reception crisis. On the one hand, volunteer groups, local citizen initiatives and civil society organizations supporting reception paved the way for inclusive approaches towards asylum seekers and migration in general. These approaches are characterized by their local dimension, involving specific regions, areas or municipalities, and by opposition (of varying strength) to restrictive state approaches. They are consistent with the establishment of new

paradigms of integration, a trend that recent scholarship has observed to be growing in European local contexts (Geddes and Scholten 2015; Glorius and Doomernik 2016), and they bring about a "local turn" in the management of the contemporary migration issue (Ahouga 2017; Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017). All the cases of positive mobilization presented in this book confirm that civil society made concrete efforts to correct, integrate or oppose state policies and field practices.

The crisis in the system of reception across Europe opened what Bevelander and Hellström define here as a "window of opportunity" for citizens not only to mobilize, but also to transform spontaneous collective mobilization into concrete action and to have an impact on political structures and on public opinion. This is true for both positive and negative forms of mobilization. In several instances in Belgium and Germany, mobilized groups of citizens working alongside the state-designated reception actors took on a formal structure and became involved in the decision-making process at the local level. In Germany, however, a strong representation of anti-migration views emerged in 2015, reflecting significant polarization in society. The crisis also allowed far-right groups to over-represent the asylum issue as a primary national threat, and to gain space in the public debate. In the Greek context, as noted by Fouskas, Golden Dawn had a strong impact on the way a widespread idea of Greece as a xenophobic country has been shaped at the national and international level. Similarly, in Italy, the reception crisis has represented an opportunity for different segments of the right-wing and far-right spectrum to coordinate and gather together, with Matteo Salvini taking on the political leadership. In turn, the growth of anti-migration parties along the right-wing spectrum stimulated sporadic but violent actions against asylum seekers and, more importantly, enabled these actions to become tolerated and accepted by public opinion.

CHAPTER I

European Citizens' Opinions Towards Immigration and Asylum Policies A Quantitative Comparative Analysis

Arno Van Hootegem and Bart Meuleman

Introduction

In spite of various legislative efforts to ban discrimination,[1] xenophobic statements are structurally present in the European public sphere, and incidents of racially motivated violence continue to be reported with high frequency in several EU member states.[2] There is concern in civil society and among policy makers that the recently increased influx of asylum seekers into Europe might have reinforced widespread impressions that these newcomers threaten the material wellbeing and cultural norms. Fears exist that the increased inflow, coupled with the recent economic downturn, might exacerbate an already negative opinion climate towards immigrants and immigration. After all, in times of economic hardship, soaring unemployment rates and decreasing budgets for social protection, a growing group of newcomers constitutes a vulnerable target for scapegoating. The recent electoral successes of Vlaams Belang in Flanders and extreme right-wing parties advocating an anti-immigration and anti-refugee agenda elsewhere in Europe suggest that the context of multiple crises could indeed be a fertile breeding ground for intergroup tensions (Funke et al. 2016).

The aim of this chapter is to analyze European citizens' perceptions of ethnic threats as well as their opinions regarding immigration and asylum polices. Knowledge on the

[1] Examples of such legislation are the Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC issued by the Council of the European Union, or the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights that received a legally binding status in 2009.

[2] See: European Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Fundamental Rights: Challenges and Achievements in 2014*, 2015, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-annual-report-2014_en.pdf, accessed June 15, 2019.

general public's attitudes and beliefs is highly relevant to understand policy-making in the area of asylum. After all, policy makers tend to reckon with public opinions (such as policy responsiveness) (Brooks and Manza 2006) and the attitudinal climate structures the opportunities of civil and political actors for actions and campaigns pro or contra asylum seekers and refugees. This chapter sets out to shed light on the general public's perceptions of threat and preferences for immigration and asylum policies from a European-wide, comparative perspective. Concretely, we answer the following research questions: (1) How have perceptions of ethnic threat evolved in Europe generally and in Belgium specifically over the past 20 years? (2) Which individual and country-level characteristics can explain preferences for particular asylum policies? And (3), to what extent are preferences regarding asylum policy similar to preferences regarding immigration policy in general? By answering these questions, we sketch the public opinion context that is necessary to understand the policy responses as well as local mobilizations that are analyzed in the other chapters of this book.

To answer these research questions, we analyze data of the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS is a general social survey that has been fielded every two years since its inception in 2002. In every round, probability samples of the resident population of over 15 years are interviewed by means of face-to-face surveys in 20 to 30 European countries. Because we are interested in the attitude patterns among members of the majority population, respondents who were born outside the country, who have a foreign nationality, or who consider themselves as a member of an ethnic minority group are removed from our analyses.[3] The ESS is purposefully designed to optimize comparability between countries as well as across time points, with rigorous methodological standards regarding sampling, questionnaire translation and standardized interviewing (Jowell et al. 2007). The ESS consists of a core module that is repeated every round as well as more topical rotating modules. While the ESS core module contains measurements of perceived ethnic threat and attitudes toward immigration policies, rounds 1 (2002-03) and 8 (2016-17) contain items gauging citizens' opinions regarding asylum policies. As such, the ESS provides a very rich source of information to shed light on the European opinion climate regarding migration and asylum over the past two decades.

The remainder of this chapter is split up in two empirical parts. In the first part, we address the first research question and describe the evolution of immigration-related threat perceptions since the early 2000s. The second part zooms in on attitudes towards asylum policies and investigates the impact of individual characteristics as well as contextual variables on these attitudes.

Trends in Economic and Cultural Threat Perceptions from 2002 to 2016

Cross-national evolutions

As a first step, we explore the evolution of perceptions of ethnic threat across Europe since the early 2000s. Ethnic threat perceptions – and evolutions thereof – are often understood in terms of group conflict theory (GCT). GCT postulates that

[3] See on this matter: Sarrasin *et al.* (2014).

perceptions of being threatened by outgroups – such as immigrants and ethnic minorities – are rooted in intergroup competition. According to this framework, social groups are locked in a zero-sum competition for scarce goods and, as a result, believe that prerogatives of the own social group are endangered by outgroups (Blumer 1958). As Blalock (1967) states, actual threat leads to perceived threat. Importantly, not only economic goods – such as well-paid jobs, affordable housing, or the scarce resources of the welfare state – are at stake in intergroup competition. To an important extent, intergroup conflicts center around the distribution of cultural goods, such as cultural traditions or society-specific norms and values (Stephan et al. 1998). It is of crucial importance to distinguish between economic and cultural perceptions of ethnic threat, as they differ in their antecedents (such as social class basis) as well as in their consequences (such as prejudice or voting behavior) (Harell et al. 2012; Meuleman et al. 2017; Sniderman et al. 2004; Lucassen and Lubbers 2011).

According to the logic of GCT, threat perceptions among majority group members are responsive to contextual factors, such as economic conditions or immigrant group size (Blalock 1967). In unfavorable economic contexts, the material goods that are the object of intergroup competition become scarcer, which leads to intensified economic competition and heightened threat perceptions. A stronger presence of immigrant groups furthermore implies that the majority group faces a larger number of economic and cultural competitors, which causes intergroup competition to become stronger as well. Several empirical studies have confirmed that anti-immigration attitudes are more widespread in adverse economic contexts (Quillian 1995; Schneider 2008; Semyonov et al. 2006) with high levels of ethnic diversity (Lahav 2004; Quillian 1995; Scheepers et al. 2002; Schneider 2008), although these effects could not always be replicated (Sides and Citrin 2007).

From a dynamic perspective (Meuleman et al. 2009), GCT implies that *changes* in contextual indicators of actual threat (namely economic conditions and immigrant group size) drive *changes* in the level of economic and cultural threat perceived by the population. Sudden shifts in economic prosperity or immigrant presence could have substantial effects on public opinion (Hopkins 2010). After all, rapid changes can affect labor, housing, and other markets considerably (Olzak 1992) and usually receive wide media coverage (Schlueter and Davidov 2013; Mclaren et al. 2017). The empirical studies testing this dynamic version of GCT are mostly supportive of the propositions derived from GCT. Economic downturns were found to instigate threat perceptions and anti-immigrant attitudes in the United States (Quillian 1995), Canada (Wilkes and Corrigall-Brown 2010; Wilkes et al. 2008), Germany (Coenders and Scheepers 2008) and the Netherlands (Coenders and Scheepers 1998; Coenders et al. 2008). Also, studies combining a cross-national and longitudinal perspective confirm the role of economic conditions (Semyonov et al. 2006; Meuleman et al. 2019; Kuntz et al. 2017).

Based on these theoretical reflections, we can derive a number of expectations regarding the recent evolutions of perceived economic and cultural threat across Europe. Concretely, GCT predicts (1) that perceptions of (especially economic) threat have become more prevalent in countries that were affected strongly by the recent

economic crisis, and (2) that threat perceptions have become stronger in countries that have experienced increased inflows of immigrants during the reception crisis.

To test these expectations, we explore the evolutions in perceived economic and cultural threat using the ESS time series (consisting of 8 rounds of data collection between 2002/03 and 2016/17). Because the focus is on change, we only include countries that participated in three ESS rounds at least.[4] This leads to a dataset containing 26 countries, 175 country-year combinations and more than 240.000 respondents. The ESS core module contains two[5] items that were designed to measure economic and cultural threat perceptions (Sides and Citrin 2007; Pichler 2010). Respondents are invited to position themselves on an 11-point scale of which the endpoints refer to perceiving immigration as a disadvantage or as an advantage for the economy (*Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?*) and the cultural life (*Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?*). The scales are reversed, so that 0 indicates low and 10 high threat.

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 display the evolutions of economic and cultural threat respectively for the 26 countries (grouped by region) and reveal a number of highly interesting patterns. First, considerable cross-national differences exist in the general strength of threat perceptions. In the Northern European countries, the average scores on economic threat vary largely between 4 and 5 (on a scale from 0 to 10), and the averages on cultural threat perceptions are even lower (mostly between 3 and 4). Furthermore, threat perceptions in Northern Europe are very stable and hardly evolve

[4] The following countries have data for the following years. Austria: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2014 and 2016; Belgium: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Bulgaria: 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012; Cyprus: 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012; Czech Republic: 2002, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Denmark: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014; Estonia: 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Finland: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; France: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Germany: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Greece: 2002, 2004, 2008, 2010; Hungary: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Iceland: 2004, 2012 and 2016; Italy: 2002, 2004, 2012 and 2016; Ireland: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Lithuania: 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Netherlands: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Norway: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Poland: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Portugal: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Slovakia: 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012; Slovenia: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Spain: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Sweden: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; Switzerland: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016; United Kingdom: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016.

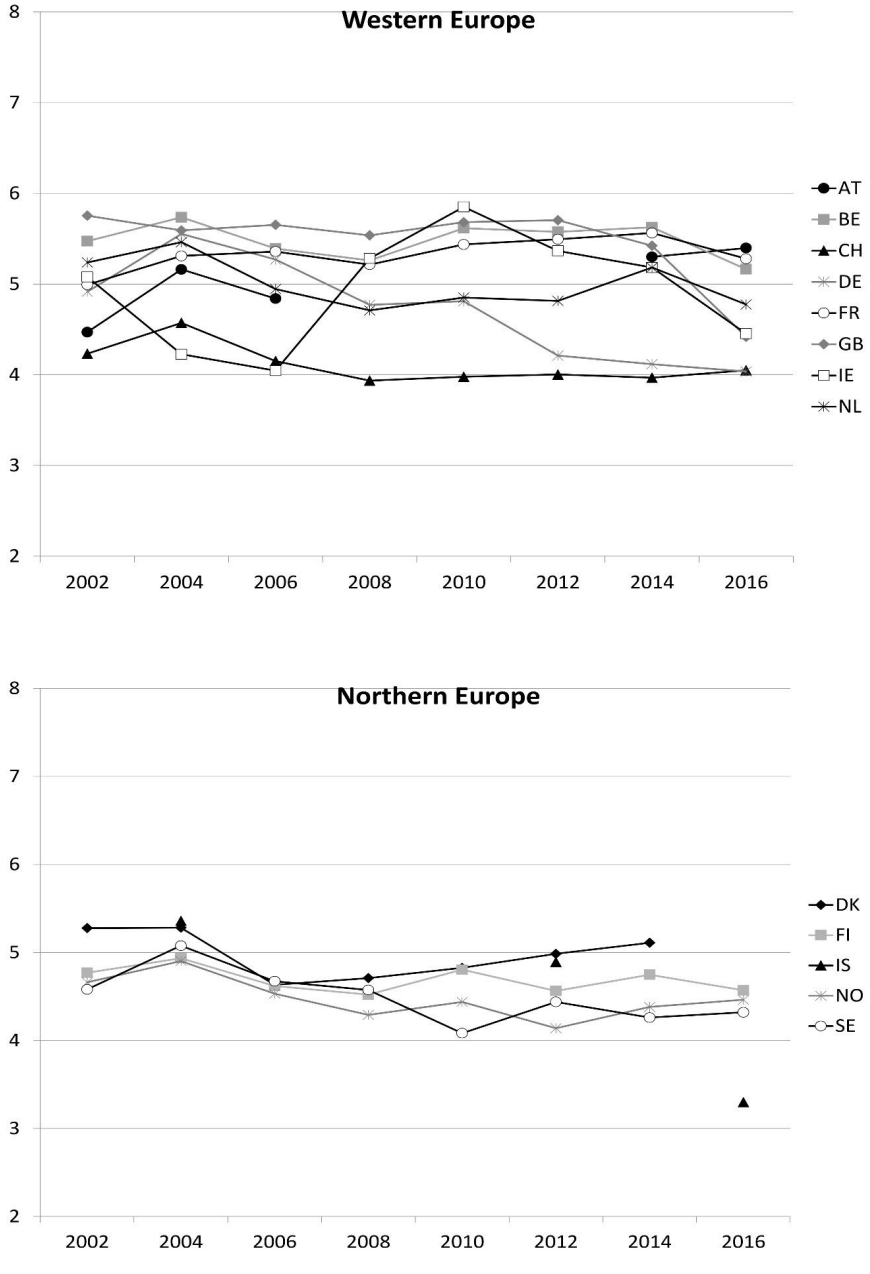
[5] The core module of the ESS contains a third item measuring immigration-related group threats (ESS item *imwbcnt*). Because the wording of this item is very general and does not refer to specific sources of threat, we do not include it in the analysis. While the two items have been used as indicators of a single concept of general group threat in previous research (Sides and Citrin 2007), we analyze them separately to render the difference between economic and cultural sources of threat visible (for a similar approach, see Pichler). This approach is justified by the fact that both items contain – especially at the individual and country-year level – considerable unique information.

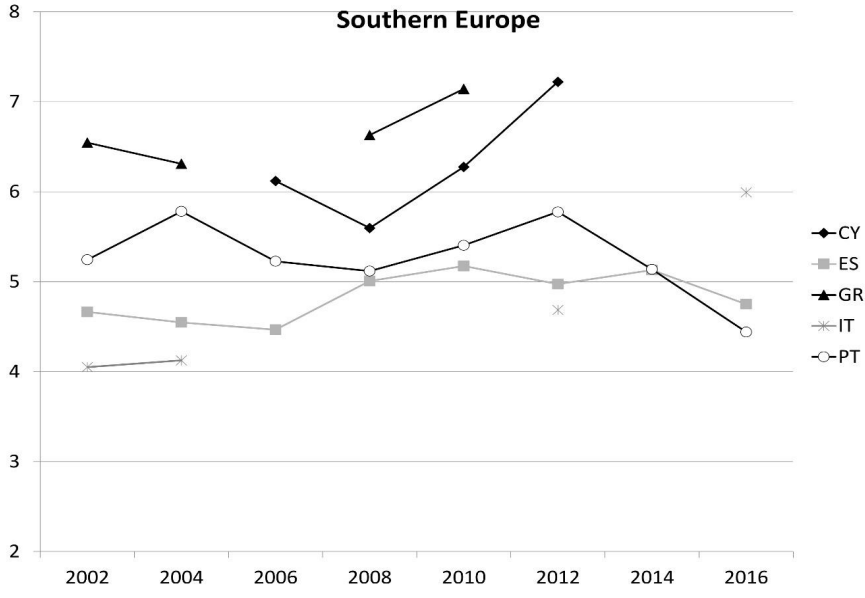
between 2002 and 2016. In the strong welfare economies of Northern Europe, neither the economic crisis nor the refugee reception crisis has led to more widespread concerns among the population about the presence of immigrants. There is a stark contrast between Northern and Eastern Europe, however, where levels of economic and cultural threat are substantially higher. Interestingly, the economic threat scores in most Eastern European countries are higher than cultural threat scores for most of the time series. This indicates that the presence of immigrants (which is relatively limited in most of Eastern Europe) was perceived as a material threat rather than as a threat to the national identity, norms and values. However, from 2014 onwards an outspoken increase in threat perceptions can be seen, and this increase is stronger for cultural than for economic threat perceptions. In Poland (for a long time the Eastern European country with the lowest threat scores) and Hungary, the increase in average cultural threat between 2012 and 2014 equals 1.2 and 1.8 points respectively, which is a dramatic increase on the scale from 0 to 10.

The average levels of threat in Western European countries are largely situated in between the low-threat context of Northern Europe and the strong threat perceptions in the East. Despite the economic crisis and increased inflow of asylum seekers, threat levels in most Western European countries show a high degree of stability. In Germany – the country that has known the strongest inflow of asylum seekers in the current reception crisis- cultural as well as economic threat were lower in 2016 than in 2010. The most remarkable change in Western Europe can be observed in Ireland, where economic threat perceptions became stronger in the crisis years of 2008 and 2010 but have lost strength since then. In Southern Europe, finally, very mixed patterns can be observed. In all Southern European countries, we see an increase in economic threat perceptions in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis (that is, between 2008 and 2012). In all countries but Spain, these economic anxieties appear to have spilled over to the cultural realm as well. Since 2012, however, both forms of threat have decreased in Portugal, remained stable in Spain and flared up in Italy.

In sum, the observed trends in economic and cultural threat perceptions confirm GCT only partially. Analyzing the same ESS data by means of societal growth curve models (Meuleman et al. 2017), shows that economic threat perceptions indeed gained strength between 2008 and 2010, especially in the countries that were heavily affected by the economic crisis. Also in line with GCT, cultural threat perceptions remained unaffected by the economic cycle. However, the rise of economic threat proved to be very short-lived, and by 2012 economic threat reverted back to the pre-crisis level. Since 2012, we see a strong increase in (especially cultural) threat in very specific countries, but stability in others. GCT cannot explain that the strongest increase in perceived threat occurred in Eastern Europe, where most countries experienced small inflows of asylum seekers only (such as Poland and Estonia), while threat remained stable in countries receiving larger inflows (such as Germany). Clearly, sudden inflows of asylum seekers do not necessarily or automatically set of a backlash of threat perceptions among the majority population. As the case of Poland demonstrates, the political climate and elite discourses on immigration and asylum might be more relevant to understand public opinion trends than indicators of actual group competition (such as the inflow of immigrants and asylum seekers).

Figure 1.1: Trends in average perceived economic threat for 26 countries (by region)

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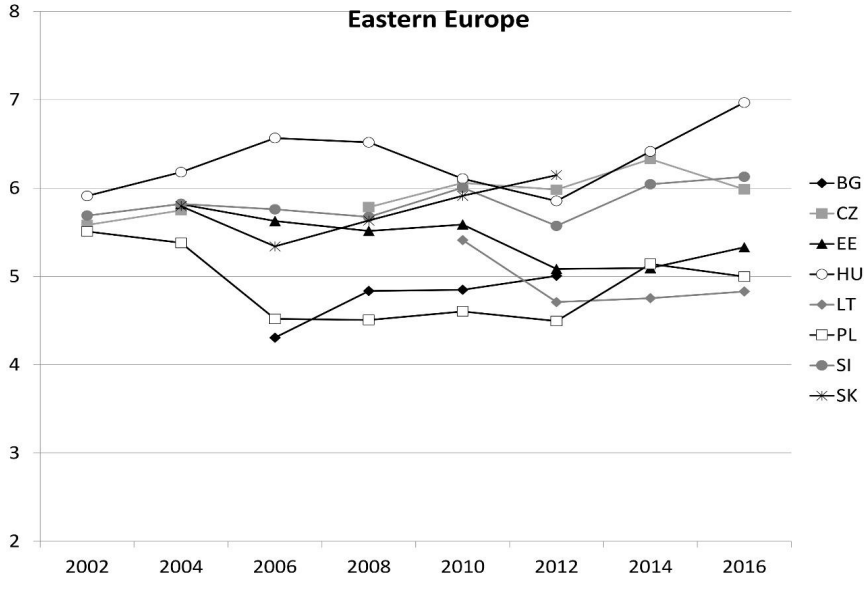
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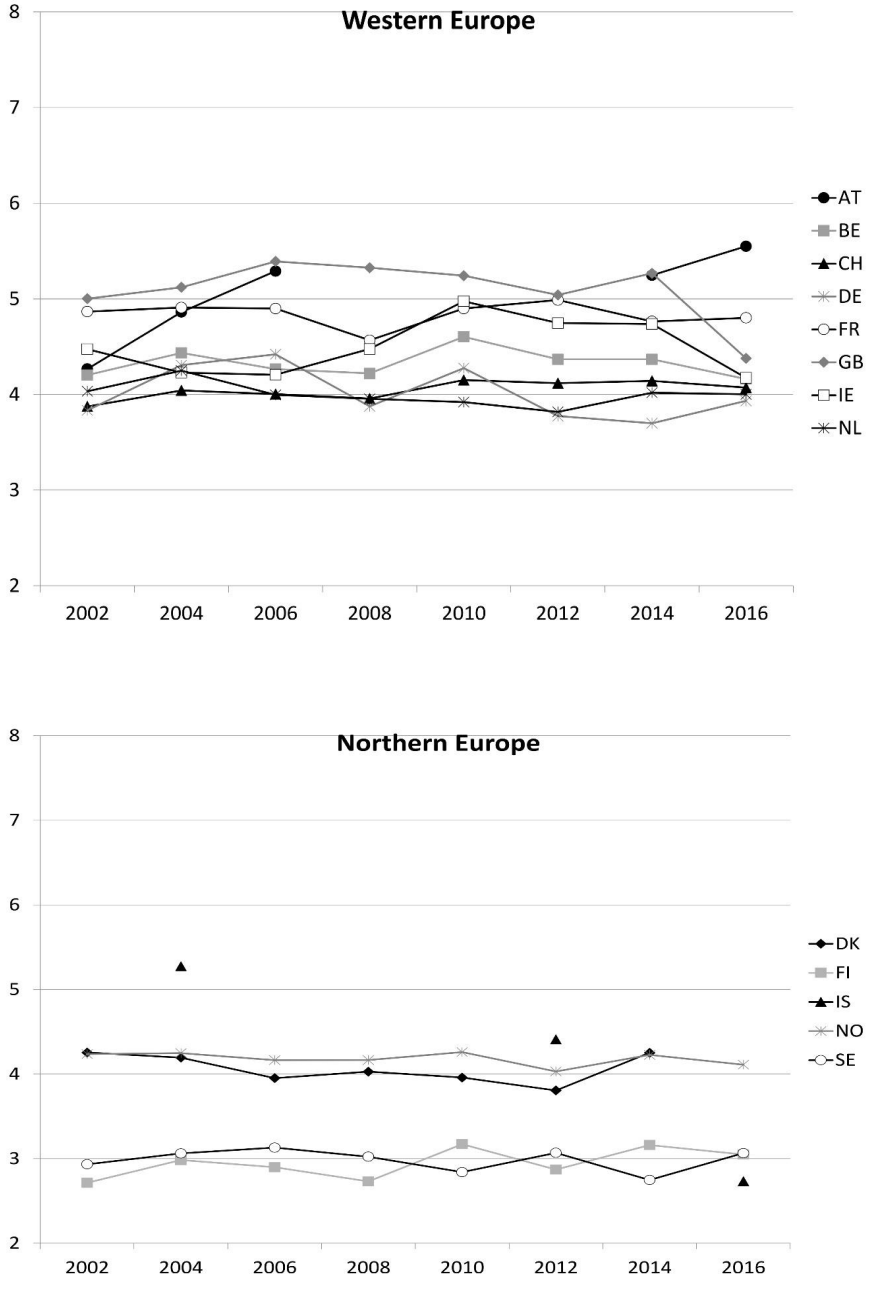
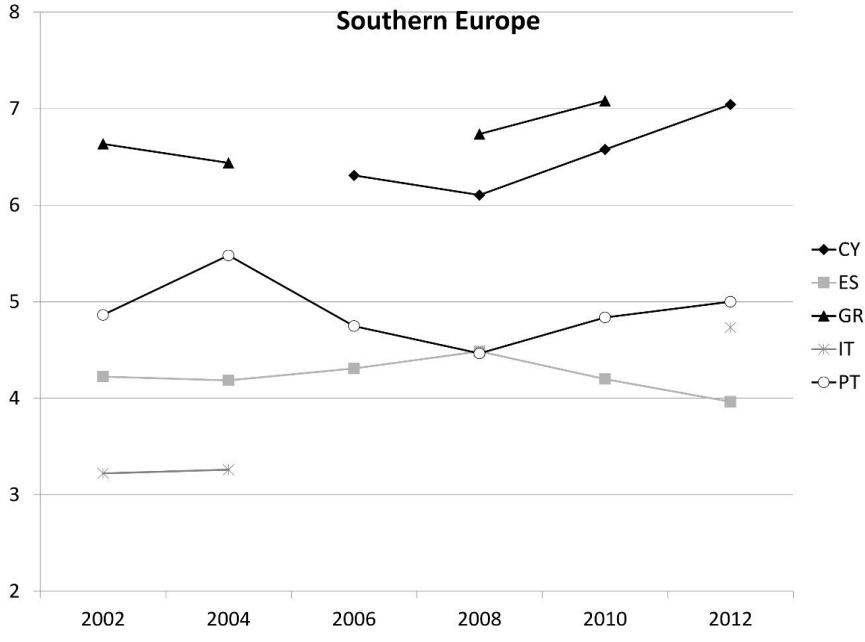
Figure 1.2: Trends in average perceived cultural threat for 26 countries (by region)

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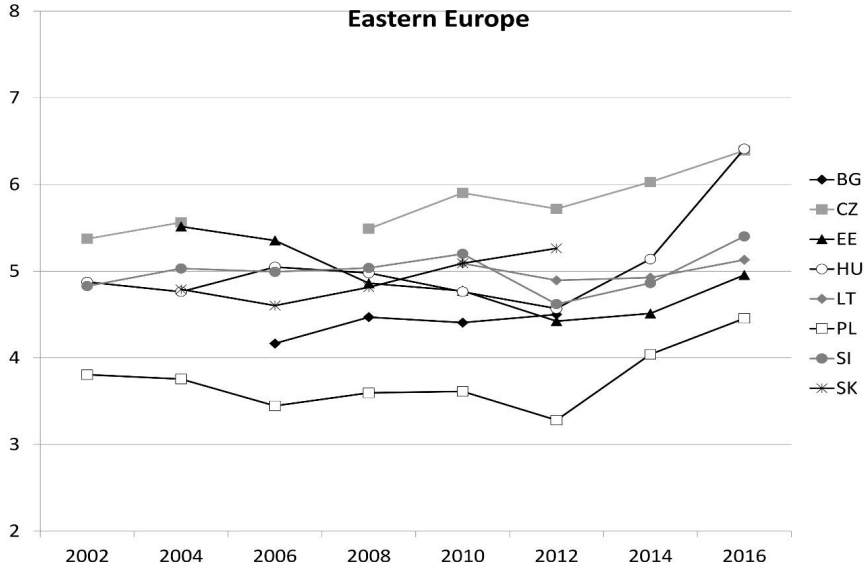
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The evolution of perceived threat in Belgium by region

As one of the main research sites of this project is Belgium (see Chapter VII of this book), we also offer a more detailed overview of the evolution of economic and cultural threat perceptions by region in Belgium. This is especially relevant in light of the current election results of May 2019 that suggest the existence of a deepening divide between right-wing Flanders and left-wing Francophone Belgium. While in Flanders almost 20 percent voted for the radical-right Vlaams Belang, in Francophone Belgium the majority voted for left-wing parties. In this light, it is interesting to study if these outspoken differences in voting behavior can be understood in terms of divergent threat perceptions in both regions. Figure 1.3 displays this evolution in economic and cultural threat perceptions from 2002 to 2016 as measured in the ESS. Available data does of course not provide information up to the point of the most recent elections, but nevertheless gives important indications of the historical divides in attitudes between both regions.

Figure 1.3: Trend in average perceived economic and cultural threat for Flanders and Francophone Belgium

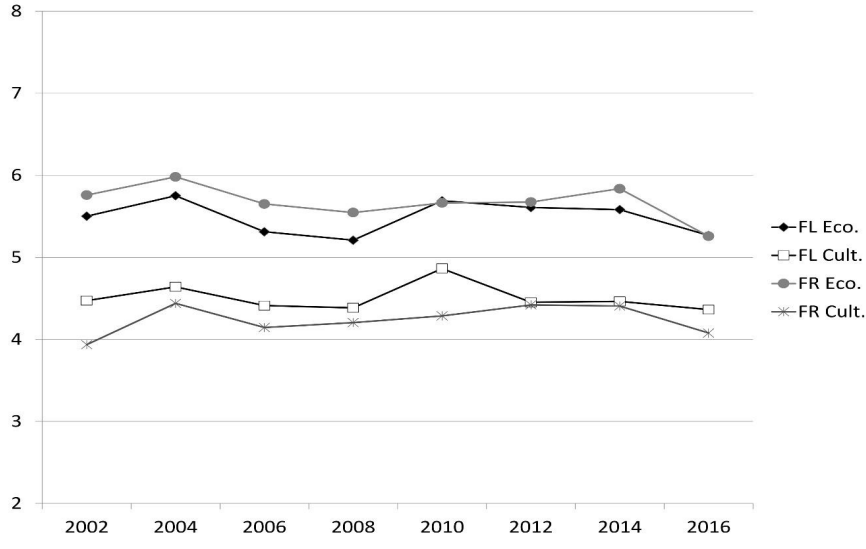


Figure 1.3 reveals, interestingly enough, not only that threat perception have evolved similarly in both regions, but also that levels of threat are also almost identical. In both regions, there is a high degree of stability, as threat perceptions barely change from 2002 to 2016 (with the exception of a slight elevated cultural threat in Flanders in 2010). Especially from 2012 onwards threat perceptions are about equal in both regions, which suggests that there is not a strong divide in anti-immigrant sentiments. Contrary to what is often believed, the Francophone Belgians do not feel less threatened by immigration than their Flemish counterparts. Moreover, in Flanders as well as Francophone Belgium economic threat is slightly higher than cultural threat at all available time points. In line with previous studies

(Billiet et al. 2017; Billiet et al. 2015), this brief overview illustrates that the left-right divide between Flanders and Francophone Belgium should be understood as the result of differences in the party system (the supply side of politics) rather than in terms of popular demands (the demand side). Instead of public opinion as such, differences in the political landscape, agendas and mobilization of anti-immigrant sentiments are responsible for opposing electoral outcomes. At least for the topic of immigration, we are unable to conclude that Flemish respondents are more right-wing or restrictive in their opinions. The attitudinal differences between both regions should, as a result, not be exaggerated.

European Citizens' Attitudes Towards Asylum Policy

Attitudes towards asylum policies: 2002 and 2016 compared

The previous section illustrated that perceptions of being threatened by immigrants in general have not necessarily intensified in all European countries. This analysis leaves unclear, however, how opinions specifically regarding asylum-seekers and refugees have evolved. Although research has pointed to a growing polarization in media frames, political debates and policy approaches (Ritter and Rhomberg 2017; Triandafyllidou 2018; Castells 2018), a dissection of public preferences is lacking. This section therefore provides a descriptive overview of Europeans' attitudes towards asylum policy in 2002 and 2016. This allows to explore cross-national variation in attitudes, which is especially useful in the light of the current divides between more welcoming and more xenophobic European member states. The comparison of attitudes towards asylum policies between 2002 and 2016 is particularly interesting because of the profoundly different context. In the early 2000's, Europe witnessed large movements of asylum seekers in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars and the Kosovo crisis. These migration movements were relatively gradual, intra-European and believed to be mostly temporary.

To operationalize attitudes towards asylum policies, we use two items (5-point agree-disagree scale) that were fielded in both the first (2002) and the eighth wave (2016) of the European Social Survey. While the first item asks respondents whether they support a welcoming government (*The government should be generous in judging people's applications for refugee status*), the second question probes opinions on family reunification (*Refugees whose applications are granted should be entitled to bring in their close family members*). The strong correlation between the two items ($r=0.452$) illustrate that it is legitimate to construct an index taking the average of both items that will be used in subsequent analyses to measure attitudes towards asylum policy. Before turning to the index, however, we provide the percentage of respondents who (completely) disagree with these statements per country in 2016 (see Table 1.1). In addition, the number of asylum seekers per 1000 inhabitants per country is displayed to provide insight into the numbers of asylum seekers residing in each of these countries.[6]

[6] Eurostat, *Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex: Annual aggregated data*, 2016, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&lang=en, accessed July 5, 2019; Eurostat, *Population on 1 January by age and sex*, 2016,

Table 1.1: Percentages of respondents (dis)agreeing with each of the asylum policy statements and numbers of asylum seekers per country in 2016[7].

	% (completely) disagree generous government	% (completely) agree generous government	% (completely) disagree family reunification	% (completely) agree family reunification	Number asylum seekers per 1000 inhabitants
Austria	51.1	26.9	39.4	37.7	4.87
Belgium	53.3	26.5	43.3	36.9	1.62
Czech Republic	70.3	11.4	34.3	39.2	0.14
Germany	51.5	25.5	26.7	57.5	9.07
Estonia	72.7	10.1	40.1	36.4	0.13
Finland	30.1	37.2	11.7	72.8	1.03
France	26.5	55.2	30.9	51.4	1.26
Iceland	15.6	59.8	10.2	69.7	3.83
Ireland	21.2	58.8	27.7	55.0	0.48
Italy	45.2	27.0	24.4	47.8	2.03
Lithuania	30.1	34.2	17.6	48.3	0.15
Netherlands	69.5	14.5	38.5	40.2	1.23
Norway	21.9	53.2	19.3	57.9	0.68
Poland	21.2	46.3	20.3	56.6	0.32
Portugal	10.4	71.9	16.2	68.5	0.14
Slovenia	43.1	26.8	32.5	48.0	0.64
Spain	15.9	60.1	11.2	74.8	0.34
Sweden	16.6	48.4	20.1	53.1	2.93
Switzerland	38.7	34.5	30.8	50.7	3.27
United Kingdom	24.8	48.7	33.0	43.4	0.61

Table 1.1 reveals that there is considerable variation between countries in the proportions of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statements on asylum policies. Concerning the first item, we see that the percentage disagreeing that the government should judge asylum applications generously ranges from 10.4 in Portugal to 72.7 in Estonia. Family reunification for refugees seems to be less of a dividing issue, as disagreement ranges from 10.2 percent in Iceland to 43.3 in Belgium. Moreover, in 16 of the 20 countries there are more respondents who agree with family reunification than respondents who approve the generous granting of refugee status. The willingness to allow reunification with close family members appears larger than the support for the settlement of asylum seekers. The results illustrate a wide divide in

http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_pjan&lang=en, accessed July 5, 2019.

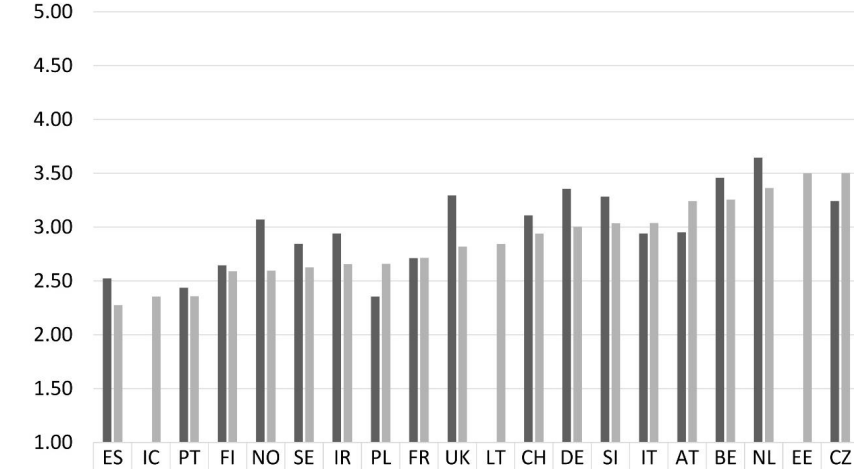
[7] The following countries that were included in the analysis of threat perceptions are not included anymore due to a lack of data for 2016: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, and Slovakia. Hungary is also excluded but for a different reason: the item for family reunification was erroneously not included in its questionnaire.

public preferences regarding the treatment of asylum seekers across Europe. Clearly, the pattern of regional differences preferences regarding asylum policies bears some similarity with the pattern for threat perceptions (see the previous sections), but also shows some marked differences (such as the position of Belgium and the Netherlands). However, as these items measure one joint concept of attitudes towards asylum policy, we examine the index combining the two items on asylum policy preferences across countries and over time.

A number of relevant findings can be derived from the means displayed in Figure 1.4. First, public opinion towards asylum policies is in most countries neither extremely negative nor extremely positive, as most average scores are relatively close to the midpoint of the scale. In 2016 most means are below instead of above the middle of the scale, which shows that in most countries there is a moderately positive rather than a moderately negative climate. Second, there is considerable cross-national variation in public preferences for asylum policies, as means range from 2.27 to 3.50. In 2016, Spain, Portugal and the Nordic countries are most supportive of generous policies. On average, citizens from Belgium, The Netherlands, Estonia and Czech Republic are most restrictive in their policy preferences. When comparing the mean scores displayed in Figure 1.3 to the number of asylum seekers per 1000 inhabitants displayed in Table 1.1, it becomes apparent that some of the most aversive countries towards asylum seekers, such as Estonia and the Czech Republic, do not face high numbers of asylum applications. This also provides support for the thesis of the previous section that sentiments towards immigrants or asylum seekers are not necessarily the most negative in countries that knew a steeper increase in the number of asylum applications.

The third – and perhaps the most notable – finding is that, compared to 2002, attitudes towards asylum seekers have generally become more positive across Europe. Between 2002 and 2016, support for generous policies grew significantly stronger in 12 of the 17 countries with available data for both time points. Only in Poland, Italy, Austria and the Czech Republic have attitudes become significantly more negative over time. Interestingly, two of these countries – Poland and Czech Republic – figure among the countries that have the lowest number of asylum applications in Europe (see Table 1.1). Given the non-European background of current flows of asylum-seekers, this pattern is quite surprising and in contradiction with the logic of group conflict theory. A possible explanation could be the prominence of humanitarian frames at the beginning of the current refugee reception crisis, with a strong emphasis on the needs and benefits of refugees and asylum seekers instead of on their societal costs (Ritter and Rhomberg 2017; Tartakovsky and Walsh 2016). This finding confirms once more that political reactions and dominant frames might be of greater importance in shaping public preferences than the numbers of newcomers *per se*.

Figure 1.4: Means of the index measuring attitudes towards asylum policies in 2002 and 2016[8]



	ES	IC	PT	FI	NO	SE	IR	PL	FR	UK	LT	CH	DE	SI	IT	AT	BE	NL	EE	CZ
ȳ 2002	2.5		2.4	2.6	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.3	2.7	3.2		3.1	3.3	3.2	2.9	2.9	3.4	3.6		3.2
ȳ 2016	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.5

Note: Higher scores on the index represent a preference for less generous policies

Explaining attitudes towards asylum policy: Individual and contextual determinants

As a next step, we try to uncover which factors influence citizens' preferences for particular asylum policies. Hereby we focus on three explanatory frameworks. First, the effect of the social structure is considered, as previous research has shown that attitudes towards asylum seekers and immigrants are socially stratified (Steele and Abdelaaty 2018; Coenders et al. 2004; Bolt and Wetsteijn 2018). Second, we investigate the effects of four frames that are recurrent in the media and in political debates (Ritter and Rhomberg 2017; De Cleen et al. 2017; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). Third and last, this section seeks to explain how policy preferences are shaped by the policy, migratory and economic context in the country. This explanatory account of attitudes towards asylum policy focuses on the data from 2016, as we wish to explain policy preferences in the context of the current situation.

Individual determinants

To begin with, we anticipate finding that attitudes towards asylum policy differ along social-structural lines. As posited by GCT, negative attitudes towards newcomers are rooted in perceived intergroup competition. Based on their social position, different social categories experience diverging levels of ethnic competition,

[8] To examine whether the means of countries differ significantly between 2002 and 2016, a series of t-tests are conducted. These tests show that, except for France, the means of all countries are significantly different between both time points.

which reflect upon their attitudes towards ethnic out-groups. Especially low-status groups are vulnerable for ethnic competition over scarce resources, as they generally access similar job or housing markets as migrants and have less resources to protect them from competition (Meuleman et al. 2017; Scheepers et al. 2002; Schneider, 2008). Higher competition leads to processes of contra-identification and potentially, as a defence mechanism, to higher support for the limited admission of migrants or asylum seekers (Ivarsflaten 2005; Scheepers et al. 2002). As a result, we hypothesize that individuals with a lower socio-economic status have more restrictive attitudes. To test this, we examine how occupational status, educational level and subjective income relate to policy preferences. Occupation is divided in six classes on the basis of the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero scheme (Ganzeboom and Treiman 1996): the service class, white collar workers, blue collar workers, the self-employed, the unemployed, and the retired and other non-actives. Educational attainment is divided into three categories: lower (secondary) education, higher secondary education and tertiary education. The subjective income variable encompasses the following four categories: "living comfortably", "coping", "finding it difficult" and "finding it very difficult" on the present income.

Apart from the social structure, four frames or discourses, which have been recurrent in the media and in political debates, are crucial to consider. First, a humanitarian framework, which initially prevailed and emphasizes the moral duty of admitting asylum seekers, has been prevalent (Tartakovsky and Walsh 2016; Ritter and Rhomberg 2017). This humanitarianism portrays refugees as the victims of violent conflict, focuses on their rights and stresses the moral responsibility of including them into host societies (De Cleen et al. 2017; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). The adoption of this inclusive, solidary and welcoming discourse is expected to stimulate support for generous asylum policies. To operationalize the humanitarian frame, we focus on the human value universalism, which emphasizes tolerance, the understanding of people who are different from one's self and the importance of defending the welfare of all (Schwartz 1994). This value coincides with humanitarianism through its focus on the protection of the weak and its preoccupation with the situation of disadvantaged groups (Davidov et al. 2014; Schwartz 2006; Tartakovsky and Walsh 2016). In the ESS, universalism is measured by three items (six-point scale) asking to what extent respondents identify with portraits of individuals who think it is important to listen to different people, who believe that everyone should be treated equally and who care about nature and the environment. Items are reversed so that higher values indicate a higher identification with this value. Previous research confirms that all items load strongly on the latent concept of universalism (Davidov et al. 2014).

Other frames, however, are not so receptive to the admittance and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Instead of focusing on the benefits and positive consequences of allowing asylum seekers entry, other discourses highlight the threats they pose to the economy, cultural life and internal security. As a second frame, we examine the impact of a negative economic discourse, which portrays asylum seekers as damaging to the national economy. The inflow of asylum seekers is considered to be too costly and to be at the expense of the welfare of the native population (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). In this view, asylum seekers and refugees are portrayed as

disguised economic migrants who wish to profit materially from their migration and who compete with the host population over scarce economic resources (De Cleen et al. 2017; Tartakovsky and Walsh 2016). Individuals who adopt this type of motivation are anticipated to prefer more restrictive asylum policies to protect their own as well as the general well-being (Ivarsflaten 2005). To operationalize the economic frame, we use perceptions of economic threat. Economic threat is measured by the same item as in the first theoretical section and is also reversed so that higher values indicate stronger fear for the economic consequences of immigration.

The third frame operates independently of material concerns but concentrates instead on how the inflow of newcomers affects the culture of the host country and the national identity. This cultural discourse portrays asylum seekers and refugees as damaging to the national culture and the existing traditions. In the current context, the inflow of asylum seekers is often linked to the increasing fear for the impact of the so-called 'Islamization' on the dominant norms and values of the host society. From this point of view Islam is incompatible with 'Western civilization' and its core liberal values, such as secularism and equality between men and women (Bracke 2012; De Cleen at al. 2017; Lucassen 2018). Although this line of thought is far from new, it is increasingly incorporated into current political debates and tailored the situation of a large inflow of migrants from outside the European Union. We expect that individuals who adopt this cultural frame are more supportive of restrictive policies, as curbing immigration should enable the preservation of dominant norms and values (Ivarsflaten 2005). To measure the cultural frame, we use the item on perceptions of cultural threat that was also analyzed in the section of the evolution of threat perceptions. High values indicate stronger cultural threat perceptions.

The fourth and last frame, the securitarian frame, treats the inflow of refugees as a problem of national security. Refugees and asylum seekers are conceived of as being dangerous to public safety, as they are blamed of committing crimes and of having immoral intentions. This rhetoric has arisen in light of several terrorist attacks, as for instance in Paris in 2015 and in Brussels in 2016, and other public incidents, such as in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015 (De Cleen et al. 2017; Ritter and Rhomberg 2017). Especially Muslim men are feared and blamed, as they are considered to be particularly threatening to the safety of women and children. Moreover, the securitarian logic characterizes asylum seekers as an uncontrollable, immoral and barbaric mass of people wanting to enter the European continent (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). Adopting this perspective is expected to foster support for restrictive policies, as this frame is closely linked to the introduction of higher surveillance, more border controls and stricter immigration legislations to manage the risk that refugees pose to internal security (Holzberg et al. 2018; Ibrahim 2005). To operationalize this frame, we study feelings of unsafety, as the existence of a relationship with asylum policy preferences would illustrate that perceptions of unsafety are partly attributable to fear of violence and criminal activities from refugees or asylum seekers (Rustenbach 2010). Feelings of unsafety were measured by a single item that probes whether individuals feel safe in their neighbourhood. The 4-point scale ranges from "very safe" to "very unsafe".

Contextual determinants

Apart from these individual determinants, several country-characteristics are deemed important in influencing asylum policy preferences. To begin with, we focus on the policy context, as the asylum policy that is being pursued in a given country could influence public support. Policies institutionalize and shape norms on the preferred roles of refugees in the host society and on the ways they should be treated, which may in turn be internalized by the public (Koster and Kaminska 2012; Schlueter et al. 2013). Open policies could thus lead to less hostile attitudes, as they put forward welcoming norms in the reception of asylum seekers. However, more generous policies could also lead to the settlement of a larger number of refugees, which could heighten threat perceptions among majority group members according to group conflict theory. Previous studies suggest that welcoming or tolerant immigration policies have been shown to lower instead of heighten threat perceptions and that the norm-shaping function is most plausible (Green et al. 2019). We operationalize the generosity of asylum policies by means of the approval rate of asylum applications in a given country. When this approval rate is higher, it points to a generous treatment of asylum applications by government officials, which could influence public opinion at large (Esses et al. 2017). On the basis of Eurostat data of 2016, we calculate the approval rate by dividing the number of positive decisions on asylum applications by the total number of taken decisions.[9]

Second, the explanatory role of the migratory context is explored. We focus on two important dimensions that could be relevant for public attitudes towards asylum policies. As a first aspect, we assess whether the number of asylum seekers in a given country can explain cross-national variation in preferences for particular policies. According to group conflict theory, a larger size of the out-group and a larger inflow of asylum seekers strengthens ethnic competition but also heightens the salience of the topic of immigration. These contexts can in turn foster support for policies that limit the numbers of asylum seekers entering the country (Fasani 2016; Zaun 2018). The size of the out-group is operationalized as the number of asylum applicants per 1000 inhabitants in 2016.[10] As a second aspect of the migratory context, the share of asylum applicants from Middle Eastern conflict regions could matter. A higher share of applicants from these regions is anticipated to lead to more support for welcoming policies, as Middle Eastern asylum seekers are generally seen as more deserving than asylum seekers from other regions (Holmes and Castañeda 2016; Von Hermanni and Neumann 2018). This higher deservingness is expected to be reflected in a more open attitude and an increased willingness to receive asylum seekers and refugees in the country. This factor is operationalized by dividing the number of asylum applicants in 2016 from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq by the total number of asylum applicants,

[9] Eurostat, *First Instance Decisions on Applications by Citizenship, Age and Sex: Annual Aggregated Data*, 2016, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asydcfsta&lang=en, accessed July 5, 2019.

[10] *Ibid.*

which is also obtained from the database of Eurostat. These three countries are chosen because they constitute the primary countries of origins of asylum seekers in 2016.[11]

Last, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the economic context is often argued to be of importance. In line with GCT, countries that experience an economic downfall or recession are thought to be characterised by a more restrictive opinion climate, as these circumstances heighten competition over scarce economic resources (Semyonov et al. 2006; Wilkes et al. 2008). Moreover, worries about the costs of accommodating and integrating refugees into the host country might become more pronounced during times of economic hardship. To study the impact of the economic situation in a country, unemployment rates are examined. Higher unemployment rates have been shown to lead to more negative immigration attitudes, as they bring about heightened competition over scarcely available jobs (Meuleman et al. 2009). As a result, we hypothesize that higher unemployment rates will lead to preferences for more restrictive asylum policies. Unemployment rates are operationalized by taking the average unemployment rate over the years 2011 to 2016 from the database of the Wold Bank.[12] By levelling out more extreme values, this approach guarantees that more long-term economic effects are considered.

Multilevel analysis

To determine how these individual- and country-level characteristics influence attitudes towards asylum policy, we conduct a multilevel analysis on the basis of the data from the European Social Survey round 8 (2016). The dependent variable in this analysis is the index measuring support for restrictive asylum policies that was also shown in the descriptive overview. This allows to take into account the clustered nature of the data and to model within- and between-level effects simultaneously. As 14.6 percent of the variance in attitudes towards asylum policies is located at the country-level, a multilevel approach is warranted. We adopt a stepwise approach to determine whether the social structural effects remain substantial after including the four frames into the multilevel model. Table 1.2 displays the standardized regression coefficients and significance levels for of the two models. Only the dummy variables are not standardized, so that these effect refer to the number of standard deviations a particular category differs from the reference group. Note that apart from the discussed variables, several control variables are also included in the multilevel models: age, gender, religiosity (*How religious would you say you are; 0-10*), area of residence (*What would describe best the area where you live?; 0=Rural area; 1= Big city, suburbs or town*) and left-right placement (*Where would you place yourself on the "left" to "right" scale?; 0-10*).

[11] See: UNHCR, *Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2016*, 2017, https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global-trends-forced-displacement-2016.html?query=global%20trends%20forced%20displacement%202016, accessed July 5, 2019.

[12] See: The World Bank, *Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force; Modeled ILO Estimate)*, 2016, http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS&country, accessed July 5, 2019.

The first model in Table 1.2 shows that individuals with a weaker socio-economic position are more supportive of restrictive asylum policies: Respondents without a tertiary education, those who find it very difficult on their present income and blue collar workers are least welcoming of asylum seekers. A possible explanation could be the higher competition over scarce resources these social categories experience from asylum seekers and refugees, which results in processes of contra-identification and in preferences for restrictive policies (Scheepers et al. 2002; Schneider 2008). In addition, right-wing individuals are more restrictive in their preferences. This is connected to the higher problematization of immigration and the higher hostility towards out-groups inherent to right-wing ideology (Semyonov et al. 2006). Moreover, the effects of the other control variables illustrate that men, older respondents, less religious individuals and respondents from urbanized regions are more supportive of restrictive policies. However, when indicators of the four frames are introduced in Model 2, many of the coefficients of the structural variables become smaller or insignificant. Some of the occupation and subjective income categories, for instance, do not differ significantly anymore after introducing the four moral frames. This illustrates that differences between groups are partly relatable to their differing usage or adoption of the four discourses.

From the second model we learn that the four frames are all related in the expected manner to attitudes towards asylum policy. First, universalism has a significant negative effect on preferences for a restrictive policy, which shows that individuals who believe that everyone should be treated equally are more prone to welcome asylum seekers into the country. The adoption of the humanitarian frame -that emphasizes the importance of respecting human rights and by portrays refugees as the primary victims in the current reception crisis- thus proves to be an effective buffer against negative attitudes towards asylum seekers (De Cleen et al. 2017). Second, economic threat perceptions (that is, the indicator for adoption of the economic frame) encourage support for restrictive policies. Clearly, individuals who portray asylum seekers as threatening to the welfare of the host country and who perceive them as economically burdensome prefer to restrict their admittance (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). Third, the frame of cultural threat fosters support for restrictive policies as well. The belief that migrants threaten the cultural life and that the values of (mainly Muslim) refugees are incompatible with the Western liberal core values thus increases support for measures that enable the protection of the dominant way of life (De Cleen et al. 2017; Ivarsflaten 2005). Last, also feelings of unsafety shape attitudes towards asylum policy. Consequently, the utilization of a securitarian frame, which sees asylum seekers as detrimental to national security and to the safety of children and women, increases support for curbing their inflow (De Cleen et al. 2017; Ritter and Rhomberg 2017). Although all of the four frames have a substantial impact in determining attitudes towards asylum policy, they are not all equally important. The effect of cultural threat is the largest, followed by the one of economic threat, which illustrates that cultural and economic frames are the most effective in shaping attitudes.

Turning to the contextual level, only unemployment rates appear to be significantly related to attitudes towards asylum policies, albeit not in the expected direction. The effect is negative, which indicates that higher unemployment rates go hand in hand with a more welcoming opinion climate. On the basis of group conflict theory, we would expect the opposite pattern, namely that higher unemployment leads to more competition over scarce material resources and to more restrictive policy preferences (Meuleman et al. 2017). Notwithstanding, a more disadvantageous economic situation seems to go hand in hand with support for a higher admittance of asylum seekers. This counterintuitive effect is mainly driven by the fact that countries with a high unemployment rate such as Spain and Portugal are precisely the ones where the population favours generous asylum policies. Simultaneously, several countries with relatively low unemployment rates, such as Austria and the Czech Republic, are characterized by a restrictive opinion climate. A causal interpretation is unlikely, but this finding nevertheless illustrates that a difficult labour market context does not necessarily lead to widespread negative attitudes towards outgroups, such as asylum seekers or refugees. Moreover, this counterintuitive effect is in line with a growing body of literature that contradicts GCT (Mols and Jetten 2017). The other country-level characteristics are not significantly related to asylum policy preferences. Apparently, our indicators of the policy and migratory context do not exert a noticeable influence on attitudes towards asylum policies. More generous policies or higher shares of asylum seekers from Middle Eastern conflict regions do not form the basis of a more positive opinion climate and a higher number of asylum seekers per 1000 inhabitants does not lead to less support for welcoming policies. This indicates that the European dividing lines in terms of the generosity of policies and in the scale of the inflow of asylum seekers are not the crucial drives of the substantial cross-national differences in public opinion vis-à-vis asylum and refugees.

Table 1.2: Standardized regression coefficients and significance levels of multilevel analysis on support for restrictive asylum policies and immigration policies in 2016 (N=26750)

	Attitudes asylum policy		**Attitudes immigration policy**	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Individual variables				
Gender				
Female (ref.)				
Male	0.041***	0.059***	0.010	0.034**
Age	0.064***	0.041***	0.134***	0.104***
Education				
Lower (secondary)	0.022	-0.064***	0.156***	0.061***
Higher secondary (ref.)				
Tertiary	-0.201***	-0.055***	-0.237***	-0.079***
Subjective income				
Comfortable (ref.)				
Coping	0.073***	-0.015	0.139***	0.042***
Difficult	0.197***	0.018	0.319***	0.111***
Very difficult	0.426***	0.164***	0.500***	0.200***
Occupation				
Service	-0.168***	-0.053	-0.214***	-0.083***
Blue collar (ref.)				
White collar	-0.118***	-0.018	-0.178***	-0.065***
Self-employed	-0.097***	0.005	-0.180***	-0.067***
Unemployed	-0.195***	-0.133***	-0.171***	-0.101***
Retired/non-active	-0.211***	-0.112***	-0.243***	-0.125***
Religiosity	-0.043***	-0.026***	-0.011	0.008
Area of residence				
Rural area (ref.)				
Big city, suburbs or town	-0.090***	-0.051***	-0.073***	-0.015
Left-right placement	0.194***	0.114***	0.173***	0.089***
Universalism (humanitarian frame)		-0.102***		-0.074***
Economic threat (economic frame)		0.215***		0.292***
Cultural threat (cultural frame)		0.268***		0.264***
Feelings of unsafety (securitarian frame)		0.041***		0.025***
Contextual variables				
Number asylum seekers	-0.053	0.004	-0.160	-0.099
Percentage from conflict regions	-0.024	-0.038	0.102	0.089
Unemployment rate	-0.194*	-0.154*	-0.049	-0.009
Approval rate	0.162	0.130	-0.068	-0.099

* p≤0.05; ** p≤0.01; *** p≤0.001; weighted for age, gender, education and region

Comparing attitudes towards asylum policy with attitudes towards immigration policy

Attitudes towards asylum policy have to be distinguished analytically from more general attitudes towards immigration policies. As the public perceives differentiated forms of threats that are posed by different outgroups (Meuleman et al. 2018) and evaluates different groups of migrants in distinct ways (Bansak et al. 2016; Iyengar et al. 2013; Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017), attitudes towards different policies are also likely to diverge. Holmes and Castañeda (2016) show, for instance, that in media reports and political statements economic immigrants are often presented as being less deserving than refugees. As a result, the public could be more open towards the admittance of refugees than to general welcoming immigration policies. However, although people seem to differentiate between different types of migrants, negative attitudes towards different categories of migrants often go hand in hand (Meuleman and Billiet 2003; Verkuyten 2004). Lewis (2015), for example, mentions that the distinction between different categories of migrants can blur in public opinion and that citizens apply issues of other types of migrants to discussions about asylum seekers. Hence, attitudes towards immigration policy and attitudes towards asylum policy could be influenced by a similar set of structural and discursive predictors.

To shed more light on the overlap between attitudes towards immigration and asylum policies, we examine whether both dimensions of preferences are influenced by the same determinants. Concretely, we estimated similar multilevel models as the ones presented in the previous section, but now with attitudes towards immigration policy in general as a dependent variable. To measure attitudes towards immigration policy, we use three items that were also fielded in the European Social Survey of 2016. These items ask about whether immigrants from the same race or ethnic group (*Allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country]'s people to come and live here*), immigrants from a different race or ethnic group (*Allow people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people?*) and immigrants from countries outside Europe (*Allow people from the poorer countries outside Europe?*) should be allowed to enter the country. Each of these items has four answer categories, which range from "Allow many" to "Allow none". Previous research illustrates that all items load strongly on the latent concept of attitudes towards immigration policy (Davidov et al. 2008). Note that higher scores on the latent variables indicate more support for restrictive immigration laws.

The regression coefficients and significance levels of the multilevel analysis for the prediction of immigration policy preferences are displayed in Table 1.2. Results indicate that on the individual-level largely the same determinants influence attitudes towards immigration policy and attitudes towards asylum policy. Similar to the findings regarding preferences for asylum policies, it are primarily individuals with a weaker socio-economic position, such as lower educated individuals, individuals who have difficulties living on their income and blue collar workers, who advocate restrictions on immigration. Also the adoption of the four frames has a significant influence on attitudes towards immigration policies. Individuals who adopt a humanitarian perspective tend to support generous immigration policies, while individuals who use an economic, cultural or securitarian frame are more in favour

of curbing immigration. Nevertheless, for attitudes towards immigration policy the economic frame instead of the cultural discourse has the largest influence, which illustrates that in determining support for restrictive immigration policies economic arguments are the most important. In addition, there are some other interesting differences in the prediction of both variables. Religiosity, for instance, does not have a significant impact on attitudes towards immigration policy, while it tempers support for restrictive asylum policy. The effects of the social structure also largely remain significant when introducing the four frames, which did not fully hold for asylum policy preferences. Furthermore, on the contextual-level the unemployment rate is not significantly related to immigration policy preferences, which illustrates that the relationship with unemployment seems to be specific for attitudes towards asylum policy. In general, however, we can state that attitudes towards immigration policy are largely determined by the same factors as attitudes towards asylum policy.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated the cross-national evolution of economic and cultural threat perceptions since the early 2000's and provided more insight into public opinion towards asylum policies across 20 European countries. Our most important conclusion is that the context of a double crisis -the joint impact of the economic and the refugee reception crisis- did not lead to an overall trend towards a more negative public opinion climate regarding immigration, asylum and refugees. There was no general increase in threat perceptions, neither economically nor culturally, across European countries. On the contrary, support for generous asylum policies grow stronger from 2002 to 2016 in most member states.

Nevertheless, we did find strong regional variations in threat perceptions as well as in attitudes towards asylum policies. In general, the Northern countries are most welcoming towards asylum seekers and are characterized by the lowest levels of ethnic threat. This is in stark contrast to several Eastern European countries where we see the most outspoken opposition against generous asylum policies. Notably, Eastern European countries show steep increases in both economic and cultural threat perceptions since 2012. In addition, Belgium and the Netherlands are among the countries with the most support for restrictive asylum policies. Yet, this is not necessarily reflected in higher increases in threat perceptions. The strong cross-national variation in attitudes exposes a clear opinion divide in Europe that appears to be growing and forms a challenge for a unified European response to the arrival of asylum seekers. Apart from a growing polarization in media frames, policy responses and political debates (Triandafyllidou 2018; Ritter and Rhomberg 2017; Castells 2018), differences in public opinion on the effects of migration and the appropriate reactions to the reception crisis thus also seem to divide the European continent.

The nature of these country variations has several implications for the evaluation of group conflict theory, as used in a large stream of immigration studies and elaborated on throughout this chapter. While GCT seems to hold at the individual level – the most restrictive asylum and immigration policy preferences are found among persons in structural positions that are likely to compete with ethnic outgroups over scarce resources- this framework is less useful to understand differences over time and

across countries. The inflow of asylum seekers or harsh economic conditions do not automatically lead to more restrictive policy preferences. This was illustrated by the relatively positive public opinion climate in countries such as Sweden, Germany and Spain, which either knew a large inflow of asylum seekers or a high unemployment rate. Another illustration is the steep increase of threat perceptions in Poland, in spite of the fact that this country experienced low numbers of asylum applications. In addition, our explanatory model revealed that unfavourable economic conditions, in terms of higher unemployment rates, relate to more positive asylum preferences and that higher numbers of asylum seekers are unable to explain cross-national differences in asylum and immigration policy preferences.

Instead, as we illustrated on the individual-level, divides in public opinion are likely to be related to the differential adoption of certain moral frames. Variation in policy preferences on the context-level could, similarly, especially be understood from divides in dominant media and political discourses. The restrictive opinion climate in Eastern European countries is, for instance, in line with the politicization of the issue and the policy stance in a majority of these countries. Several Eastern European countries, including the Visegrad group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia), have been most vocal about opposing more generous asylum policies and the introduction of refugee quota (Veebel and Markus 2015; Niemann and Zaun 2018; Zaun 2018), which could also partly explain why exactly public support for generous asylum policies is lowest in these regions. Furthermore, research shows that frames adopted by the media and political parties are indeed important in shaping intergroup anxiety, stereotypes and attitudes towards migrants (Bos et al. 2016; Matthes and Schmuck 2017).

While the current chapter investigated national threat perceptions and attitudes towards asylum seekers, the remainder of this book focuses on policies, local mobilizations and refugee reception practices in a selection of countries. This chapter provided the necessary background on public opinions against which the specificity of these cases can be interpreted. To summarize: Belgium is among the most restrictive countries in terms of preferences for asylum policies but did not face an increase in negative attitudes; Sweden and Germany are characterised by a relatively stable positive and improving moderate opinion climate respectively; and Italy, Hungary and Greece (for the available time points) experienced a deteriorating public opinion with relatively high and increasing threat perceptions.

CHAPTER II

Divided Reactions: Pro- and Anti-Migrant Mobilization in Germany

Sophie Hinger, Priska Daphi and Verena Stern

Introduction

In 2015, Germany was one of the main destinations for immigrants in Europe, with 2.14 million registered arrivals.[1] This development marked an unprecedented peak in immigration to Germany and has left considerable traces in German society and politics. The peak in immigration was largely due to the growing number of refugees[2] seeking asylum in Germany, particularly Syrians fleeing the war. Among European countries, Germany was the country that hosted the largest total number of refugees, with about 890,000 registered arrivals in 2015.

The situation developed against the background of an overall increase between 2012 and 2015 in people fleeing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and other regions (UNHCR 2016). The particular developments in Germany go back to the decision of the German government, in September 2015, not to send Syrian nationals back to their first country of entry into the European Union, as required under the Dublin regulation. Prior to this decision, a growing number of refugees, many of them from Syria, were stranded in precarious conditions at train and bus stations in Hungary and other countries along their routes to northern Europe, which put considerable pressure on the German government. Many observers described the events of 2015–16 as a "crisis" – not only regarding the dire situation of refugees

[1] BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2015* [The Federal Office in numbers 2015], 2016 (in German), p. 2, https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2015.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

[2] We use the term "refugee" not in its limited legal sense, but as a broad generic term for a person seeking asylum or protection. We provide more detailed information on the legal status where this distinction becomes relevant.

or their increased numbers, but also with regard to the ill-prepared official bodies in Germany. German authorities were indeed not well prepared to provide adequate support to the increased number of refugees, and this has been described as a "crisis of government structures" (Lahusen and Schneider 2017: 8).[3]

German society reacted to these changes in very different ways, leading to a considerable polarization of discourse and public opinion on migration and multiculturalism. Reactions were, on the one hand, characterized by openness and solidarity, including a steep increase in civic engagement in support of refugees, which was praised and celebrated domestically and internationally as a "new (German) culture of welcome" (Hamann and Karakayali 2016). On the other hand, there was a significant rise in xenophobic and racist mobilization, as well as violence. This chapter explores the diverse reactions to migration dynamics in Germany in and after 2015, focusing on mobilization in civil society in support of refugees and migrants (hereafter pro-migrant) and in opposition to refugees and migrants (hereafter anti-migrant). This mobilization includes a broad spectrum of actors from civil society and actions ranging from donations and petitions to large-scale demonstrations and violent attacks.

This chapter explores these different reactions in 2015, analysing both pro-migrant and anti-migrant mobilization and contextualizing this within broader societal and political developments. In the following section, we will first provide an overview of the historical and political context of mobilization around migration in Germany, elaborating Germany's immigration history, policies and prior public reactions to immigration. In the subsequent third and fourth sections, we will explore pro- and anti-migrant mobilization between 2015 and 2018 in detail, drawing on our own studies[4] and existing research.

Contextualizing Migration and Asylum in Germany

The reactions of civil society to immigration in 2015 must be seen as part of long-term developments and debate concerning immigration in Germany. As we will elaborate below, the period in the early 1990s, when Germany saw a previous peak in (refugee) immigration and controversy around asylum policies, serves as a particularly important reference point for understanding the reactions of civil society to immigration in 2015. In the following discussion, we will first shed light on the history of migration to Germany, with a special focus on asylum, briefly explain Germany's federal asylum system and sketch the pre-2015 politicization of (refugee) migration.

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[3] See also: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Deutschland: Verwaltungs- und Infrastrukturkrise* [Germany: administrative and infrastructure crisis], 2015 (in German), https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/kurzdossiers/217376/verwaltungs-und-infrastrukturkrise, accessed 10 September, 2019.

[4] This chapter draws on research we have conducted in the context of different research projects, including the projects "Welcome or Insulted? A Comparative Study of Reactions to Asylum Seekers' Accommodations" (funded by the German Research Foundation; PI: Priska Daphi) and "The local production of asylum" (Sophie Hinger).

The dynamics of (refugee) migration to Germany

Since the Second World War in particular, Germany has been a country of immigration. Firstly, in the immediate aftermath of the war, about 13 million displaced people settled in West Germany. A second important phase of immigration started in the 1950s and 1960s, when West Germany recruited workers from abroad, mainly from southern European countries and Turkey, to help rebuild the country's infrastructure and economy. Thirdly, about 5 million (late) repatriates, ethnic Germans mainly from the former Soviet Union, immigrated to Germany, particularly in the early 1990s following German reunification.[5] With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Wars, the migration dynamics intensified further, so that the overall number of newcomers in Germany rose considerably, reaching 1.5 million in 1992 (see Figure 2.1). The following years were characterized by a decrease in the overall number of immigrants, reaching the lowest point in 2008, when more people left Germany than immigrated to it and only 28,018 people applied for asylum.

Refugees have played a growing role within immigration since the 1980s. While in 1976, asylum applications reached the benchmark of 10,000 for the first time, more than 100,000 applications were filed in 1980. The number of those seeking asylum peaked in 1992 with 438,191 applications, but decreased significantly afterwards; this was linked to the more restrictive asylum legislation that entered into force in 1993 (see below).

In the 2010s, Germany has once again become a popular destination for immigrants. In particular, 2015 presented a peak in immigration, with numbers almost doubling in comparison to 2014 (see Figure 2.1). The increase was due above all to the rising number of refugees, with 476,649 asylum applications filed in 2015 and 745,545 in 2016. The overwhelming majority of refugees came from Syria, while the second and third largest groups came from Albania and Kosovo in 2015 and from Afghanistan and Iraq in 2016.[6] With this development, for the first time in decades Germany witnessed a higher proportion of non-EU migrants than EU migrants, who had predominated in previous years.[7]

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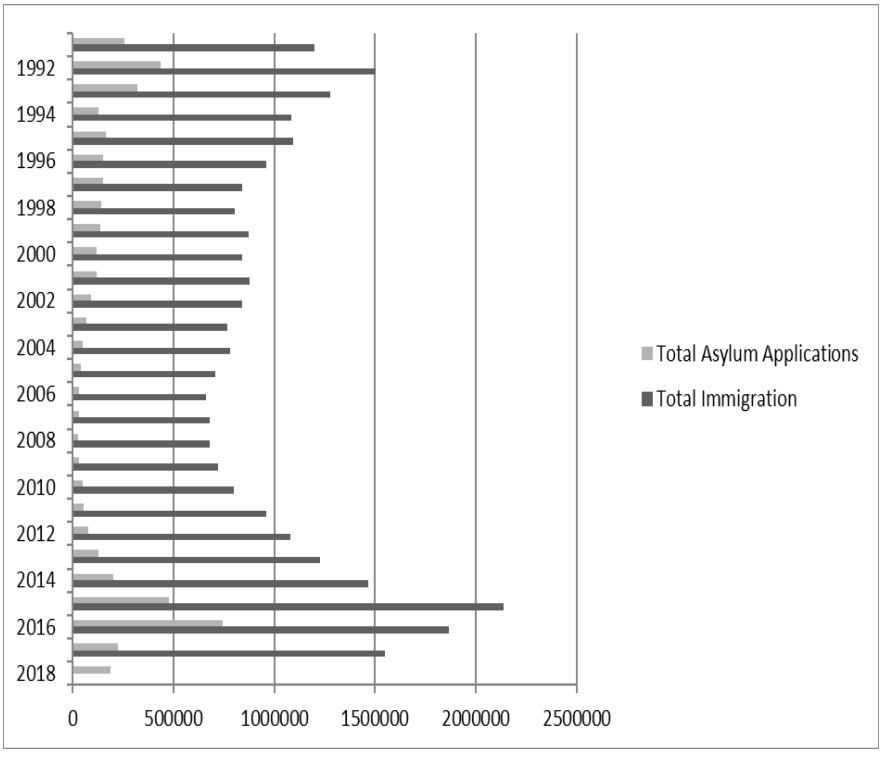
[5] BAMF, *(Spät-)Aussiedler in Deutschland* [(Late)Repatriations in Germany], 2013 (in German), p. 28-29, https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Forschungsberichte/fb20-spaetaussiedler.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

[6] BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2015* [The Federal Office in numbers 2015], 2016 (in German), https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2015.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019. And: BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2016* [The Federal Office in numbers 2016], 2017 (in German), https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2016.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

[7] BAMF, *Migrationsbericht 2015* [Migration Report 2015], 2016 (in German), p. 9, https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2015.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

Figure 2.1: Total asylum applications (first and follow-up) against total immigration to Germany since reunification (1991–2018)[8]



Source: BAMF[9] and Statista[10].

Since 2016, overall immigration has decreased significantly due to a drastic decline in the number of asylum applications.[11] The main reasons are the border

[8] Total immigration is calculated on the basis of entries in municipal resident registers. The asylum statistics are compiled by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. The number of first asylum applications may not always reflect the actual number of incoming asylum seekers, as there is a gap between the registration and asylum application. For example, many people who arrived in 2015 could not apply for asylum until 2016 because the authorities were unable to keep up with processing the applications.

[9] BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2018* [The Federal Office in numbers 2018], 2019 (in German), http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2018.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

[10] Statista, *Anzahl der Zuwanderer nach Deutschland von 1991 bis 2018* [Number of immigrants to Germany from 1991 to 2018], 2019 (in German), https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/28347/umfrage/zuwanderung-nach-deutschland/, accessed September 10, 2019.

[11] The 2017 figure includes delayed applications resulting from the backlog of previous years, so the number of asylum seekers who actually arrived in 2017 was even lower than 200,000. The trend continued in 2018, when even fewer people (185,853) applied for asylum. See: BAMF, *Aktuelle Zahlen zu Asyl 12/2018* [Current figures on asylum 12/2018],

closures along the Balkan corridor, reinforced, militarized maritime border controls, and the EU–Turkey agreement enabling the EU to return refugees to Turkey, which entered into force in March 2016. Nonetheless, in 2017, Germany continued to be the main host country for refugees in the EU, with almost one third of all asylum applications being processed in Germany.[12]

The administration of asylum in Germany

The administrative policies regarding asylum are strongly shaped by Germany's federal system (see also the chapter on Belgium in this volume). Different administrative bodies at various administrative levels are responsible for different steps and tasks within the application and accommodation process. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – BAMF) is responsible for the formal application procedure. Refugees are distributed to the respective federal states on the basis of a distribution quota, defined annually. The practical implementation of the accommodation of refugees is the responsibility of the federal states and municipalities. Accordingly, standards in housing and support differ considerably across Germany (Hinger and Schäfer 2019). After registration, asylum seekers are entitled to basic social services, such as medical care, accommodation and subsistence. After a stay in an initial reception facility (*Erstaufnahmeeinrichtung*), they are usually transferred to longer-term municipal housing, and in some cases are offered an individual apartment.

As in other European countries, three different types of protection for refugees are implemented in Germany: recognition on the basis of the Geneva Refugee Convention (GRC), the granting of asylum on the basis of the Basic Law, and subsidiary protection. In 2015, the overall rate of protection on the basis of the GRC and the Basic Law within the total number of accepted refugees rose to almost 50 per cent (up from 25.8 per cent in 2014), but has dropped over the following years to less than 20 per cent in 2018. Since 2016, the category of subsidiary protection has gained importance, with 22 per cent of all asylum applicants receiving this type of protection (compared to less than 1 per cent in 2015). The rejection rate for asylum claims dropped slightly in 2015–16, but has risen again since 2017 to about one third of all case decisions.[13]

The politicization of (refugee) migration

In Germany, views on immigration differ markedly across society and over time. Overall, as in other European countries, the politicization of the issue has grown considerably over the decades, and particularly since the 1990s (Hutter 2012). What

2019 (in German), p. 3, http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/aktuelle-zahlen-zu-asyl-dezember-2018.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

[12] BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2017* [The Federal Office in numbers 2017], 2018 (in German), p. 30-31, https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2017.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

[13] BAMF, *Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2018* [The Federal Office in numbers 2018], 2019 (in German), p. 11, http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Broschueren/bundesamt-in-zahlen-2018.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed September 10, 2019.

is particular to the German debate is that even though Germany (or at least its western part) had been an important destination for immigrants for many decades, the German government and large parts of the public did not recognize Germany as a country of immigration until the 1990s. Despite this lack of identification as a country of immigration, Germany witnessed intensive debates around immigration, starting in the late 1970s. During the 1970s, immigration increasingly moved into the focus of public and political debates, following the end of the recruitment of so-called guest workers in 1973 and in light of questions arising about long-term prospects for those already living and working in Germany, as well as the rising number of asylum seekers. For the first time, immigration was addressed in parties' election programs and position papers (Tietze 2008). These reflected profoundly different positions: while the conservative Christian Democratic Party (CDU/CSU) continued to adhere to the idea of a homogeneous nation state, other parties, above all the newly founded Green Party, not only recognized the de facto long-term presence of immigrants but also declared all immigrants, regardless of their origin, part of a multicultural German society (*Ibid*.).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, debates about immigration intensified further; this was connected to a peak in (refugee) immigration (see Figure 2.1). Conservative and right-wing parties and their debates around a "national identity" were important contributions to an increasingly negative discourse on immigrants (Jäger and Wamper 2017: 24). Starting in the mid-1980s, the CDU-led government introduced a series of restrictions on asylum seekers, such as a residency obligation, a bar on working and the principle of "safe countries", making it easier for the German authorities to reject asylum applicants. The introduction of the latter restriction required a change in the German constitution, which the government pushed through in 1992 with the support of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the so-called "asylum compromise". At the time, protests both against and in solidarity with immigrants significantly increased in Germany (Hutter 2012).

The late 1990s saw something of a shift in the official stance on immigration. In 1998, the newly elected government, a coalition of the SPD and the Green Party, officially acknowledged German society as heterogeneous and shaped by migration. This launched an intensive political and public debate on the topic of immigration, culminating in the 2004 Immigration Bill, which introduced a national integration policy and hardship commissions for rejected asylum seekers, and which simplified procedures and residency titles.[14]

These developments form the background against which debates and mobilization around immigration have developed in the new millennium. When the number of people seeking asylum in Germany rose again in the 2010s, the political controversy around asylum and immigration developed a new dynamic, as the following sections will reveal.

[14] Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Rückblick: Zuwanderungsgesetz 2005* [Review: Immigration Act 2005], 2007 (in German), https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/dossier-migration-ALT/56351/zuwanderungsgesetz-2005?p=all, accessed 10 September, 2019.

Pro-Migrant Mobilization

While not new, the scope and characteristics of the support for migrants, and more specifically refugees, has changed since 2015. In this section, we will focus on pro-refugee mobilization, that is, mobilization that specifically supports refugees and addresses issues of asylum, which has been particularly prominent in recent years. Below, we will begin by sketching the overall development and changes prior to 2015, before elaborating on recent pro-refugee mobilization and its key actors, demands and impacts.

Pro-migrant mobilization before 2015

There have been pro-migrant initiatives in German civil society since at least the 1960s, but they gained momentum with the growing controversy surrounding asylum that started in the mid-1970s. In the 1980s, various pro-migrant groups were founded in the context of the increasingly anti-migrant and anti-asylum political climate. Refugee Councils (*Flüchtlingsräte*) were initiated at federal state level with the goal of supporting and defending refugees. Furthermore, in 1986, members of Refugee Councils, unions, churches and welfare and human rights organizations initiated the federal association Pro Asyl, which focuses on lobbying for the rights of refugees and remains a central actor today. Pro-migrant mobilization was increasingly geared towards direct support for migrants and protecting them from deportation (Kirchhoff 2017: 50-2). Moreover, in many cities people gathered in candlelight walks to demonstrate against anti-immigrant sentiments and in favour of asylum rights.

The 1990s saw an additional increase in pro-migrant mobilization in reaction to the increasingly racist climate and restrictive asylum policies. One prominent example is the highly visible activity of the network "no one is illegal", which was founded at the international art exhibition "documenta" in Kassel in 1997. The network had strong ties to transnational activist networks including the European "No Border" network, as well as other anti-racist networks (Schneider and Kopp 2010) and larger global justice movements (Daphi 2017a). At the same time, initiatives by migrants and descendants of migrants increased significantly in these years (Jakob 2016: 14). The enforcement of the stricter asylum laws from 1993 onwards mobilized (rejected) asylum seekers in particular. In addition, solidarity groups not only fostered political campaigning but also offered direct and practical support, for example in the prevention of deportations (Rosenberger, Stern and Merhaut 2018). These movements were mostly embedded in anti-racist and leftist struggles and sought to cooperate with and support self-organized groups of migrants and refugees.

The development of pro-migrant mobilization since 2015

Although a heightened awareness of and solidarity with refugees could already be observed in previous years, it was only in 2015 that the number of people involved in pro-refugee mobilization skyrocketed. Accordingly, a survey of volunteers from 2015 reveals that 66 per cent only started to be involved in 2015 (Karakayali and Kleist 2016: 19). Mobilization increased further between 2015 and 2016 (Ahrens 2017). Almost 10 per cent of the German population, about 7 million people, were engaged

in actively supporting refugees in 2015 and 2016 (*Ibid*.).[15] If donations are included in addition to more active forms of engagement in support of refugees, some studies even estimate that at least half and up to two thirds of the German population have assisted newcomers since 2015 (IfD Allensbach 2016).

This raises the question of which developments triggered this intensive, pro-refugee mobilization. An obvious reason seems to be the rising number of refugees reaching Germany. However, the increasing arrivals of refugees in Germany in the early 1990s did not lead to comparable mobilization. Therefore, in addition to the increased number of refugees, a number of specific circumstances in 2015 need to be considered to explain the significant growth in pro-refugee engagement. First of all, the overall perspective on migration in 2015 was different from that of the 1990s. Germany's growing economic stability and the related need for additional workers certainly played a role in changing views on migration, highlighting its economic and socio-demographic advantages (Glorius 2018: 20). In connection with this, Germany's identity as a country of immigration had been increasingly embraced over the years preceding 2015. According to a 2014 study on narratives of German identity, a majority agreed that being German can be learned and acquired (Foroutan et al. 2014). Mirroring this shift in the public perception of immigrants in Germany, the mainstream media, including centre-right press organizations, portrayed the 2015 arrivals – especially of Syrian refugees – and the supporters of refugees in positive terms. This, in turn, spurred further pro-migrant mobilization (Nohl 2017; Karakayali and Kleist 2016: 34; Jakob 2016: 10–11). An exceptionally high pro-migrant attitude in Germany has also been reflected in the Eurobarometer surveys for the years 2015–17: more than 80 per cent of German respondents said that they agreed with the statement "our country should help refugees" (Glorius 2018: 20).

Secondly, pro-migrant mobilization in 2015 could draw on a well-established activist infrastructure, which had been growing since the 1990s. In particular, a range of projects executed by refugee activists between 2012 and 2014 contributed to this, not only drawing considerable public attention but also helping to build new networks between self-organized refugee groups and other civil society organizations (Glöde and Böhlo 2015; Odugbesan and Schwiertz 2018: 196).

Furthermore, the rather particular situation in 2015 needs to be taken into consideration when explaining the increase in pro-refugee engagement. The developments that led to the decision not to close the border in September 2015 considerably shaped attitudes towards refugees. While later on there was growing criticism of Chancellor Merkel's decision, at first her decision was widely praised and increased her popularity well beyond supporters of the CDU. Against this backdrop, her slogan of "Wir schaffen das" [We can manage it] in response to the new peak in asylum applications was echoed across the country and was widely interpreted as a call on civil society to become active in support of refugees. This corroborates

[15] See also: Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), *Stimmungsbarometer zu Geflüchteten* [Mood barometer on refugees], 2017 (in German), https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.556677.de/17-17.pdf, accessed September 10, 2019.

the finding that a positive framing of migration by the media and leading politicians impacts positively on public perceptions and reactions.[16]

The focus and dynamics of engagement changed over time. As official bodies were largely ill-prepared to provide adequate support to the many newcomers, the volunteers who started to work with refugees in 2015 largely focused on emergency help, such as the donation and distribution of food and clothes, support in dealing with official procedures, and translation (Karakayali and Kleist 2016; IfD Allensbach 2016: 9; Zamponi and Daphi 2017). Other frequent activities included providing language courses, organizing leisure activities and coordinating volunteer infrastructure (IfD Allensbach 2016).[17] After 2016, volunteering momentum slowed down, with overall levels of engagement decreasing, even though many support initiatives were continued and partly professionalized (*Ibid*.). The focus shifted away from spontaneous emergency help and donations and towards long-term support for settlement in Germany and political work (Zamponi and Daphi 2017).

Key actors in pro-migrant mobilization

A huge variety of actors were involved in the established and new pro-refugee mobilization, and initiatives differed with regard to their composition, degree of formalization, geographic and thematic focus and political orientation.

The socio-demographic characteristics of those who have been engaged since 2015 reflect the overall composition of German society to a greater extent than other areas of engagement (IfD Allensbach 2016: 22). Not only young leftist urbanites, but people of all ages from different-sized communities, some without any prior political or volunteering experience or existing ties with migrants and refugees, have actively supported refugees since 2015.[18] In addition, migrants (and their descendants) have been more involved in this area of engagement than in other areas.[19] However, as in other fields of volunteering, some groups are overrepresented, namely people with higher levels of education and income, as this provides certain relevant resources and skills. Furthermore, West Germans are more likely to support refugees than their East German compatriots, reflecting the lower levels of engagement more generally among the latter and the rather recent (and often only temporary) presence of refugees in many East German communities. Moreover, while the majority of pro-migrant mobilization involves migrants and/or refugees (IfD Allensbach 2016: 23), refugee

[16] See: Van Hootegem and Meuleman in this volume.

[17] Bundesministerium für Familie, Frauen, Senioren und Jugend, *Engagement in der Flüchtlingshilfe* [Involvement in the refugee aid], 2016 (in German), https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/122010/d35ec9bf4a940ea49283485db4625aaf/engagement-in-der-fluechlingshilfe-data.pdf, accessed September 10, 2019.

[18] For a comparison between 2014 and 2015 see: Karakayali and Kleist (2016: 3).

[19] See: Bundesministerium für Familie, Frauen, Senioren und Jugend, *Zweiter Bericht über die Entwicklung des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [Second report on the development of civic engagement in the Federal Republic of Germany], 2017 (in German), https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/zweiter-bericht-ueber-die-entwicklung-des-buergerschaftlichen-engagements-in-der-bundesrepublik-deutschland/115660, accessed September 10, 2019.

activists have raised the criticism that the new "welcome culture" has actually left little room for the voices of refugees themselves or self-organizing refugee groups (Osa 2016).

The degree of formalization of pro-migrant mobilization can range from individual initiatives to established NGOs with a national or international reach. The former includes donations, voluntary guardianship for unaccompanied minor refugees and accompanying individuals to official appointments. In 2015, as surveys of volunteers show, most supporters of refugees were active in self-organized groups (27 per cent) and in initiatives and projects (19 per cent) (Karakayali and Kleist 2016: 22), highlighting the spontaneous character of many initiatives at the time. In comparison, only 13 per cent were engaged in well-established organizations and associations, 11 per cent in religious organizations and 5 per cent in state or municipal structures (*Ibid*.).

Whereas some initiatives and organizations focus specifically on migrants and/or refugees, such as the above-mentioned Refugee Councils and Pro Asyl, others have a more general target group and objective. For example, charity organizations, sports clubs and church parishes have become key actors in pro-migrant mobilization. Of those volunteers supporting refugees within the framework of an association, 43 per cent are active in a group that exclusively targets refugees, while 27 per cent are part of organizations that are also active in other areas (IfD Allensbach 2016: 28). The more specialized groups include the Refugee Law Clinics, which provide free legal advice to refugees, and the Medibüros, which offer free healthcare services to refugees and also illegal migrants in many German cities.

Pro-migrant mobilization can be further differentiated with regard to its geographic focus. Many pro-migrant initiatives do not in fact have one specific area of expertise or thematic focus, but offer different kinds of support within a certain geographical territory. Many of the new welcome initiatives were neighbourhood-based, for example. While much of the new engagement in support of refugees happened within Germany, some pro-migrant mobilization also took place across and beyond its national borders. In 2015 and 2016, when hundreds of thousands of people travelled along the Balkan corridor, they were supported by volunteers from Germany, either through car rides or the distribution of food, clothes and informational materials. Additionally, civil society initiatives have emerged with the aim of rescuing migrants in distress at sea, many of them based in Germany, such as Sea Watch, Sea Eye and Jugendrettet.

Finally, pro-migrant actors can be differentiated on the basis of their political orientation. While some initiatives have a clear anti-racist and leftist orientation, such as the No Border and No Lager groups, others do not take a political stance, as we will explore in more detail in the next section. Traditionally, politically oriented initiatives have focused on combining direct support for individual refugees and refugee activism with political campaigning, and have criticized the more humanitarian "welcome initiatives" for focusing only on charity work, thereby reproducing patterns of paternalism (Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017: 21).

Key demands of pro-migrant mobilization

When pro-refugee mobilization diversified in 2015, its motivations, goals and demands also became more varied. It is possible to roughly distinguish two different sets of goals: groups following largely humanitarian concerns on the one hand, and groups seeking political change on the other. In relation to this, the various pro-refugee initiatives hold different views on the role of civil society initiatives, ranging from those largely seeking to support official bodies to those that understand their work not as a replacement for state support, but as a corrective (Daphi 2017b). Politically motivated actors were often already engaged before 2015 (see section 3.1). To them, support for individual migrants always goes hand in hand with political demands. These demands include the suspension of the residency obligation and of accommodation in camps, the unconditional granting of the right to family reunification, equal social rights for all, the ending of deportations and, more generally, the right to remain and to travel. In contrast, other active groups share a more humanitarian approach. Many people who became involved in pro-migrant mobilization in 2015 and 2016 were moved above all by the (media representation of the) "refugee crisis" (Hinger 2016) and "just wanted to help" (IfD Allensbach 2016: 23) the newcomers, who had left their homes and who were not adequately cared for in Germany because of insufficient state support (Karakayali 2017: 18-19). The new volunteers thus mostly shared a humanist stance, partly in connection with religious beliefs. Given their local focus, their demands have mostly been aimed at the local level, including transparency in local decision-making, the conditions in local accommodation centres and support for their work by local authorities. For most charity-oriented pro-refugee groups, the focus has been on practical help such as organizing leisure activities, running clothing banks in accommodation centres and teaching German courses. These groups are more likely to cooperate with state authorities than politically motivated groups, and in some cases were set up and/or coordinated by state authorities (Schiffauer, Eilert and Rudloff 2017; Daphi 2017b).

The demands have changed somewhat over time. The central motivation for pre-2015 pro-refugee mobilization had been (leftist) political conviction or faith-based political demands. Such demands still drive some of the recent pro-migrant initiatives, but have lost salience due to the involvement of many other groups with a more humanitarian approach. Accordingly, the proportion of volunteers who support welcoming refugees "unconditionally" and who demand "open borders" has declined significantly between 2014 and 2015.[20] Nonetheless, a survey of those actively engaged in 2015 revealed that about 80 per cent of respondents were motivated by taking a stance against nationalist, right-wing ideas and xenophobia. This was especially the case in localities where xenophobia is an issue (or is threatening to become one) (Karakayali 2017: 21).

[20] Furthermore, only 25 per cent of newcomers support the notion of "open borders", whereas more than 40 per cent of older activists share a worldview associated with the "no border movement" (Karakayali and Kleist 2016; Hamann and Karakayali 2016: 77-8).

Impact of pro-migrant mobilization

Pro-refugee mobilization has made a difference in several regards. Firstly, it has improved the situation for refugees in Germany considerably, enabling their relatively smooth reception as well as providing important resources and opportunities for participating in German society (Aumüller, Daphi and Biesenkamp 2015). Furthermore, mobilization has had an impact on asylum procedures and administration. Pro-migrant mobilization has triggered institutional learning processes regarding the decentralization of accommodation and greater transparency in decision-making (Daphi 2017b; Hinger and Schäfer 2019). In other cases, it has had a decisive impact on the implementation of policies, for example deportation orders (Scherr 2017: 100). However, some have criticized it on the basis that volunteerism risks contributing to the deprofessionalization and devaluation of social work and, in fact, creates a new low-paid sector, in which mainly women work (Graf 2017: 60).

On a more general level, the volunteers' involvement has raised awareness of cultural differences, as well as institutional racism and the lack of state support for refugees. As a result, some of the initiatives that were initially charity-oriented have become politicized and have increasingly taken a stance in public and political debates on migration issues (Karakayali 2017: 21). Furthermore, pro-refugee mobilization has had a considerable impact on public opinion and attitudes towards migration, for example on how local populations reacted to and perceived the accommodation of refugees (Aumüller, Daphi and Biesenkamp 2015). On the one hand, support initiatives have had a direct impact on the public perception of and discourse about refugees because they intervened in the public debate, for example at citizens' forums or in the local media, and because they enabled personal encounters between local populations and newcomers. On the other hand, they had an indirect impact on public perception because they helped to ameliorate local conditions for refugee reception and accommodation (*Ibid*.). Pro-migrant mobilization has thus made a decisive contribution to challenging stereotypes and lessening fear, and therefore to a more positive perception of refugees, especially locally (Daphi 2016: 6).

Anti-Migrant Mobilization

In 2015, Germany not only witnessed an increase in solidarity with refugees but also a steep increase in anti-migrant mobilization. This wave of mobilization was fuelled by the growing public debate and concern around issues of migration and drew significantly on existing right-wing infrastructures built up in the preceding years. The increase in anti-migration protests from 2015 onwards marks a significant shift in right-wing mobilization in Germany from a marginal and less visible phenomenon to a broader and more omnipresent development. In the following section, we will first trace the emergence and development of anti-migrant mobilization prior to 2015, before detailing its main actors, demands and impacts between 2015 and 2018 in subsequent sections.

Anti-migrant mobilization before 2015

In connection with the growing debates around migration in general, mobilization against migrants and refugees has increased, especially since the 1990s (Koopmans et

al. 2005). This growing mobilization did not come out of nowhere; rather, it built on previous developments. In the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, several right-wing groups formed that increasingly turned to issues of migration, reflecting the growing salience of the issue in public discourse during these years (Betz 1994). In particular, the integration of (former) guest workers into the labour market and a (perceived) risk of job loss opened a window of opportunity for anti-migrant mobilization in these years. The new right-wing groups formed in this period included, for example, the nationalist party The Republicans, founded in 1983, and the newspaper *Junge Freiheit*, established in 1986.

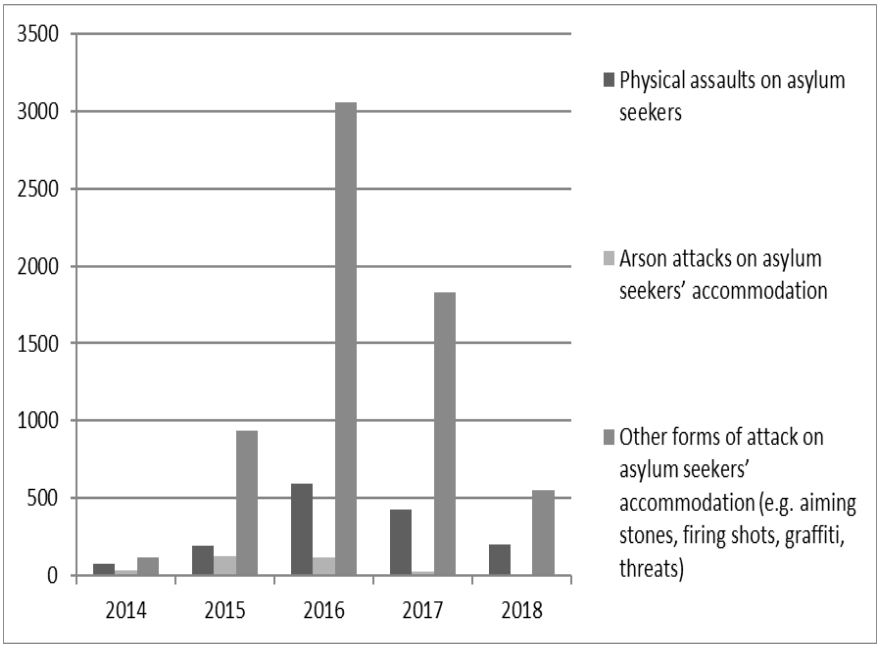
In the 1990s, right-wing mobilization regarding the issue of immigration intensified significantly in the aftermath of reunification. Protests against immigration increased, including a series of violent attacks on migrants and refugees and on their accommodation, which were unprecedented in post-war Germany. 1992 in particular saw a peak, with 2,582 attacks on migrants and migrant housing (Koopmans 1998: 202). Some incidents gained particular notoriety, such as the riots in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in August 1992, when several hundred right-wing activists launched a racist attack on accommodation facilities for migrants, lasting several days and watched by an applauding audience and a mostly passive police force. Right-wing activists committed a similar attack in the town of Hoyerswerda in 1991, as well as fatal arson attacks on accommodation for Turkish immigrants in the towns of Mölln and Solingen in 1992 and 1993. While anti-migrant engagement decreased in the late 1990s, anti-migrant mobilization, especially involving protests against accommodation facilities for refugees, has become more frequent again since the early 2010s.

Development of anti-migrant mobilization since 2015

The intensity and scope of anti-migrant mobilization peaked between 2015 and 2017, marking a new high since the 1990s. This mobilization covered a broad range of activities, from lobbying, media campaigns and lawsuits to large protests and violent attacks. Statistics from the federal police[21] as well as from NGOs reveal a considerable increase in personal physical assaults and various forms of attacks on refugee accommodation, including arson attacks, throwing stones and xenophobic graffiti (see Figure 2.2). Anti-immigrant mobilization increased in both rural and urban areas; however, incidents occurred more frequently in East Germany than in the West (Jäckle and König 2017).

[21] Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, *Politisch Motivierte Kriminalität im Jahr 2017* [Politically Motivated Crime in the Year 2017], 2018 (in German), https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/2018/pmk-2017.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4, accessed September 10, 2019.

Figure 2.2: Attacks on asylum seekers and their accommodation (2014–18)



Source: Pro Asyl and Amadeu Antonio Stiftung.[22]

Several local citizens' initiatives formed between 2015 and 2017 that opposed new refugee housing, many of which turned violent. A case that drew considerable national and international attention took place in the city of Clausnitz, Saxony in February 2016, where a bus with several asylum seekers on board was stopped and attacked in front of the asylum seekers' allocated accommodation by predominantly right-wing protesters. Moreover, several large demonstrations against multiculturalism took place in these years. A prominent example is the Pegida movement (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), which mobilized unprecedented numbers in street protests and has managed to build up various local branches (see details in section 4.3). As surveys reveal, the movement succeeded in mobilizing previously unengaged people with little to no prior experience of political engagement (Daphi et al. 2015).

How did this increase in mobilization come about? While the rising number of refugees arriving in Germany from 2015 onwards did shape these developments, the considerable growth in anti-migrant mobilization was also influenced by other factors. Firstly, general attitudes towards migration and previous anti-immigrant tendencies in Germany played a part. While levels of xenophobia had decreased between 2002 and

[22] Compiled by the authors based on records compiled by the NGOs Pro Asyl and Amadeu Antonio Stiftung. The NGOs collect all data from public reports such as newspaper articles, police press releases, and reports from local advice centers for victims of racist violence. The records cover all federal states in Germany since 2014.

2014 from around 27 per cent to 14 per cent, they rose again between 2014 and 2016 to 20 per cent (Decker et al. 2018: 83). In recent years in particular, Germany has seen an increase in xenophobic attitudes towards certain groups, especially Muslims and refugees (*Ibid*.). Accordingly, the number of people who shared the opinion that most asylum seekers are not really persecuted in their country of origin and therefore are wrongfully seeking asylum grew from 55 per cent in 2014 to 60 per cent in 2016 (*ivi*, p. 105). As these figures illustrate, anti-immigrant sentiments are not a phenomenon of the margins but are present in a broad section of society (*Ibid*.; Zick, Küpper and Krause 2016).

Secondly, anti-migrant mobilization profited greatly from the frequency and density with which issues of migration started to dominate public discourse from 2015 onwards. For example, media analyses not only show that the issue of migration has been raised much more frequently in newspapers since 2015 (Haller 2017: 16), but also how the portrayal of refugees shifted to an increasingly negative image in 2016. The terror attacks in Paris in November 2015 and the cases of sexual assault in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015/16 in particular contributed to a growing hostility in the coverage by many media outlets (Schorer and Schneider 2017: 146).

Thirdly, and related to the growing media attention, political parties – both mainstream and marginal – increasingly addressed the issue of migration and significantly shaped the debate. Within the governing Christian Democratic Party (CDU), for example, growing concerns were voiced in relation to Angela Merkel's decision not to close the borders in 2015, and demands for more restrictive asylum policies grew louder, particularly in the CDU's Bavarian chapter, the CSU (Handwerker 2019). This shaped the public discourse around migration and provided key discursive opportunities for anti-immigrant protest (Rucht 2018: 241). The Alternative for Germany (AfD) – a party founded in 2013, initially with a Eurosceptic focus but which shifted to issues of migration in 2015 – played a central role in spreading anti-migrant discourse. After a split from its more liberal wing, it moved to a right-wing populist and völkisch-nationalist agenda and has positioned itself as the flagship "anti-refugee" party ever since (Häusler and Schedler 2016). The party has strong ties to the Pegida movement and to various right-wing extremist groups (*Ibid*.).

Lastly, anti-migration mobilization benefited greatly from the growth of far-right and right-populist groups across Europe, which created a range of opportunities in terms of public attention, exchange and resources (Fielitz 2016).

Key actors in anti-migrant mobilization

A variety of actors have participated in anti-migration mobilization, including individuals involved sporadically and conservative-right, New Right and militant neo-Nazi organizations. These groups have increasingly mobilized around immigration in recent years, drawing on the growing public debate around issues of migration and asylum (Virchow 2016). In particular, right-populist groups and the New Right have been highly successful in broadening the scope of anti-migrant mobilization by reaching a lot of people who did not (initially) identify as particularly right-wing and by moving more traditional right-wing positions from the fringes to a mainstream audience (Salzborn 2017).

In addition to their different goals, the groups involved have varied considerably with respect to their forms of organization, repertoire, size, geographical focus and longevity. Anti-migrant mobilization has included more formally organized political parties such as the National Democratic Party (NPD), the Republicans (REP) and the AfD, as well as groups with less formal organizational structures, such as social movements like Pegida and the Identitarian Movement (*Identitäre Bewegung*). Furthermore, various subcultures have played important roles in this mobilization, for example right-wing hooligans, fraternities and the right-wing rock milieu. Starting in 2015, several new – and in some cases short-lived – local citizens' initiatives emerged in the context of protests against asylum accommodation facilities; for example, there were more than 50 local Reject the Shelter (*Nein zum Heim*) initiatives (Wichmann and Lamberty 2015). While some of the groups involved have organized and mobilized at a national level, others have had a local focus, such as the local chapters of Pegida, the party Pro Cologne (*Pro Köln*) and the various neighbourhood groups.

One of the most prominent cases of an anti-migrant movement has been Pegida. Founded in the autumn of 2014, the movement not only has a strong Islamophobic attitude but also an anti-immigrant outlook, as well as close ties with the AfD. Pegida has been one of the most visible anti-immigrant protest movements, with ongoing demonstrations across the country. Starting out with about 350 protestors, the movement reached its peak in January 2015 when around 25,000 people attended its demonstration in Dresden. While its protests declined in numbers after that, its four-year anniversary in October 2018 nonetheless still managed to draw about 3,200-4,100 people to the streets (Durchgezählt n.d.), and its goals have radicalized considerably.[23]

As various studies on anti-immigrant sentiment reveal, far-right worldviews as well as anti-migrant attitudes tend to be shared more often by men, by people with low educational backgrounds and – relatedly – people with low income or with experiences of socio-economic deprivation (Decker Kiess and Brähler 2016; Zick, Küpper and Krause 2016). However, groups active in the anti-migration mobilization from 2015 onwards have had a more diverse socio-demographic profile, particularly within New Right and right-populist mobilization. In this vein, surveys among participants in the Pegida protests show that while – as in other far-right movements – more men than women participated, socio-economic deprivation was not a particularly prominent feature of the participants: employment in a regular, full-time job and educational level were above the population average (Vorländer, Herold and Schäller 2015; Geiges, Marg and Walter 2015; Daphi et al. 2015), while unemployment was below average.[24] Similarly, a population survey in 2016 found that socio-economic deprivation, income and joblessness were not important predictors of whether or not people supported Pegida's goals (Yendell, Decker and Brähler 2016).

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[23] Durchgezählt, *Statistik zu Pegida in Dresden* [Statistics of Pegida in Dresden], no date (in German) https://durchgezaehlt.org/pegida-dresden-statistik/, accessed September 10, 2019.

[24] However, compared to left-wing demonstrations, levels of education were considerably lower among Pegida participants (see: Daphi et al. 2015), as were levels of prior experience in political participation (see: Haunss et al. 2017).

Key demands of anti-migrant mobilization

Due to the diverse range of groups involved, the key demands within anti-migration mobilization have varied considerably. Firstly, issues of migration have been addressed at different levels, including both local and national dimensions of immigration and asylum. Local citizens' initiatives have focused substantially on developments in their vicinity, such as the opening of new accommodation centres for refugees (Aumüller, Daphi and Biesenkamp 2015). Others have pursued changes at a national or international level, targeting culture and policy decisions on immigration and asylum (such as closing borders and limiting social services for migrants). Secondly, there has been notable divergence between groups in the radicalism of demands made, as perspectives ranged from conservative-right to far-right ideologies. For example, New Right groups – which have been very prominent in anti-migrant mobilization – are characterized by their aim of linking conservatism to right-wing extremism in an attempt to create a broader base and leverage. In this vein, New Right groups such as the Identitarian Movement or the think tank Institute for State Policy (*Institut für Staatspolitik*) pursue an ethnopluralist[25] ideal that seeks to distance itself from the "old right" – for example the NPD – and its völkisch-nationalist ideology (Salzborn 2017; Weiß 2017).

Accordingly, groups active in anti-migration mobilization share elements of right-wing ideology such as racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, authoritarianism, anti-elitism, national chauvinism and anti-feminism to varying degrees. Despite their differences, most groups involved in recent protests do, however, tend to share the goal of a culturally and ethnically homogeneous nation – a classical right-wing ideal – and frequently refer to supposed foreign infiltration or "foreignization" (Häusler and Schedler 2016). This is also the case for some of the groups who have claimed not to follow a right-wing agenda, such as local initiatives against new accommodation centres for refugees. Many of these groups framed their protests as neither right-wing nor xenophobic by portraying themselves as apolitical, "concerned" citizens. Several groups have also aimed to hide their broader nationalist agenda behind an emphasis on their opposition to Islam and the alleged danger it represents to European and German culture, for example HoGeSa (Hooligans against Salafists) and Citizens' Movement Pax Europe, as well as Pegida. Accordingly, surveys of the Pegida demonstrations show that xenophobic, authoritarian and nationalistic claims are prominent among participants. A large majority of them not only criticize current immigration and asylum policies and reject multiculturalism (Geiges, Marg and Walter 2015; Vorländer, Herold and Schäller 2015), but are chiefly motivated by the fear of a loss of national identity (Daphi et al. 2015). Similarly, general population surveys show that people are more likely to support Pegida's goals if they hold an Islamophobic worldview and right-wing attitudes, most prominently xenophobic and chauvinist national ideals (Yendell, Decker and Brähler 2016).

[25] Ethnopluralism describes a New Right twist on nationalist racism by claiming that people(s) from various states and geographic locations should be considered different on the basis of their respective cultures. In the New Right view, immigration is considered a threat because it will ultimately result in the repression or elimination of one's own culture.

Impact of anti-migrant mobilization

The wave of anti-migrant mobilization described above has left considerable marks on German society and politics. Firstly, the protests have had an impact on public discourse, as the rise in anti-migration mobilization profited as much from the growing public debate around migration as it shaped it. Accordingly, the protests have further heightened interest in and debate around immigration in both the media and political parties. For example, an analysis of the traditional summer interviews with leading politicians in 2017 showed that migration was still the single most talked-about topic for representatives of all parties (Pfeiffer, Peez and Ostwald 2018).

Secondly, this mobilization has also influenced the frequency and content of public debates about immigration. While the mobilization triggered several left-wing counter-movements and motivated a lot of solidarity with refugees (see section 3), for large parts of society it has also incited more restrictive views on immigration, for example in debates around derogatory terms such as "asylum abuse" (Bade 2015: 5). Such changes can be seen, for example, in party programmes: during the electoral campaigns preceding the general election in 2017, all major parties, except for the Green Party, expressed at least some concerns regarding the reception of refugees (Falter and Stern 2018). The CDU and especially the CSU called for a maximum limit on the number of refugees entering the country. Anti-migration mobilization has also helped to disseminate anti-immigrant and nationalist sentiments more generally – taking them from a phenomenon at the margins to the core of society. Indeed, the most recent surveys reveal that levels of xenophobia increased from 20 per cent to 24 per cent between 2016 and 2018, as did levels of Islamophobia (from 50 per cent to 56 per cent) and the percentage in favour of rejecting refugees (from 60 per cent to 62 per cent) (Decker Kiess and Brähler 2016) – despite the fact that levels of immigration and asylum applications have fallen sharply since 2017.

Finally, anti-migration protests have also had a concrete impact on asylum policies and procedures. For example, at a local level, citizens' initiatives have had direct effects on municipal policy. In some cases, local protests against refugee accommodation not only resulted in municipalities changing their plans about where and how to build new housing, but occasionally halted those plans altogether. In a few cases, protests even forced the mayors of small cities to resign.[26] Furthermore, at a national level, the introduction of new asylum restrictions in 2015 suggests a certain level of influence from anti-migrant mobilization.[27] Starting in October 2015, the government introduced several changes to asylum law, most of which presented new hardships for newcomers seeking asylum. The 2018 coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD announced that asylum procedures would be made more efficient, and in the future the intention is that they will be carried out in centralized reception, decision-making and repatriation facilities.

[26] A prominent example is the former mayor of the small town of Tröglitz in Saxony-Anhalt, who resigned after the NPD threatened him and his family.

[27] See also Morales et al. (2015).

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have explored the development of pro- and anti-migrant mobilization in Germany, which intensified in the context of the long summer of migration (Hess et al. 2017) in 2015. We have shown that while a similar dynamic of mobilization around issues of immigration and asylum emerged at the beginning of the 1990s, the scope and nature of recent pro-migrant mobilization has been different. Millions of people spontaneously set up "welcome initiatives" to support the newcomers in 2015, and even more people decided to become involved when the number of racist attacks on refugees increased and the xenophobic discourse gained momentum throughout the following year. Parallels with the 1990s can be drawn in relation to the defamation of refugees, the instrumentalization of the issue by right-wing groups and the rise in xenophobic violence. At the same time, however, the recent widespread solidarity with refugees clearly reflects a changed understanding of German identity and society. In addition, we have shown that the broad scope of both pro-migrant and anti-migrant mobilization from 2015 onwards signals an increasingly polarized discourse on migration.

Our chapter has furthermore revealed how the growth in pro- and anti-migrant mobilization has entailed a diversification in terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of the citizens involved, their motivations and the demands on both sides. Moreover, this diversification is also visible in the geographical scope of pro-refugee mobilization, which used to be rather "urban" but has increasingly spread into rural areas as well since the 2015 events. Anti-migrant mobilization has also broadened since 2015, leading to a situation in which right-conservative groups, far-right groups and citizens with no prior political engagement have increasingly worked together.

Anti-migrant and pro-migrant mobilization have interacted to some extent. The strong pro-migrant mobilization, and the fact that it was initially supported by leading politicians and the mainstream media, probably had a dampening effect on rising anti-immigrant voices. However, it prevented neither the increasing domination and normalization of right-wing, anti-migrant discourse nor the introduction of the harshest asylum restrictions since the early 1990s. Chancellor Merkel, who had suspended the Dublin regulation in 2015 and who had propagated "*Wir schaffen das*", increasingly came under pressure to tighten asylum provisions. The reasons for this included ongoing anti-migrant mobilization, rising voter support for the AfD, the right-wing course taken by her local chapter in Bavaria, the CSU and the demands of fellow EU leaders.

However, at the same time, solidarity with migrants and refugees among civil society remains strong. Many of the welcome initiatives from 2015 continue to exist and, after a decline in 2016, political mobilization in support of migrants and multiculturalism has been on the rise again since 2018. For example, the "We'll come united" parade in Hamburg in September 2018, an initiative fighting for "societal participation, equal rights, and solidarity", attracted 30,000 participants. Just two weeks later in Berlin, over 200,000 people took part in a demonstration for an "open

and liberal society – solidarity instead of exclusion"[28] (We'll come united n.d.; Unteilbar n.d.). It seems that the controversial debate around immigration is far from over: many citizens are concerned by the rise of anti-migrant and nationalist forces and want to maintain and shape a cosmopolitan society.

[28] Source: We'll come united, *Defend Solidarity! United Against Racism and Fascism*, 2019, https://www.welcome-united.org/en/call-2/; Unteilbar, #Unteilbar im sommer 2019 [#Indivisible in the Summer of 2019], 2019 (in German), https://www.unteilbar.org/uber-unteilbar/positionen/unteilbar-2019/, accessed September 10, 2019.

CHAPTER III

Pro- and Anti-Migrant Mobilizations in Polarized Sweden

Pieter Bevelander and Anders Hellström

This chapter describes current changes in migration flows and politics in Sweden, before presenting and discussing the reactions to these changes in civil society – the mobilization of both pro- and anti-migration sentiments – which reflect the polarized sentiments towards immigration in Swedish society.

First, this report conveys information about migration flows to Sweden before, during and after the refugee reception crisis of 2015. In 2016 in particular, Sweden had a major intake of asylum seekers, which prompted new legislative measures to manage this. Second, we emphasize transformations in the party-political landscape before, during and after the refugee reception crisis of 2015. In this period there was also a rhetorical shift in mainstream politics, heralding an emphasis on security in order to protect the Swedish model. The mainstream-right bloc was also split in two. Third, we study the actions and reactions in response to these changes in civil society. The everyday experiences of problems with integration stand in contrast with international norms of solidarity. We conclude that the crisis enabled a window of opportunity for the mobilization of both pro- and anti-migration sentiments in civil society.

Introduction[1]

In recent decades, a polarization in public opinion on migration and refugees has gradually taken place in many European countries. Sweden is a relative latecomer to this negative discourse. The country was long considered to be a deviant case (Dahlström and Esaiasson 2011). Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, when many other countries moved towards the implementation of harsher policies regarding immigration, integration and citizenship, Sweden went in the opposite direction. However, this development finally came to a halt in the autumn of 2015, in what has been referred to as "the end of Swedish exceptionalism", when Sweden adjusted its immigration policy to the EU minimum level (Emilsson 2018; Rydgren and Van Meiden 2016). There was a drastic increase in the number of asylum seekers coming to Sweden in the period from September to November 2015.

Before 2015, when the number of asylum seekers and, subsequently, the number of refugee permits issued were substantially higher than in any other European country, public opinion towards refugees had gradually become more positive over time (Demker 2014). In other words, the electoral fortunes of the Swedish anti-immigration party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), cannot be explained by increasing levels of anti-immigration attitudes in the population – the opposite was actually the case. However, when the government implemented restrictive measures to decrease the number of applicants, public opinion also shifted to become more negative again.[2]

Nevertheless, the growth in the number of asylum seekers – from around 30,000 per year to over 160,000 in just three months in the autumn of 2015 – did bring about an increase in pro-refugee mobilization, especially during the first few days after the arrival of asylum seekers in Sweden. Taken by surprise, the migration agency had to partially rely on civil organizations and municipalities for help in arranging the reception of these asylum seekers in the first days following their arrival. Once the asylum seekers had been dispersed to all kinds of accommodation throughout the country, the pro-refugee discourse that dominated was impaired by other discourses on the economic costs of the asylum intake and the subsequent integration measures

[1] In finalizing this chapter, we have received valid input and comments from Linus Hermansson from the Church of Sweden and Josefin Åström from the Swedish Network of Refugee Support Groups (FARR). A draft version of this chapter was also presented to the Migration Seminar Series at the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM) on 14 March 2019. All comments, including those from the editors, have been much appreciated and are hereby acknowledged. In our discussion of the party-political landscape, we received valuable input from Henrik Emilsson. The interviews and the focus group conversations were moderated by Anders Hellström and Brigitte Suter, and this teamwork is hereby gratefully acknowledged. Many thanks also for the valid input from and fruitful discussion with our focus group partipants and individual interviewees.

[2] As in other European countries, people with lower levels of education tend to be more concerned about integration compared to those with higher levels. See: Dagens Nyheter, *Svenskarna har svängt: 4 av 10 vill ha betydligt färre flyktingar* [The Swedes have turned: 4 out of 10 want significantly fewer refugees], 2018 (in Swedish), https://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/svenskarna-har-svangt-4-av-10-vill-ha-betydligt-farre-flyktingar/, accessed September 10, 2019.

needed in order for the newcomers to adapt. More refugee-negative discourses subsequently came to the fore, including on criminality, segregation and illegality.

The absorption capacity of many municipalities was increasingly stretched, and faced with this reality, some argued that it would perhaps be more effective to help refugees in their original environment instead of in Sweden. Others, however, countered this view and maintained that international solidarity should and could be combined with the preservation of internal cohesion. This difference of opinions in the electorate was mirrored by a heavily polarized discursive climate around how to manage this situation. Despite the dramatic change in asylum policy and the increasingly negative attitudes towards asylum seekers, the latter's inclination to stay and become part of Swedish society did not decrease.

To gain insights into the milieu in which the mobilization of anti-migrant sentiments thrived, we conducted an interview with a representative of the anti-racism journal *EXPO*. Then, to enable us to provide examples of the various forms of mobilization of pro-migration sentiments, we conducted focus group interviews and two additional individual interviews with key actors, representing an inclusive range of initiatives.[3] This material does not fully capture the totality of voices involved with the reception of refugees, but represents illustrative examples of both the initial reception of and subsequent integration measures directed at asylum seekers.

Immigration and Asylum in Sweden

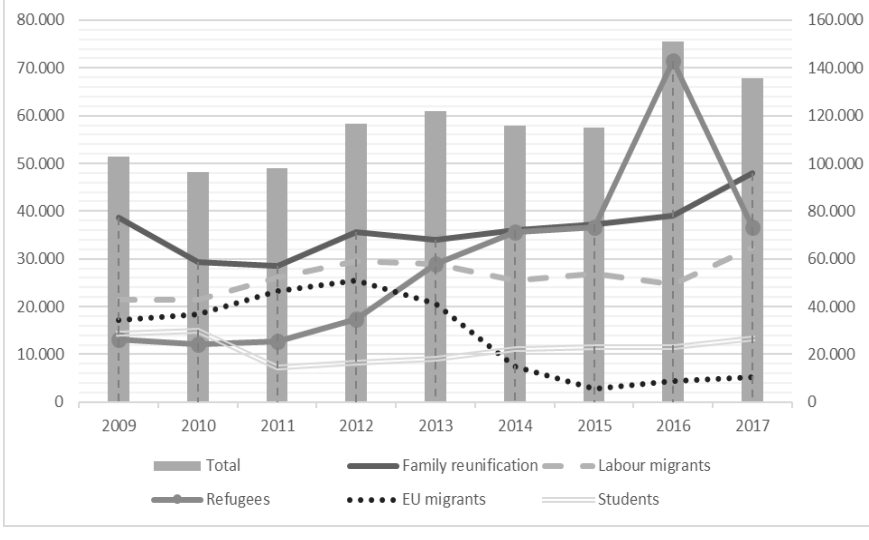
Migration to Sweden has been substantial over the last five decades. From the Second World War up until the mid-1970s, the majority of migration was attributable to the high demand for foreign labour in the growing industrial and service sectors. Only a minor part of the total migration was composed of refugees from non-European countries. As a result, immigration to Sweden previously consisted almost entirely of European labour immigrants. However, since the 1970s, the decline in economic and industrial growth has heavily decreased the need for foreign labour. Sweden has, since the 1980s, seen a large increase in the number of refugees and their families from Eastern Europe, different parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa. In the last ten years, immigration to Sweden has reached an all-time high, with immigration close to or over 100,000 individuals annually and net migration fluctuating at around 50,000 individuals per year during this period. Compared to earlier peaks of immigration to Sweden in the late 1970s and during the Yugoslavian Civil War in the early 1990s, figures during these recent years have vastly exceeded the earlier years of high immigration (Bevelander 2011).

Although diverse in terms of reasons for entering Sweden, a significant proportion of the immigration to Sweden over the last nine years (as depicted in Figure 3.1) has consisted of individuals seeking asylum and subsequently gaining residence. An

[3] The interview with the journalist from *EXPO* took place via telephone on 16 November and lasted for approximately forty-five minutes. The focus group with three representatives of pro-migration organizations lasted for approximately one and a half hours on 4 December 2018. This was followed by two individual interviews on the same day, which lasted approximately forty-five minutes each.

increase in the numbers over time is clearly visible, with the peak in 2016. A small proportion of the total number of immigrants or refugees has consisted of resettled refugees. Moreover, family-reunification migration has formed a significant part of the yearly inflow. These migrants are, to a large extent, connected to earlier refugee migration, although they are also partly due to international marriage with members of the native population. Student migration has fluctuated at around 10,000 individuals per year. However, in 2010, Sweden began to implement tuition fees for non-EU immigrants, which caused a drop in numbers; these have since started rising again. Labour migration has shifted between 20,000 and 30,000 per year. Last but not least, internal EU migration has been rising since Sweden entered the European Union in 1995. Figure 3.1 indicates that this continued to increase up until 2012, after which we can see a substantial drop in registered EU migration – due to the fact that Statistics Sweden stopped registering EU migrants. There is no reason to believe that *actual* EU migration to Sweden has become substantially lower than before this change in the registration of this migration category.[4]

Figure 3.1: Immigration to Sweden (2009–17)[5]



Source: Swedish Migration Agency.

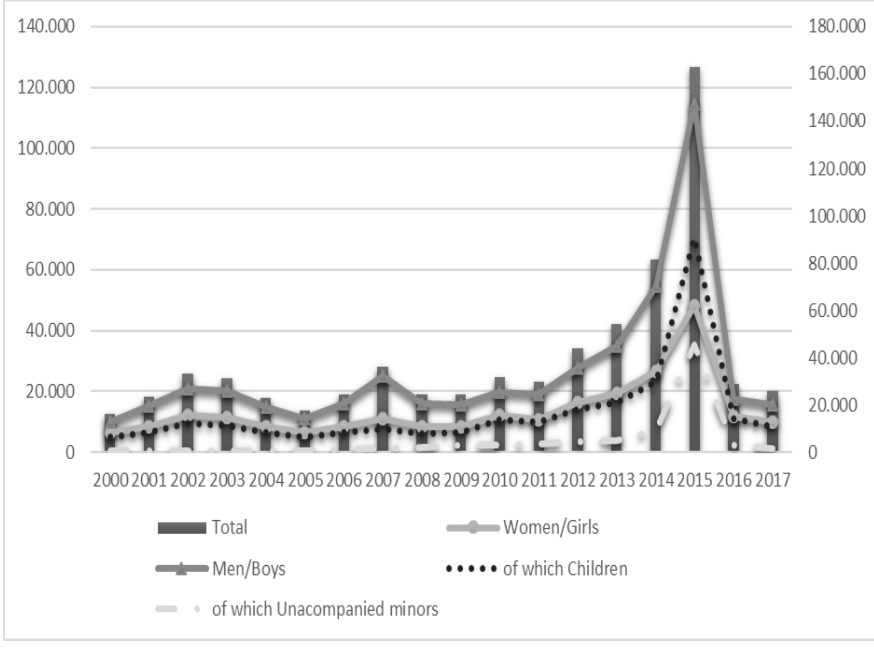
As depicted by Figure 3.1, the number of refugees increased after 2012, peaking in 2016, with over 70,000 individuals gaining a residence permit as a refugee. This

[4] A recent report on how the media has presented immigration to Sweden shows that published articles have primarily focused on refugee migration, thus paying less attention to other forms of immigration (mentioned here) such as labour migration, family reunification or the re-immigration of Swedish citizens (Strömbeck et al. 2017: 6).

[5] Figure 3.1 indicates the trajectories of the various admission categories, connected to the left scale of the chart, whereas the the total migration number is indicated in the bar chart and connected to the right scale.

increase in refugees was due to the rise in the number of asylum seekers over time – starting in 2012 and peaking in 2015 (Figure 3.2) – of whom about 40 per cent in 2013, 50 per cent in 2014, 30 per cent in 2015 and 25 per cent in 2016 were asylum seekers from Syria. Other major asylum-seeking groups during this period were individuals from Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and Eritrea. Figure 3.2 shows that in the period 2000–17, more men than women sought asylum. What is more, a substantial part – 32 per cent of all applications – were minors and 9 per cent were unaccompanied minors. More than 50 per cent of all applications by unaccompanied minors took place in 2015.

Figure 3.2: Number of asylum seekers in Sweden (2000–17)[6]



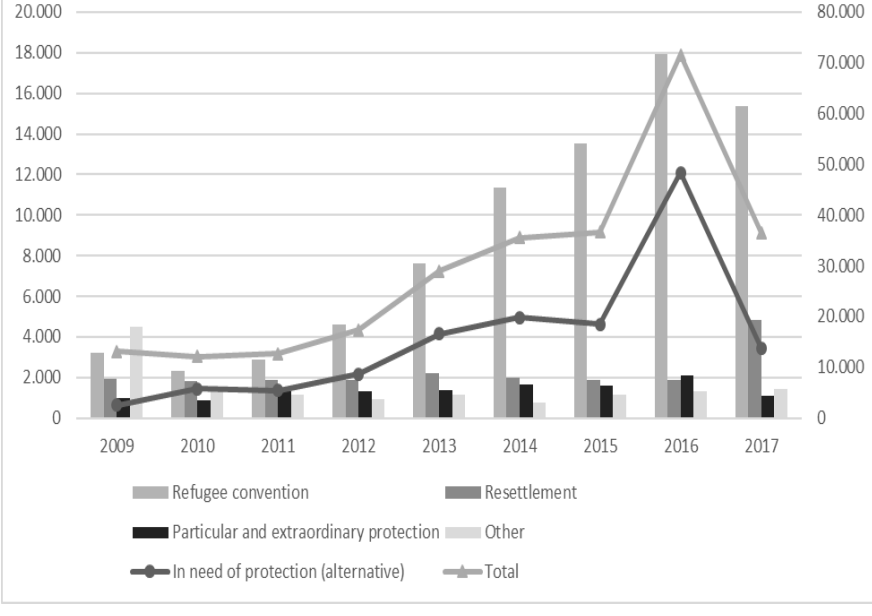
Source: Swedish Migration Agency.

A more detailed picture of the reasons why asylum seekers obtained refugee status in Sweden in the period 2009–17 (Figure 3.3) shows that the category "in need of protection" contained the largest number of individuals. This category was an alternative to the other main category – "refugee convention" – and offered refugee status in line with EU-regulated protection rules. The second-largest category comprised those who had obtained refugee status according to the Geneva Convention of 1951. In connection to this, Sweden had a so-called "resettlement programme", which was expanded in 2017 to accommodate more individuals – previously about

[6] Figure 3.2 indicates the number of asylum seekers split by gender and minors and connected to the left scale of the chart, whereas the the total number of asylum seekers is indicated in the bar chart and connected to the right scale.

2,000 individuals per year, but by 2017 this increased to 5,000. Resettlement meant that individuals from either refugee camps or other places in the world who were granted refugee status before arrival were accepted in Sweden with the help of the UNHCR. The smaller category "particular and extraordinary protection" were mainly individuals who could not return to their home country due to health issues. The category "other" is made up of people who were granted permission to stay for other reasons – such as, for example, those covered by the so-called "Gymnasium Law"[7] from 2017 and those who received temporary refugee status.

Figure 3.3: Reason for obtaining asylum (2009–17)[8]



Source: Swedish Migration Agency.

To conclude this section on immigration and, in particular, refugee migration to Sweden over the last decade, the percentage of rejected applications clearly decreased between 2010 and 2017.[9] The increase in applicants from Syria and Eritrea, all of whom obtained refugee status, means that the rejection rate decreased from about 70 per cent – especially from 2012 to 2014 – to around 40 per cent, after which it remained at this level until 2017.

[7] This law enables applicants who have had their applications for asylum rejected to receive a residence permitin order to undertake studies at upper-secondary level.

[8] In Figure 3.3, the bars indicate the various admission categories and are connected to the left scale of the chart, whereas those who obtained asylum in the category in need of protection, together with the total migration figure, are indicated through a line and connected to the right scale of the chart.

[9] Source: Swedish Migration Agency, *Asyl* [Asylum], https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Asyl.html, 2018 (in Swedish), accessed September 10, 2019.

Response from the Authorities on Arrival

In general, the Migration Agency is in charge of the asylum process in Sweden, but numerous governmental agencies may also be involved. However, in addressing the increase in asylum applications in Sweden in 2015, all municipalities were screened to ensure that they could provide sufficient accommodation in which to host asylum seekers. Upon arrival, those seeking asylum must visit a local office of the Swedish Migration Agency and formally apply. The application is relatively simple – applicants must provide proof of their identity and have their fingerprints and photograph taken. Each asylum seeker then receives an LMA (short for "*Lagen om mottagande av asylsökande*" [Swedish Reception of Asylum Seekers' Act] card with his or her photo on it. This card serves as proof that the holder is seeking asylum and is permitted to be in the country while their application is being processed.

However, due to the high number of applications in 2015, the waiting period between the filing of an application for asylum, its processing and the issuing of a decision increased substantially. For example, of the 114,000 asylum seekers who arrived in Sweden between September and December 2015, 50,595 had still not received a decision on their asylum application by January 2017. Of this group, 40,492 had not even had their asylum investigation initiated by then (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2017). Before 2015, the average waiting time for a decision was three to four months; however, by 2016 the average processing time was about one year (328 days).

While waiting for their asylum application to be processed, asylum seekers have two housing options: they can either accept housing provided by the government or they can find housing independently, potentially with family or friends already living in Sweden. Government housing is known as *anläggningsboende* (ABO) and independent accommodation as *eget boende* (EBO). For ABO asylum seekers, the accommodation provided is typically a shared flat in which multiple refugees live together. Families can have their own room and, if requested, special arrangements can be made for LGBTQ + individuals, the elderly, pregnant women and single people with small children, so that they can feel more comfortable.

During the asylum process, asylum seekers can receive financial assistance from the government if needed and have access to emergency healthcare services, maternal healthcare and medical care related to abortion and birth control. Other healthcare is accessible for asylum seekers for a fee. Children under the age of eighteen receive the same health coverage as native-Swedish children living in the region. Furthermore, asylum applicants are allowed to be employed. While adults do not have the right to attend school during the waiting period (they must wait until they receive a residence permit), all asylum-seeking children and young people have the right to attend pre-school and school at no cost, just as their native-Swedish counterparts do.

Separate policies apply to unaccompanied minors who seek asylum in Sweden. An unaccompanied minor is defined as "a person who is under the age of 18 […] who is separated from both parents and not being cared for by an adult" (UNHCR 1997).[10]

[10] UNHCR, *Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum* , 1997, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3360.html, accessed

Unaccompanied minors live in transitional housing in a municipality that is of geographical proximity to the place of application (Lundberg and Dahlquist 2012); they are supposed to remain there until they are transferred to another municipality where they can stay for the duration of the processing period. The new municipality remains responsible for the unaccompanied minors' wellbeing until they reach the age of eighteen (unless they relocate to another municipality, which then takes on this responsibility) and provides the minors with public counsel, a legal guardian and accommodation (often in the form of a foster home or group shelter).

Change in policy for asylum seekers

As stated earlier, the high number of asylum applications received in 2015 put a strain on both the Swedish Migration Agency and the municipalities that were providing housing and other services.

In November 2015, several new policies were passed with the aim of discouraging asylum seekers from coming to Sweden in order to give the country the "breathing space" (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2017: 12) that it needed to handle the large number of asylum cases. The goal was to adopt temporary rules that would abide only by the "EU minimum" standards, so that asylum seekers would be encouraged to seek refuge elsewhere. It should be noted that resettled refugees were not affected by any of the following changes in policy, as the modifications only applied to asylum seekers.

On 12 November 2015, the concept of temporary border and ID controls was introduced for the first time since Sweden entered the Schengen Agreement in 1995, with police requesting identification from all persons entering Sweden, including by train, bus or boat. Individuals were required either to immediately request asylum in Sweden – thus preventing them from doing so later in another country – or be turned away. The border controls went into effect on 4 January 2016 (Bech, Borevi and Mouritsen 2017: 7) and ID checking still continues partially today (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2017).

One of the biggest changes in policy occurred on 24 November 2015, when the government proposed a temporary law stating that all asylum seekers who applied after that date could only receive temporary, rather than permanent, residency if it were granted in Sweden. The legislation was officially voted on July 2016. Under these new rules, each asylum seeker's temporary residency is to last three years or thirteen months and can be extended beyond that time if the person still requires protection. However, permanent residency may be granted at the time of renewal if the person can prove that he or she has found housing and employment and is capable of supporting him- or herself financially.

This same law of 24 November also had another component: family reunification. Under the new mandate, asylum seekers who receive a status of alternative protection with a temporary thirteen-month residence permit are not entitled to apply for family reunification. Meanwhile, those who are granted refugee status and receive a three-year residence permit will only be considered for family reunification if applications are submitted within three months of asylum being granted (Bech, Borevi and

September 10, 2019.

Mouritsen 2017). All refugees who have received a residence permit on the grounds of different protection needs can apply for family reunification once they have been granted permanent residency and can provide proof of their own housing and of sufficient economic resources to sponsor their family members. Even then, only their immediate family – that is, their spouse or partner over the age of twenty-one (the age minimum had previously been eighteen) and any children younger than eighteen can be reunited with them. Other family members would not be eligible for reunification. This change in policy does not affect resettled refugees who arrive in Sweden with their family unit.

The massive increase in migration flows to Sweden during the autumn of 2015 gave rise to immediate changes in rules and legislation, which we have accounted for above. In this same period, popular attitudes also shifted from the extensive willingness shared by a majority of Swedes singing a chorus of "refugees welcome" to calls for burden-sharing and fears of a system collapse. In public debate, mainstream actors began to employ a rhetoric once considered extreme but now thought of as commonsensical.

In the next section, we highlight the transformations in the party-political landscape before, during and after the refugee reception crisis of 2015.

The Party-Political Landscape

Originally, in April 2015, the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven stated that there was "no limit" to the number of Syrian refugees that Sweden could receive (Barlai et al. 2017: 289). However, as the number of asylum seekers in Sweden rapidly grew, the political rhetoric began to change. In November 2015, the Swedish Migration Minister Morgan Johansson said that there were, in fact, limits to what the government could do (Hofverberg 2015). That same month, Löfven held a press conference with Åsa Romson, leader of the Green Party, at which he said: "It pains me that Sweden is no longer capable of receiving asylum seekers at the high level we do today. We simply cannot do any more." (Crouch 2015).

If we look back a little to the 2014 national elections in Sweden, we see that the country was divided into two camps on issues pertaining to migration and integration. On the one hand, electors could choose to vote for the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats (SD) – a party which has doubled its voting share in all national elections since its inception in 1988. Its antagonists on both the right and the left considered members of the SD to be political clowns who made a mockery of daily parliamentary work, or else they were depicted as devils in disguise with a particularly deplorable past (Hellström and Nilsson 2010). On the other hand, voters could choose a party from either the mainstream left or the mainstream right, whose members seemingly converged on the migration issue in this period and united in a show of repugnance for the SD.

With the exception of the anti-immigration party in the Swedish parliament, in 2014 the other parties were united in prioritizing international norms of solidarity over and above the concerns of popular demands for the sanctioning of a more restrictive migration policy. After 2015, this divide between the SD and every other party was no longer apparent. The two traditional blocs (blue and red) now displayed internal

divisions over how to handle immigration and integration issues, with the various factions suggesting different measures. After the 2018 parliamentary elections, the SD attained major positions in three municipalities; in other municipalities the party joined governing coalitions. In these municipalities, it is undoubtedly less shameful to publicly announce your sympathies with the SD. The party had taken over voters from, predominantly, the two largest parties from each bloc, the Moderates and the Social Democratic Party, and a recent study suggests that, for as long as the immigration issue continues to be of high salience, these voters are not likely to return to their original parties (Jylhä, Rydgren and Strimling 2018).

However, there are several reasons for not jumping to hasty conclusions. Sweden has not suddenly become an intolerant country and not all voters who are considering backing the Sweden Democrats are racists (e.g.: Dahlström and Esaiasson 2011). Recent studies on Sweden Democrats voters divide them into more xenophobic and less xenophobic sympathizers (Jylhä, Rydgren and Strimling 2018). According to these studies, the more xenophobic group makes up its core constituency, while the latter (less numerous) group has been attracted to the party because of its perception of a lack of control of the current political situation and not because this group displays intrinsic anti-immigration beliefs.

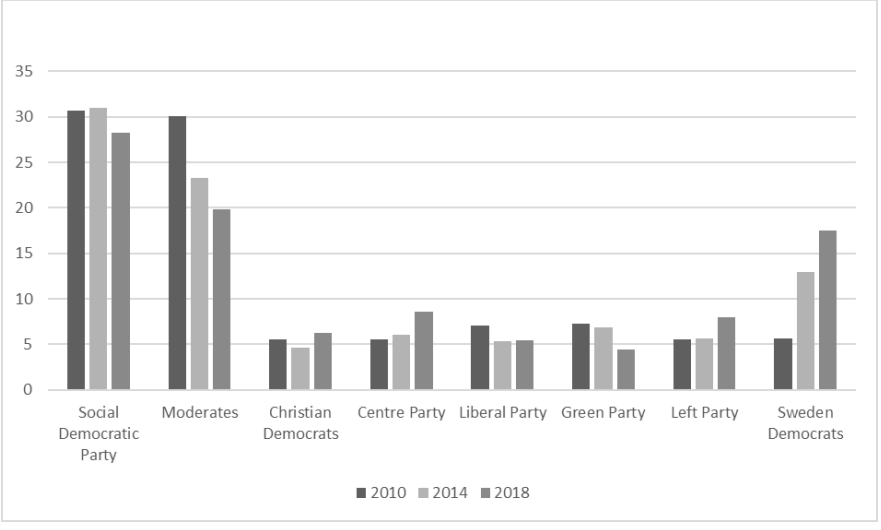
Demand among the electorate for anti-immigration party views is not new; however, these were previously channelled through the mainstream parties. Furthermore, it is not necessarily the case that the media has been a catalyst for the transmission of immigration-negative views, as Bonjour and Schrover have shown for the Netherlands and family migration (2015).

What these findings indicate is that voting behaviour is highly dependent on the political agenda (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008). If immigration and law and order are viewed as key issues, then the Sweden Democrats have the potential to mobilize more of their voters (even if campaigners argue against them). On the other hand, if the political debate is centred on the environment, it will almost certainly be to the benefit of the Green Party. Similarly, for the Social Democrats, if they focus on traditional welfare issues, this will leave little room for the Sweden Democrats.

Political positions on immigration in Sweden

Looking back to the period after the Second World War, neither immigration nor integration were salient political issues or questions of partisan rivalry. The model of combining strong and active welfare states has been referred to as “the Scandinavian model”. As we show below, this is no longer the case. In Figure 3.4, the election results for all the parliamentary parties in Sweden from 2010–18 are listed.

Figure 3.4: Parliamentary election results in Sweden (2010–18)



In 2010, the Alliance (a coalition of four mainstream-right parties) lost its absolute majority in parliament but continued as a minority government. After the 2014 national elections, the Alliance was replaced by the Social Democrats and the Green Party, who also formed a minority government. In 2014 there was a governmental crisis, since the Swedish parliament decided to reject the government proposal for a new budget for the following year. Prime Minister Löfven announced a new election, but this was never realized. Instead, the four mainstream-right parties and the governing coalition of the Social Democrats and the Green Party decided on a mutual budget agreement – referred to as the December Agreement – to enable minority governance and avoid votes for any one party's own budget proposals in the parliamentary chamber. This procedure was, however, heavily criticized, not only by various media commentators but also within the parties.

After the Swedish national parliamentary elections in September 2018, Sweden did not manage to form a new government until January 2019. Together with the Green Party, Stefan Löfven, leader of the Social Democratic Party, continues to govern the country, now with the support of two smaller mainstream parties, as well as backing from the Left Party. The traditional divide in Swedish politics between a red and a blue bloc has now become obsolete in an effort to shut the SD out from formal power. Sweden has not chosen the same path as, for example, Norway, Denmark or Austria, where the conservative parties have accommodated the views of the radical right in a bid to seize governmental power, nor has it seen the birth of a grand coalition between the leading mainstream-right and mainstream-left parties, as in Germany.[11]

[11] See also: *Financial Times*, "Löfven tears up Sweden´s political landscape to retain power", 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/709fd18e-1a67-11e9-9e64-d150b3105d21, accessed January 4, 2019.

The mainstream-left bloc

The Left Party has in the past had a restrictive policy on immigration, especially towards labour migration (Bucken-Knapp 2009). However, nowadays the party endorses the opposite position to the SD, and is in favour of abolishing the temporary border controls (see above), aiming to facilitate more legal ways for migrants to enter the country (Emilsson 2018). In terms of the socio-cultural division between authoritarianism and progressivism, the Left Party clearly belongs to the latter category. Before the reception crisis, the party's emphasis was on establishing innovative welfare state arrangements, although without letting private actors profit from public goods. After the autumn of 2015, when the two governmental parties took measures to adjust Swedish immigration policy in line with that of other European countries by implementing temporary residence permits (instead of permanent), the Left Party instead defended the traditionally relatively generous Swedish path.

Before the 2014 national elections, the Green Party, like the Left Party, was a strong defender of a humanitarian approach towards immigration. This starting point stands in sharp contrast to the measures the party has since implemented – together with the Social Democrats – towards a more restrictive policy on asylum (see above). This transformation has also led to much internal criticism.

During the autumn of 2015, the Social Democratic Party was in a governmental position. The party has, as previously stated, initiated border controls, restricted the possibilities of family reunification and implemented temporary residence permits. The rhetoric around burden-sharing concerns an equal distribution between the Swedish municipalities and a solidaristic concern that all EU member states should share the responsibility of receiving refugees. Before the reception crisis, the party called for both a fair number of asylum seekers and equal rights for those immigrants who actually stay in the country. Compared to the other two parties mentioned above, the Social Democratic Party places greater emphasis on the importance of law and order.

The mainstream-right coalition

Recently the alliance of four parties (the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, The Moderates and the Christian Democrats) has split in two. The two former parties have clearly indicated that it is important to them that they should not, in any way, be dependent on the electoral strength of the Sweden Democrats in the process of government formation.

In its migration policy programme, the Centre Party aims to facilitate entrepreneurship and endorses the principle of subsidiarity. It has developed into a liberal – some would say neo-liberal – alternative to the Sweden Democrats' harsh, restrictive policies on immigration.

Like the Centre Party, the Liberal Party welcomes higher levels of labour immigration, preferably highly skilled, to Sweden. The party believes that knowledge of the Swedish language is the key to better integration. Language, the party proposes, should become a requirement for citizenship acquisition. The party has profiled itself as the most pro-EU party in Swedish politics.

In the run-up to the 2014 national elections, the Christian Democrats emphasized the need for a generous, family-oriented policy on immigration. Since autumn 2015, however, the party's rhetoric has been completely transformed. The party still emphasizes humanitarian concerns with regard to, for instance, family reunification, but this aside, it is important to the party not to depart too much from the rhetoric of other EU member states.

A similar transformation has also occurred in the Moderate Party. If, before the crisis, the party was frequently associated with liberal progressivism or an open-door policy, its rhetoric is now centred much more on the necessity of imposing restrictive measures related to migration and integration. However, even if the party has started to collaborate with the SD in the municipalities, it refrains from any cooperation with them at a national level.

The Sweden Democrats is the only party that has always had a restrictive policy on immigration. It maintains that in order to maintain the necessary solidarity between Swedish natives to secure trust in the government, national citizens need to be culturally equal and thus born and raised in their country. The welfare state requires cultural conformism and, following this, the party would like to put an end to multicultural experiments. Cultures, according to the party view and based on ethnopluralist ideas, should not be mixed but be kept separate (Hellström 2016). The EU, therefore, represents a threat to national sovereignty.

So how did the authorities organize the integration of newly arrived asylum seekers in this period? This question is dealt with in the next section, after which we discuss the actions and reactions of both pro- and anti-migration organizations in Swedish civil society to these changes in policy and rhetoric.

Actions and Reactions to Changing Policies on Immigration and Integration by the Authorities and in Civil Society

Once individuals (either resettled refugees or asylum seekers who have been granted a residence permit) settle in a municipality, they have the right to follow an introduction programme organized by the Employment Service. The programme was initially run via the municipalities, but this changed in 2010, when it was switched to the Labour Market Agency and began to focus particularly on the labour market and the societal integration of refugees and their families. Although participating in the introduction programme is not mandatory, it is linked to economic benefits, and those who do not partake cannot receive any form of governmental assistance.

The programme is made up of various components, including language classes, civic orientation and job training. By participating "actively", individuals can also receive a special scholarship which is slightly higher than normal social assistance payments. The programme lasts for a maximum of twenty-four months.

The number of participants in this programme has grown steadily, with 100,000 individuals expected to take part between 2018 and 2020 (Employment Service 2016), even though the programme was originally only designed to accommodate 10,000 individuals (Bevelander and Emilsson 2016). Such high numbers are putting a strain on municipalities, particularly in terms of staff shortages. Many newcomers are therefore finding it increasingly difficult to access a high-quality programme

(Employment Service 2016). In addition, the government has had to dramatically increase funding for the programme (Bevelander and Emilsson 2016).

Based on semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugees participating in the introductory programmes, Bucken-Knapp et al. (2018) came to the conclusion that the quality of the language training, the complexity of the validation process and the lengthy administrative procedures hinder employment integration.

A major new government initiative, "Swedish From Day One", is an attempt to reach new arrivals at an early stage by offering valuable resources – such as language courses and information about Swedish society – to asylum seekers stranded in reception centres and refugees awaiting resettlement. Approximately €3 million was initially allocated to this programme in 2015 and, in that year alone, the programme reached 73,000 individuals across 240 municipalities (Folkbildningsrådet 2016). Since then, the Swedish government has proposed extending the programme's budget by an additional €7.5 million.

Pro-immigration engagement in civil society

In both national and local authorities, initiatives were carried out and money was allocated in order to manage the situation. The practical circumstances surrounding the integration of newly arrived refugees, however, necessitated deep engagement among civil society actors. In general, Swedish citizens are used to the state caring for the less fortunate in society.[12] In this situation, however, in addition to government agencies, NGOs and wider civil society have also played a major role in managing the high numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Sweden, particularly via two main types of engagement: (1) providing support and assistance to asylum seekers arriving at Swedish train stations and ferry terminals by offering them food, clothes, medicine and transportation, and (2) helping arrivals during the integration process. In autumn 2015 in particular, the Swedish government was not equipped to deal with the high numbers of asylum seekers (114,000 of whom arrived within a four-month timeframe), so NGOs and volunteers often stepped in, greeting refugees at entry points while government agencies tried to organize their efforts in these locations.

The chairperson of the Red Cross in Malmö explained in an interview that they offered emergency assistance to exposed and desperate refugees at Malmö central station, with recruited volunteers offering food, clothing and medical supplies.

While asylum seekers waited for decisions from the Migration Agency, civil society remained at the forefront of the whole process, especially by facilitating programmes that would help with integration, since asylum seekers do not have access to similar government-sponsored services until they receive their residence permit. Social venues providing regular social encounters and practical assistance with, for example, the homework of unaccompanied minors, are still thriving. The Swedish Migration Agency will even, on occasion, cover the transportation costs for asylum seekers to attend these study circles.

Volunteers from various organizations have thus been engaged both in immediate assistance and in activities intended to facilitate the newcomers' long-term integration

[12] See on this issue: Berggren and Trågårdh (2009 [2006]).

into Swedish society – language training, conversation groups and the provision of societal information. Bak-Jørgensen and Rosengren Olsen, in their recent study on Danish civil society in times of crisis (forthcoming), focused on the organization Venligboerne, emphasizing how learning becomes crucial for the enactment of everyday progressive politics. In their understanding, civil society is not only a location for public protest against state-made decisions but also a communication platform for learning activities and mutual understanding.

A number of organizations focus their efforts on mental health. A study by the Swedish Red Cross[13] (2016) found that one in three Syrian refugees suffers from either depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder, the consequences of which can impact not only on the individual's present-day wellbeing but also on their future success (Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen 2013). These activities can identify individuals who need professional medical care, which individual volunteers cannot offer themselves.

Many Swedish NGOs also provide legal assistance. The UNHCR has an office in Stockholm and provides refugees with information about the country's asylum laws and processes. It is also able to assist refugees in cases of forcible deportation and can investigate certain facts, even those from a person's country of origin, to provide as evidence in asylum investigations (Abraha 2007). Amnesty International performs similar functions but has district offices in Malmö and Gothenburg in addition to its central office in Stockholm. It also has "refugee representatives" in eighteen districts throughout the country. Other legal organizations are the Swedish Refugee Advice Centre in Stockholm and the Swedish Network of Asylum and Refugee Support Groups (commonly referred to as FARR, for its initials in Swedish), a large umbrella organization that connects refugees to local support groups. FARR also monitors Swedish authorities to ensure that they respect both international and national refugee law with respect to asylum applications (Abraha 2007).

The largest civil society organization, with more than 5 million members, is the Church of Sweden. The Church has been deeply engaged with the refugee issue for more than fifty years, providing immediate help and conducting integrative work. It supports the *stadsmissionen* [city mission] financially and also cooperates with several other actors.

In general, religious organizations have played a major role in managing the crisis. According to a report by the Church of Sweden (Hellqvist and Sandberg 2017), eight in ten of its congregations helped asylum seekers between 2015 and 2016 in one capacity or another, with an estimated 37,000 people taking part in such activities each month. Examples of Church-led involvement include volunteering at language-learning cafés, participating in clothing collections and hand-outs, and advising asylum seekers on where to get legal advice. Mosques were also very much involved in helping the refugees – working closely with Islamic Relief Sweden, those in Stockholm and Malmö served over 3,300 meals to refugees, and many individuals

[13] Swedish Red Cross, *Refugees battle mental health problems in Sweden*, 2016, https://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/europe-central-asia/sweden/refugees-battle-mental-health-problems-in-sweden-73709/, accessed January 4, 2019.

were either given shelter overnight in the mosques or received clothing, hygiene kits or legal advice.

Since there are no legal restrictions that forbid migrants from establishing civil society organizations, many Syrian refugees living in Sweden have developed NGOs to help others like themselves. Examples of just some of the many NGOs founded by Syrians living in Sweden include The Young Republic, which encourages civic engagement and democratic participation among young Syrians living in Sweden and other parts of Europe (European Civic Forum), as well as Syriska Riksförbundet i Sverige [Syrian National Association in Sweden] which, although organized by Syrian immigrants in Sweden prior to the conflict, helps refugees during the integration process and supports humanitarian projects in Syria. In total, there have been at least twenty Syrian associations documented in Sweden (Ragab and Katbeh 2017), most of which are active in issues of political engagement and integration.

In the focus group discussion and in the subsequent individual interviews with representatives of the voluntary organizations, it was made clear that it is more difficult to get the message across to politicians these days, but that child poverty and poor housing conditions prevail. No one, however, is promoting these issues from a political viewpoint. During the crisis, it was easier to recruit new volunteers for urgent intervention activities. However, even if the possibility of recruiting new members peaked in 2015–16, recruitment continues; for example, the Red Cross department in Malmö, comprising approximately 800 volunteers, is continuously growing in terms of paying members.

In the interview, the representative of the Red Cross returned to the importance of continuing to focus on the organization's core principles of universality and impartiality – a person in need of help, no matter his or her origin, religion or side in the conflict, is still a person in need of help and the key is to understand and not to condemn them. Many new volunteers, she explained, are themselves newly arrived and would like to offer assistance in, for example, second-hand or charity shops. Maybe, she speculated, they had seen the Red Cross symbol on their way to Sweden and were now looking for opportunities to repay the help they had received.

One participant in the focus group was the director of Aleris, an organization providing transitional accommodation for newly arrived unaccompanied minors in Sweden. During the focus group, he emphasized the importance of enabling cooperation between the private sector and emancipatory forces in civil society. The new enemies, he explained, are the state authorities responsible for implementing new political decisions. These could induce the cutting of financial support or even the closure of particular organizations which work to realize integration measures. Between 2009 and 2015 there was growth in solidarity but, after the crisis, the societal climate abruptly shifted from building bridges to erecting walls and there was what he refers to as a "systemic collapse" – a situation in which the political establishment was no longer able to handle the massive intake of refugees. This was made manifest in the execution of political decisions.

Another participant in the focus group works at Mötesplats Otto, a venue offering activities and assistance for newly arrived unaccompanied minors. She talked about the massive civic engagement and enthusiasm for the refugee cause in 2015, which has

now seemingly waned. At the political level, integration measures have become less pertinent, in her experience. In the current situation, ordinary people are increasingly worried about threats from the extreme right and are less active as a consequence. Politicians might still be listening, but this is not always evident in the allocation of resources, she continued.

Prospects for change

As shown above, the refugee reception crisis did not only mobilize feelings of resentment among the population. We have also found many examples of willingness to offer immediate assistance to refugees and to commit to more long-term engagement and learning activities involving refugee reception. According to our interviewees, this engagement stems from the heavy intake of refugees in the autumn of 2015. Even if these initiatives were not always entirely congruent with political developments, it is important to remember that the crisis did not only lead to restrictive policies but also to a sincere commitment to community solidarity.

How can bottom-up mobilizing activities pursue actual political change? In the autumn of 2015, on their way to work or study, university employees and students were quite literally crossing paths with vast numbers of refugees at Malmö's central station. This building is located very close to the university buildings in the city. In an interview, an employee of the university explained the deep commitment shared by some (international) students and staff members who organized activities to assist refugees. This movement was called "Refugees Welcome" and involved mass meetings, including fundraising events. This is an example of widespread mobilization in civil society, from the bottom up, in a bid to pursue actual change. The employee argued that these efforts would have been in vain if they were not anchored in the university system; for instance, without being able to use the university logo, this movement would soon have died out. However, the combination of bottom-up emancipatory initiatives and a sincere willingness by the university board to sustain these activities meant that real changes were made possible. For the individual university employee interviewed, concerns were raised about agency within individual employment. Without a clear structure, institutional support and a designated leader, any movement would soon die out.

Even though this movement eventually lost momentum, it nevertheless illustrated how a university could both partake in immediate assistance and offer services to foster the integration of the newly arrived into the labour market (offering, for example, language teaching). The state apparatus of integration was not limited to, *inter alia*, employment agencies, but planted seeds in the universities as well. In addition, the university, together with other academic environments both nationally and internationally, became an important lobbying organization used to affect actual decision-making.

Engagement in opposition to refugee integration

As shown above, a number of organizations were active in mobilizing pro-migration sentiments during the crisis. This situation, however, also created a window of opportunity for activities mobilizing *anti*-migration sentiments.

Hampshire (2013) explains that throughout history, immigration has been perceived as threatening by the inhabitants of receiving countries. Broadly speaking, these types of perceived threat can be divided into two camps (*ivi*, p. 23). First, opposition to immigration is guided by economic self-interest. The majority population seeks to avoid enhanced competition over scarce resources. Explanations emphasizing economic threats commonly fall into the category of "ethnic competition" (e.g.: Hellström 2016: 46-47).[14]

Second, opposition to immigration is guided by identity. The majority population seeks to preserve a traditional way of living, restoring the country to the way it looked before. When a higher proportion of immigrants alters the demographic composition, previously more homogenous nation states become more heterogenous, giving rise to negative attitudes towards immigration in the domestic population. From this perspective, immigration is seen as culturally threatening and immigrants are not necessarily seen as inferior to us but simply different.

Before the autumn of 2015, there were many in Sweden who expressed their hatred towards refugees on social media. They prompted each other to use more and more extreme rhetoric on common platforms – such as Facebook groups – outside of the mainstream media. If, for instance, the media reports that the overall crime rate has gone down and that more non-native citizens are finding jobs instead of living on subsidies, one can find mutual allies on social media who do believe this to be true.[15] On social media, users can share a common normative starting point and, from this position, dismiss new empirical facts as "fake news" if the findings go against their initial assumptions.

In 2015 and 2016 these people, who had previously only communicated their views on social media, also convened at social events such as demonstrations. According to a journalist at the anti-racist journal *EXPO*, during this period some people were radicalized. If politicians expressed concerns about not being able to manage the migration situation, this motivated radicalized people to take action towards managing the situation themselves – to go from social media activism to publicly manifesting anti-migration views. After a peak in 2015 and 2016, these people again returned to their platforms on social media, which did, however, enable anonymity.

In 2016, ninety-two fires were started in asylum accommodation (*EXPO* 2017). From the later part of 2015 onwards, there was a dramatic increase in violent acts. During this period, organizations such as the Soldiers of Odin and the Nordic Resistance Movement came into being and collaborated both with international and national like-minded organizations. In autumn 2015 and early 2016, they saw an opportunity to relocate their views from the extreme margins into the mainstream and to take action.

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[14] See also Rea et al. (introduction) in this book.

[15] In previous decades citizens were less exposed to news about crime, given that they primarily relied on local newspapers as a source of information. Today, one can read about crime almost everywhere. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many citizens believe the country to be on a downward trend. Politicians stating macro-level facts and statistics cannot alter this perception.

If mainstream political actors already shared a perception of a chaotic world and an out-of-control domestic situation, this surely motivated anti-migrant people and gave them confidence in taking action. There is no particular framework (either economy or identity) that unites participants in this milieu, the *EXPO* representative continued. Instead, different areas attract different people to a particular cause, whether related to criminality, education, housing or, more abstractly, to problems of cultural blending or a wish to restore a more homogenous society of culturally similar individuals. Their demonstrations, he explained, always oppose an existing elite which has allegedly betrayed the people, either culturally, economically or politically.

Sections of the native population express concerns that newly arrived refugees may be eroding and misusing the welfare system and jeopardizing the societal values that shape them as a community. Immigration can be both economically and culturally threatening to the nation state. Both humanitarian and economic claims are used to argue that (too much) immigration will damage the welfare state and disrupt social cohesion.

Concluding Discussion

External shocks such as the refugee reception crisis in 2015 have triggered polarized sentiments about immigration. If domestic politics rarely changes abruptly due to divisions in or between parties, external crises may promote substantial changes in party systems (e.g.: Emilsson 2018).

When immigration and integration issues became highly salient, the traditional blocs – mainstream left versus mainstream right – in Swedish parliament developed into a multidimensional party space. The immigration issue is both a matter of practical concern over the equal distribution of goods amongst the citizenry and a more existential, abstract topic that shapes how we see ourselves and our national community. Again, the everyday experiences of problems with integration stand against international norms of solidarity.

When representatives of the political mainstream signal to voters that they have lost control of the situation, this enables attitudes towards immigrants that were previously considered extremely hostile to appear more credible and more mainstream. At the same time, this period also encouraged many people to offer immediate assistance to people in need or to participate in longer-term commitments, for example, facilitating language teaching so that the newcomers could better integrate into Swedish society. While acknowledging that extreme views against immigration have become more mainstream, these inauspicious gusts are accompanied by winds of hope, brought about by vigorous emancipatory mobilization in civil society (Hellström, Norocel and Bak-Jørgensen, forthcoming).

Traditionally, Sweden has had little experience of mobilization activities in civil society (Berggren and Trågårdh 2009 [2006]). When the reception crisis hit Sweden, the authorities were arguably poorly prepared. Following this line of argumentation, if the authorities fail to deliver on promises, civil society actors must step in or at least take a more active role. However, some argue that in order to do so, it is necessary to rely on private actors to secure funding. Others would refuse any reliance on private

actors and trust in state sponsorship instead. Either way, the crisis triggered activity among civil society.

By way of conclusion, the crisis opened a window of opportunity for the mobilization of both pro- and anti-migration sentiments in civil society. We have given many examples of efforts made to facilitate incoming refugees' inclusion in civil society, of offers of immediate assistance and of engagement with longer-term commitments to facilitate integration. At the same time, restrictive policies on immigration were implemented and, rhetorically, an emphasis on security in order to defend the Swedish model became ingrained in the political mainstream. When the political language in the mainstream changes, this also gives confidence to those among the native population who embrace this shifting rhetoric.[16]

The question of which values should define the foundation of Swedish society thus became heavily discussed during this period, both within and outside of organizations. On the anti-migration side, the wish to restore a more homogenous past has encouraged public demonstrations. The perceived "elite" consensus on the need to always show solidarity towards the "other" has been broken, or at least is much contested, triggering the mobilization of both pro- and anti-immigration forces in civil society and bringing about changes in the overall structure of political competition, rendering it a more multidimensional party space.

This discussion is likely to continue; meanwhile, Sweden is faced with new citizens who are likely to stay and not necessarily to move on. In the context of the changing demographic composition of the country, only time can tell how well the diverse elements of the population will manage to live peacefully and supportively together.

[16] In relation to this, the discourse analyst Ruth Wodak has elaborated on the mainstreaming of extremism in European politics (2015).

CHAPTER IV

The Reception of Refugees and the Reactions of the Local Population in Hungary

András Kováts and Alessandro Mazzola

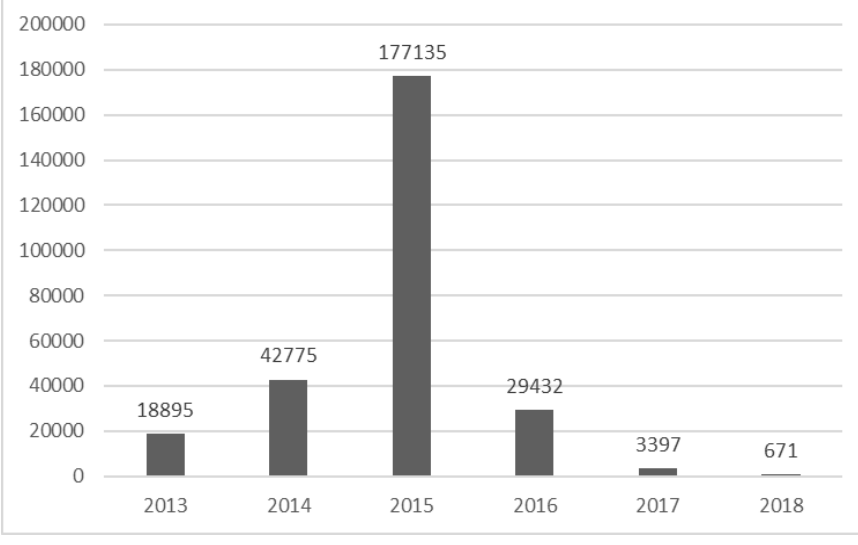
The Reception Crisis Years

The summer of 2015 has been perceived as a turning point in Hungary's asylum and migration history, and to some extent in the history of the country's domestic and foreign policy. The refugee reception crisis of 2015 brought forth several political actions that since then have become symbolic reference points for policy and for professional actors in the field of asylum and migration, as well as for politicians and the general public in Hungary and abroad. The most remarkable ones were: the Hungarian government's billboard campaign against immigrants and immigration; the mobilization in civil society to help people stranded at railway stations and in public parks in the late summer of 2015; the setting up of the border fence along the Serbian and Croatian border and the subsequent closure of the green border; the government's refusal of the European Emergency Relocation Mechanism and the related communication campaign and public referendum. Although there have been several other legal and political developments since these events, this chapter mainly focuses on the period between January 2015 and October 2016. This period is bookended by two events, both of symbolic importance: the starting point was the Hungarian Prime Minister's public speech following the Charlie Hebdo incident, and the period ended with the public referendum on the so-called 'relocation quota' on 2 October 2016. The reason for not – or only partially – extending the analysis beyond that point is that the interaction between the government and civil society has since then largely shifted away from the developments around the reception crisis. This is because by the end of 2016, asylum seekers and refugees were no longer present in Hungary in large numbers.

Asylum statistics of the preceding years

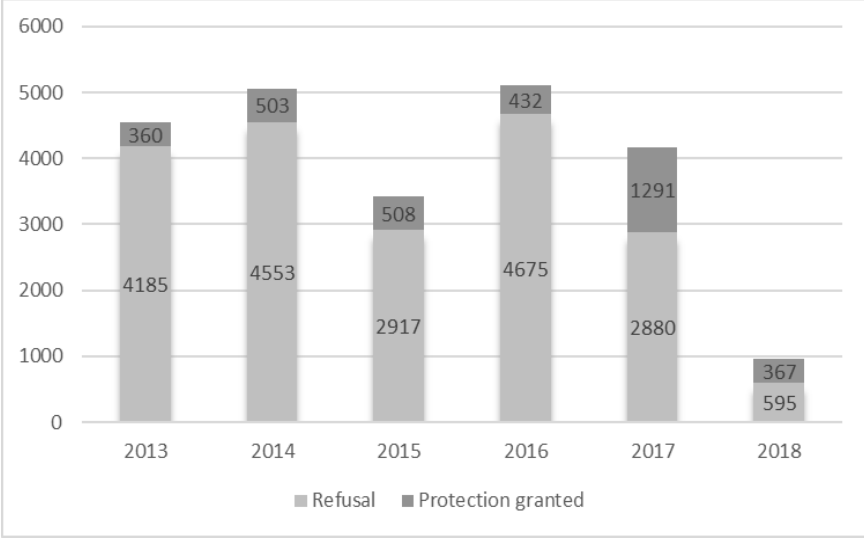
The year 2015 showed a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers in Hungary. It reached an unprecedented peak of over 177,000 asylum applications registered (see Figure 4.1), and the number only stopped growing because the asylum system collapsed at the end of August. There were 414,000 irregular border crossings registered in the same period. Roughly half of them occurred between 15 September and 16 October. As we will see later, the green borders with Serbia and Croatia were closed in that exact period.

Figure 4.1: Number of asylum seekers (2013–18)



The Hungarian asylum system has always been characterized by a strong presence of secondary movements. The majority of those registered have moved on and disappeared from the system even before the first decision regarding their status was made. As a result, the number of cases for which an asylum authority made an "in-merit decision" was much lower than the actual number of asylum seekers until 2017, when asylum seekers could no longer leave the transit zone unless they abandoned their case by travelling back across the border, or unless they received a positive decision. Thus, the number of decisions and the frequency of some form of international protection being granted in the first instance over the past six years are as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Number of in-merit first instance decisions by the asylum authority (2013–18)



From looking at this figure, it is apparent that, despite the initial dramatic increase and the subsequent drop in the number of asylum seekers, the number of decisions remained more or less constant until 2018. Significantly, the year of the crisis produced considerably fewer decisions, most likely due to the systemic collapse and the subsequent organized transit of asylum seekers. The different patterns for 2017 and 2018 are explained by the introduction and gradual adjustment of the transit zones: in the first year they had a considerable effect on selection and containment, resulting in an unprecedented recognition rate, which was quickly adjusted in 2018 by further restrictive measures, resulting in a considerable drop in intake but an even higher recognition rate.

Regarding the composition of asylum seekers and people granted international protection, the three largest nationality groups are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Countries of origin of the 3 largest groups of asylum seekers and people granted protection (2013–18)

Year	Asylum Seekers	Beneficiaries of International Protection
2013	Kosovo, Pakistan, Afghanistan	Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia
2014	Kosovo, Afghanistan, Syria	Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia
2015	Syria, Afghanistan, Kosovo	Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia
2016	Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq
2017	Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq
2018	Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria	n.d.

Chronology of the refugee reception crisis from January 2015 to October 2016

On 11 January 2015, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán gave an interview to the Hungarian Public Television on the occasion of his participation in the march in Paris that paid tribute to the victims of the Charlie Hebdo incident. In the interview he made several statements that triggered strong responses from opposition political parties, the media and civil society organizations. Orbán said that Europe needs a more straightforward and honest discourse on migration, resulting in more restrictive immigration policies: "Economic immigration is a bad thing in Europe, we shouldn't look at it as if it had any use. It brings only trouble and danger to European people, therefore immigration should be stopped; this is the Hungarian position." He also mentioned that there were only a limited number of people in Hungary "whose cultural background was different from ours" who had no problems with integrating into Hungarian society. "But it needs to be clear", he said, "that we won't allow, at least while I am the Prime Minister and while we have this government, Hungary to become the target of immigrants." He concluded that "we don't want a significant minority among us with different cultural features and backgrounds, we want to keep Hungary as Hungary".[1] Subsequently, the government made it clear that they identified a causal relationship between the terrorist attacks and unrestricted or loosely regulated immigration.

The number of asylum seekers from Kosovo had been rapidly increasing for the previous two years, reaching its peak in the early months of 2015. The ever-increasing irregular migration from Kosovo towards Western European countries had become a common discussion point for government officials and pro-government media, highlighting the problem of managing irregular immigration. The Prime Minister's calls for a more restrictive immigration policy also took place in the context of the growing number of Kosovars crossing the border irregularly, asking for asylum and eventually moving on to another European member state. On 11 February, the government announced that it would start a so-called public consultation on immigration,[2] and on 20 February the parliament held a plenary debate titled "Hungary doesn't need livelihood immigrants". Due to reinforced border controls on the Kosovo–Serbia and Serbia–Hungary borders, the number of asylum seekers from Kosovo dropped significantly.

In March and April, the number of asylum seekers from Kosovo remained low. However, asylum seekers from Syria and Afghanistan started to arrive in slowly but steadily increasing numbers. Although the numbers no longer justified urgency, the government moved forward with the preparation of a communication campaign on

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[1] See the summary of the Prime Minister's speech: Kormány, *A gazdasági bevándorlást meg kell állítani* [Economic immigration must be stopped], 2015 (in Hungarian), http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek/a-gazdasagi-bevandorlast-meg-kell-allitani, accessed July 1, 2019.

[2] See the summary of the press conference: Kormány, *National consultation to be launched on illegal immigration*, 2015, http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/national-consultation-to-be-launched-on-illegal-immigration, accessed July 1, 2019.

immigration, with the aim of introducing substantial restrictive amendments to the laws on asylum and immigration. One month later, the government started to send out questionnaires for the National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism, a political consultation introduced by the second Orbán government aiming to ask people's opinion directly before crucial policy decisions, which was posted to every person over eighteen years with a registered address in Hungary. Over the years, these consultations became an effective tool in the government's communication strategy, and have regularly been used as evidence of the popular legitimacy of its position and decisions.[3] There have been eight such consultations to date; the one discussed here was the fifth. It consisted of twelve questions, all of them with severe methodological flaws: either being "leading" questions that suggested the expected answer, or setting false or incomplete dilemmas to choose from.[4] As a result, the responses were overwhelmingly in line with the government's message. The questions can be grouped around three main topics: drawing a connection between failed immigration policies and terrorism, expressing the need for stricter immigration policy and proposing alternatives to supporting immigration, such as tackling root causes in countries of origin and favouring child and family policy.[5]

In June, the government launched its first billboard campaign on migration, with the aim of endorsing the ongoing National Consultation. The billboard campaign consisted of three core messages addressed to immigrants, albeit in Hungarian. The messages were the following: "If you come to Hungary, you must not take Hungarians' jobs"; "If you come to Hungary, you must obey our laws"; and "If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture." The three messages encapsulated the main points of the government's framing of the threat posed by immigration, triggering a vigorous response from political and civil society movements. Several billboards were damaged or overwritten, and there was public fundraising for a counter-campaign organized by the Hungarian mock party the Two-Tailed Dog, which eventually resulted in placing hundreds of billboards with messages ridiculing, twisting or negating the messages of the original campaign (Nagy Zs. 2016).

According to a public opinion poll by Századvég, a pro-government think tank, the overwhelming majority of Hungarians were sympathetic to the messages of the billboards, and in two out of three cases, their political preferences did not have an impact on their support. Only in the case of the billboard hinting that immigrants

[3] For the government's communications, see: About Hungary, *National Consultation*, http://abouthungary.hu/national-consultation/, accessed July 1, 2019. For a critical analysis, see: Nova (2017).

[4] Migration researchers and leading Hungarian social scientists protested against the consultation, calling for it to be revoked by the government.

[5] A few examples to illustrate the questions: "Some say that immigration, mishandled by Brussels, may be connected with the spread of terrorism. Do you agree with this?"; "Would you support the Hungarian government in applying stricter immigration rules in opposition to Brussels' lenient policies?"; "Do you agree with the Hungarian government that instead of immigration we need to support Hungarian families and the birth of Hungarian children?".

might "take away jobs from Hungarians" was the public more divided: those with left-wing inclinations tended to refute that message.[6]

The number of asylum seekers arriving in Hungary via the Serbian border continued to grow dramatically in June. By the end of the month, the situation reached a stage where neither the Border Police nor the Asylum and Immigration Authority could contain the new arrivals in their designated holding places. Temporary (preliminary) detention for registration and identification could not last longer than forty-eight hours by law, and the temporary collection centres set up in the border zone quickly became overcrowded and eventually clogged. There was no organized transport available between the collection centres and the open or closed refugee reception centres intended for hosting asylum seekers for the duration of their asylum procedure. These centres were all full to their maximum possible capacity. Consequently, people were released after their registration by the authorities and asked to travel to the reception centre designated to them on their own. Most people, however, did not intend to stay in Hungary for long, so rather than trying to get to a reception centre, they headed for Budapest and eventually further on, to Germany or other Western European countries. As a consequence, asylum seekers started to appear in ever-larger numbers in public squares and parks around the three main railway stations in Budapest, as well as at the railway station in Szeged, a country town located near the Serbian border, where people spent their first day or two in detention before moving on. Indeed, Szeged was the first place where an informal volunteer group formed in early June to help people board trains that would take them to Budapest or elsewhere in Hungary. This initiative was soon followed by several other volunteer groups, active mostly in Budapest but also in other country towns that asylum seekers travelled through and where they had to change trains on their way to Budapest or to one of the open refugee reception centres.

The number of people stranded around railway stations kept growing during the summer months. By early September, there were over ten thousand people passing through each day or taking a few days to move on towards Western Europe. By the end of August, the registration system had collapsed, authorities were no longer registering people entering the country and asylum requests were filed only occasionally. In early September, the Hungarian government started to organize bus transfers from the Serbian border to permanent and temporary refugee reception centres near the Austrian border, from which people could easily move on. Throughout these months, the question of whether these people could freely move on from Hungary to Austria and eventually to Germany remained ambiguous and unresolved. Sometimes there were signs of free movement that resulted in thousands boarding trains, and yet there were also times when the Hungarian and Austrian police prevented people from boarding trains, even with a valid ticket. These circumstances led to chaotic situations with a lot of tension between the migrants, the volunteers and the authorities.

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[6] See the report on the survey: Századvég, *Plakáthaború – kinek van igaza* [Billboard war – who is right], 2015, https://szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/plakathaboru-kinek-van-igaza, accessed July 1, 2019.

Most of the volunteer activities supporting asylum seekers travelling through Hungary took place during the summer months. Volunteering mostly focused on providing basic care and amenities to people stranded in and around railway stations and public spaces. More complex services emerged as well, including medical care, family tracing and providing accommodation and transport, as well as providing access to information and communication facilities. Several volunteer groups worked alongside each other, sometimes in a coordinated manner, sometimes in conflict and with rivalry among them. There were also individuals and families who became active in helping asylum seekers without joining one of the coordinated initiatives. Once the reception crisis in Hungary caught global media attention, volunteer groups from other European countries, most notably from Austria and Germany, started to arrive, and for the last two to three weeks before the closure of the Serbian border, international aid agencies set up their services as well. This often led to chaotic and uncoordinated situations, especially in the border zone where the Border Police was supposed to control the situation, but seemingly the area turned into a large informal refugee settlement.

Another source of conflict was the lack of coordination and mutual acknowledgement between the informal volunteer groups and the volunteers who worked under the auspices of the major Hungarian charity organizations. The government and state agencies (the police and the Office of Immigration and Nationality) played a clear political role in keeping this conflict alive by disregarding, belittling or even negating the contribution of the grassroots volunteer movements, solely relying on the help of major and established aid agencies, even in cases when these clearly had capacity problems.

Besides the extraordinary nature of the situation in general, this period was marked by three symbolic events that became points of reference for most actors in the field. On 27 August, seventy-two people were found dead in a truck in Austria, apparently being smuggled in from Hungary. On 4 September, thousands of people started marching from the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest toward the Austrian border, along the M1 Highway. After some hesitation, followed by lengthy negotiations, the government ordered the transportation by bus of 4500 people to the border. The third event was the closure of the Serbian border on 15 September and the subsequent violent clashes between the police and the migrants trying to enter Hungary.

The border fence, built with the aim of stopping mass irregular immigration and channelling asylum seekers to designated entry points (the so-called Transit Zones), became the strongest symbol and point of reference in social and political debates related to the 2015 reception crisis in Hungary. In mid-June, the government decided to close the 175-km-long border with Serbia, and the parliament passed the necessary legal amendments in early July. Construction works followed, and by the end of August a temporary barbed-wire fence was placed along the border, which was gradually replaced with a more permanent fence. The closure of the border was heavily criticized by opposition political parties, international organizations and local NGOs, along with the increasingly vocal volunteer movements. On 15 September, the fence closed off the customary crossing points for irregular migrants and, alongside this, a package of legal amendments entered into force. The package concerned the

law on the national border and the penal code, as well as the laws on the entry and residency of third country nationals and the law on asylum.

Although migrants were no longer arriving from Serbia due to the closure of the border, the flow of migration did not stop but rather diverted to the border with Croatia, where a similar border fence was being built, but with a considerable delay. The main difference from the previous period was that the state authorities organized and maintained a transit corridor along which they transported people arriving at crossing points on the Croatian border directly to border crossing points with Austria. Boarding trains and buses, over 200,000 people were transported with the help of the police, the military and the national public transportation companies. As a result, migrants disappeared from railway stations and public places and most of the voluntary help became redundant. International volunteer groups quickly moved further south along the so-called "Balkans Route" in Serbia and Croatia. Hungarian groups tried to get involved in providing assistance to the diminishing number of people stranded on the Serbian side of the border fence, or supporting newcomers entering from Croatia or leaving for Austria after being transported to the border. Despite these efforts, in this period care and support to the migrants being transported were provided mostly by the large, established aid organizations (most notably the Hungarian Red Cross and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta), as grassroots volunteer movements and individual civilians were not authorized to enter the areas of embarkation and disembarkation, which were declared special military and police operation zones. On 16 October, the green border with Croatia was closed as well, and asylum seekers could only enter through two transit zones or – if they had valid travel documents – through the regular border crossing points.

In November–December 2015, the reception crisis in Hungary was virtually over as far as one considers the mass transit of irregular migrants through the country. The migration route was diverted towards Croatia and Slovenia, the previously overcrowded refugee reception centres gradually emptied out and arrivals through the border transit zones remained low. Despite all this, the government's communication campaign did not recede: the two EU relocation schemes became its target. Hungary voted against the second (mandatory) scheme in the European Council and turned to the European Court of Justice, together with Slovakia, to try to annul the Council's decision. At the same time, the government initiated a referendum-like collection of signatories against the so-called "settlement quota". The November terrorist attacks in Paris and the fact that some of the perpetrators had come (or come back) to Europe as asylum seekers via the Balkans Route were used as strong elements in the government's communications on immigration and asylum.

The number of asylum seekers entering the transit zones along the Serbian border and submitting their claims upon entering Hungary irregularly started increasing again at the beginning of 2016. The number of people apprehended during or after crossing the border fence increased as well, indicating that the border fence and the legal measures protecting it were not sufficient to prevent people from entering the country. Continuing its communication campaign against European asylum and migration policies, the government initiated a public referendum on the EU relocation quota in February. The proposed date of the referendum was 2 October, and the government

began its related communication campaign, which increasingly targeted the allegedly failed and mistaken immigration policy of "Brussels".[7]

The government launched its second billboard campaign in the following months, with a broader range of messages portraying immigration as an imminent threat to security and public order. The March terrorist attacks in Brussels again served as a strong point of reference, just as in the case of the incidents in Paris the previous year. The billboard campaign was accompanied with a detailed information campaign involving leaflets on the dangers of immigration, political rallies and public fora. The Two-Tailed Dog Party launched a counter-campaign and oppositional parties, together with several human rights and advocacy NGOs, actively campaigned for either boycotting the referendum or for casting an invalid vote, or even for casting a valid vote that opposed the government's point of view. The referendum itself was not strictly about the EU relocation mechanism, but rather on a more general question that only vaguely resembled the much-debated relocation mechanism. The question to vote on was the following: "Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the Parliament?".[8]

In the meantime, the parliament adopted new amendments to the laws on immigration and asylum as well as on the protection of national borders. As a result, asylum applications were to be submitted only in the transit zones along the border, and undocumented foreigners apprehended within 8 km of the border fence were to be escorted back to the other side of the fence. The transit zones had a limited reception capacity, causing the accumulation of hundreds of people on the Serbian side of the fence, which resulted in the emergence of informal refugee settlements. Volunteer groups started to operate in these settlements, often entering into conflict with the Hungarian or Serbian border authorities. The activities of paramilitary groups, especially from Ásotthalom, intensified and Hungarian and international NGOs started to criticize the police and the military for allegedly using disproportionate force and violence.[9]

On 2 October 2016, the referendum took place. Legally speaking, the referendum failed as the number of valid votes was below the minimally required 50 per cent of the total number of the population with voting rights. This result was mostly due to the low turnout, which could have equally been the result of a lack of interest or of the successful mobilization towards a boycott. Out of those who voted, the overwhelming majority voted in favour of the government's position.[10]

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[7] The meaning of "Brussels" in the government's political communication is inconsistent: sometimes it means the European Union, but sometimes it has a more restricted meaning referring to the European Commission only, or to an unspecified cosmopolitan bureaucratic elite working in and around European institutions.

[8] European Public Affairs, *Hungary Lose-lose Referendum*, 2016, https://www.europeanpublicaffairs.eu/hungarys-lose-lose-referendum/, accessed June 13, 2019.

[9] Human Rights Watch, *Hungary: Migrants Abused at the Border*, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/13/hungary-migrants-abused-border, accessed June 13, 2019.

[10] 92.3 per cent of the total votes, or 98.4 per cent of the valid votes supported the government's position.

Developments since October 2016

In March 2017, a new legislative package was adopted by the parliament that further tightened the asylum system, bringing forth its present characteristics. The so-called 8 km rule was extended, making it possible for the police to escort to the Serbian side of the border fence anyone apprehended anywhere in Hungary without valid entry or residence permits and documentation. The border transit zones became only places of residence for asylum seeker families with children, and other vulnerable people were no longer authorized to move into reception centres inside the country. The only exceptions were unaccompanied children under the age of fourteen. A constitutional amendment declared that asylum claims could only be dealt with if the claimant entered Hungary directly from a country where persecution had occurred or might occur.

Alongside the legal amendments, a new public consultation was launched with the title "Let's stop Brussels", asking the public about five threats stemming from EU policies. One dealt with the dangers of losing sovereignty when shaping national immigration and asylum policies, and another with the alleged threat posed by NGOs and by international organizations supporting them, serving "foreign interests". Furthermore, in June 2017, the first law sanctioning civil society organizations funded from abroad came into force. The preparatory discussion and communication campaign triggered a coordinated reaction from a group of civil society organizations, most of them affected by the new measure and targeted by the communication campaign. A remarkable event in this period was a solidarity protest of tens of thousands of people in support of the NGOs attacked by the government. After the law was passed, NGOs responded with various strategies, ranging from full compliance to open boycott framed as civil disobedience. Affected NGOs filed a complaint to the Hungarian Constitutional Court and to the European Court of Human Rights as well.

In July, the government launched a new communication campaign, the target of which was no longer the migrants or the political and bureaucratic elite of "Brussels", but the philanthropist businessman George Soros, who allegedly had plans to facilitate the irregular mass migration that Hungary was facing. This attack was not only against Soros as an individual, but also against several civil society actors who were either supported by the Open Society Foundations or were allegedly in close ideological relationships with Soros and the organizations he funded. In October, the government initiated a new national consultation, this time on the so-called "Soros Plan".

In September 2017, the European Court of Justice dismissed Hungary and Slovakia's complaint against the Council relocation decisions. The infringement procedure related to Hungary's non-compliance with the relocation scheme reached its final stage in December 2017, with the Commission handing over the case to the European Court of Justice.

In September 2017, the community of a small village stood against the organization of a holiday camp for refugee children by Migration Aid, once the leading volunteer organization in the reception crisis.[11] The conflict ended in intercommunity violence,

[11] Migration Aid, *Why do you bring refugees into such hatred?*, https://migrationaid.org/en/why-do-you-bring-refugees-into-such-hatred/, accessed June 13, 2019.

when the mayor of the village resigned and the property of a local entrepreneur supporting the refugee children was vandalized by fellow villagers. The conflict attracted significant media attention from both the opposition and the pro-government media, which either talked about crossing a red line[12] or about the braveness of Hungarians fighting foreign invasion; the latter was articulated by the Prime Minister as well.[13]

Following the news of the recognition of 1,300 refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, a heated debate erupted in the media and in public discourse. Opposition parties accused the government of hypocrisy and demanded the strictness exhibited in its political communication. Social welfare organizations and refugee- or migrant-related NGOs were attacked by the opposition media for cooperating with the government in secrecy. As a result, Hungary suspended the implementation of its national programme related to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, which was aimed at supporting activities related to reception or integration. This development resulted in the discontinuing of several services that had been available to refugees, reducing or even stopping the activities of some civil society organizations active in the field. In July 2018, after lengthy political and public debates and considerable mobilization on behalf of the affected civil society organizations, the parliament adopted a series of laws sanctioning NGOs and individuals working with immigrants and asylum seekers. The so-called "Stop Soros" legislative package has drawn the attention of the international community, and in July 2018 the European Commission launched an infringement procedure against Hungary because of it. Furthermore, an amendment to the law on taxation proposed that activities facilitating the immigration and permanent settlement of foreigners should be subjected to a special tax of 25 per cent of the cost of the activity. This caused much uncertainty among civil society organizations and service providers. As a result, a special university programme for refugees at the Central European University was suspended temporarily[14] and the volunteer community organization Migration Aid announced that it would continue its activity as a political party.[15]

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[12] HVG, *Őcsény egy éve kifordult magából, ma a szégyen és a düh uralkodik a faluban* [One year ago Őcsény turned away, and today shame and anger reign in the village], 2018 (in Hungarian), https://hvg.hu/itthon/20180925_ocseny_egy_ev_utan_menekultek_panzios_migration_aid, accessed June 13, 2019.

[13] Pesti Srácok, *Orbán kiállt az őcsényiek mellett: "Az emberek nem akarnak migránsokat az országba, a falujukba"* [Orbán advocated for the people of Őcsény: "People do not want migrants to their country, to their village"], 2017 (in Hungarian), https://pestisracok.hu/orban-kiallt-az-ocsenyiek-mellett-az-emberek-nem-akarnak-migransokat-az-orszagba-falujukba/, accessed June 13, 2019.

[14] Central European University, *CEU Suspends Education Programs for Registered Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, 2018, https://www.ceu.edu/article/2018-08-28/ceu-suspends-education-programs-registered-refugees-and-asylum-seekers, accessed June 13, 2019.

[15] Magyar Idők, *Párttá alakul a Migration Aid, hogy ne kelljen adót fizetniük* [Migration Aid becomes a party so they don't have to pay taxes], 2018 (in Hungarian), https://www.magyaridok.hu/belfold/partta-alakul-a-migration-aid-hogy-ne-kelljen-adot-fizetniuk-3396913/, accessed June 13, 2019.

The Asylum System after the Crisis

As was made clear in the government's communications, setting up a so-called "legal border closure" was meant to be an indispensable part of the policy reaction to the 2015 crisis. As a result of the legal and policy changes that took place between September 2015 and July 2018, Hungary has created the most restrictive asylum and immigration policy in the European Union. In this analysis, we focus only on the developments that took place up until October 2016, but the restrictive trends are already visible. In the following years, further restrictions have been introduced, but the operational logic of the system has not changed. The main elements of the new border and asylum regimes were the following.

In July 2015, the government introduced lists of safe countries of origin and safe third countries to be taken into consideration when dealing with asylum applications. The two identical lists included EU and EEA member states as well as EU candidate countries, among a few others. Turkey was added to the lists later, when the EU–Turkey deal came into force. These lists made it technically possible to dismiss the asylum claims of those entering the country from Serbia. In the same period, the parliament passed an amendment to the Asylum Act removing procedural guarantees in order to speed up pending asylum procedures and lifting the suspensive effect of an appeal procedure.

In September, the government declared a state of crisis "caused by mass immigration"[16] in which the default operation of the asylum system could be suspended and legal rights and guarantees could be curtailed. The police and the military were granted special rights to limit personal freedoms in order to combat mass immigration and terrorism. Due to an amendment of the Penal Code, illegal crossing or damaging of the border fence became a criminal act. A new border procedure was introduced in the transit zones, where asylum seekers were supposed to submit their claims, and only the so-called vulnerable asylum seekers with special procedural or reception needs were let into Hungary to stay in an open or closed refugee reception centre.

In May 2016, a new amendment to the Asylum Act cut the integration support available for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. The principle was that foreigners should not be entitled to more benefits than Hungarian citizens and that any integration support might serve as a pull factor for further unwanted immigration.

In July 2016, another thorough amendment to the asylum and immigration laws took place, resulting in the system which has been in place to date, though it has been restricted further by another amendment in March 2017. The essence of this new measure was the introduction of the so-called 8 km rule mentioned above. The March 2017 amendment extended the application of this rule to the whole territory of Hungary and designated the transit zones as the only place where those who enter the country with the aim of seeking asylum can submit an asylum application and stay for the duration of the procedure.

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[16] *Daily News Hungary*, "Orbán's cabinet again extends state of emergency due to migration crisis", 2018, https://dailynewshungary.com/orbans-cabinet-extends-state-emergency-due-migration-crisis/, accessed June 13, 2019.

At the end of 2018, asylum seekers were being de facto detained in the transit zones along the Serbian border during the status determination process.[17] Particularly vulnerable people, such as families, children and unaccompanied minors over the age of fourteen are no exception. Only unaccompanied children under fourteen are placed in a special children's home. All applications submitted by people entering from Serbia are considered inadmissible. Appeals against the fast-track procedure are limited to a three-day period. The number of people allowed to enter the transit zones has been limited and the limit is continuously decreasing. For the past year, it has been only five people per week per entry point on average. All migrants apprehended in Hungarian territory without a legal right to stay are escorted to the other side of the border fence along the Serbian border.

These measures have resulted in a situation where the number of asylum seekers and consequently people receiving international protection has decreased to a few hundred per year. Open refugee reception centres are virtually empty and community-based accommodation of asylum seekers is no longer possible. Those who receive some form of international protection usually leave Hungary for a Western European country soon after their status is granted, and those who remain in Hungary face enormous hardships (Kováts 2016). Care and support are provided only by a handful of professional migration-specific NGOs, where there are only limited opportunities for volunteering. Therefore, the volunteer movements that came into being in the summer of 2015 are no longer operational, with the exception of only one movement, Migration Aid, which is still functioning.

One may ask about the political and policy gains from the introduction of such harsh measures, and especially from leaving them in place for so long. Hungary has been gradually becoming isolated from the international community due to its extreme stance on immigration and asylum, and there have been several pending infringement procedures initiated by the European Commission, connected to the country's policy and practice in asylum-related matters. An analysis by Boldizsár Nagy identifies six so-called "organizing categories" in terms of which the legal and policy developments and their role in formulating the relationship between political stakeholders, the public administration, the broader Hungarian society and the affected immigrants and asylum seekers can be interpreted (Nagy B. 2016). These categories are the following:

1) *Denial* of the protection needs of irregular migrants arriving in Hungary, including systematically and consequentially referring to them as illegal immigrants, thus framing the issue in a securitization narrative.
2) *Deterrence* with the aim of preventing potential asylum seekers from choosing Hungary as a destination or transit route. Deterrence is also extended to political and civil society groups that oppose the government's position.
3) *Obstruction*, when the capacity and quality of the asylum system are not enhanced, facilities are closed down and procedural limits are set, with the aim of making it difficult to go through an asylum procedure and benefit from international protection.

[17] See: European Court of Human Rights, *Case of Ilias and Ahmed v. Hungary*, 2017, https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{"itemid":["001-172091"]}, accessed June 13, 2019.

4) *Punishment*, when detention and expulsion are applied extensively, often with additional punitive elements such as a Schengen entry ban as a consequence of a minor offence.
5) *Free-riding*, meaning a form of non-cooperation in finding a common European solution to the crisis, while still enjoying the benefits of EU legal and financial schemes. The most striking example is the country's non-compliance with the mandatory relocation mechanism and the explicit criticism of EU policies without seeking or offering common solutions to managing the crisis.
6) *Breaching superior law* is the last of the six interpretative categories offered by Nagy. It is apparent that several legal and administrative measures introduced by the government have been violating international, European or Hungarian law. The extraordinary measures and the use of the crisis situation as their pretext are a serious threat to the rule of law, both in Hungary and in the European Union.

This categorization may be helpful in giving a descriptive analysis of the policy developments during and after the reception crisis; however, it is equally important to take into consideration the expected political gains in order to fully understand the situation in Hungary. It is obvious that the key elements of the government's message are firmly supported by the majority of Hungarians and especially by those who vote for Fidesz, the dominant governing party. Therefore – as many analysts say – the anti-immigrant communication campaign and the restrictive immigration measures were able to effectively mobilize the voters of the governing party, securing their support throughout the 2014–18 parliamentary cycle (Fondation Robert Schuman 2018), and even securing another important victory in the 2018 spring parliamentary elections, when the party obtained 49.27 per cent of the vote in coalition with the Christian Democratic People's Party KDNP.

A further domestic political gain is the paralysing effect that the government's handling of the reception crisis and the accompanying political communication had on far-right political parties and movements. This may explain the relative lack of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee popular movements during the months of the crisis: the conflicting entities were the government and those involved in providing informal support for migrants. This framework could provide enough options for identification: helping refugees could become a form of political protest. Hungarian citizens who were not in favour of the mass irregular arrival of people could feel that their views and interests were strongly represented by the government and the law enforcement authorities; there was hardly room for demanding a stricter policy. This put the far-right parties – especially Jobbik, the largest opposition party in Parliament – in a difficult situation: they could either support the government's policy, thus giving up their stand-alone identity, or they could oppose it, thus alienating themselves from their radical constituency.

Another plausible explanation is that the immediate reception crisis seemed very difficult, if not impossible, to tackle through common European measures.[18] Hungary technically opted out of international and European asylum systems by unilaterally

[18] The failure of the two relocation mechanisms is a clear example of this. See for example: Selo Sabic (2017).

sealing its borders and dismantling its refugee protection system. Under this explanation, this was in order to alleviate the burden on the asylum and immigration systems and to prevent social tensions stemming from a prolonged crisis if Austria and Germany were to stop receiving asylum seekers entering via Hungarian territory.

The third rationale is that these decisions were made in order to maintain a "policy playground" on which the boundaries of European cooperation and solidarity could be tested with relatively little political risk and cost. Asylum had already been a contested field of European policy implementation, and finding allies in challenging this system seemed to be paying off, at least in the short run (Sándor 2018).

Political communication and public debate

The government's communication campaigns during and after the crisis created a discursive framework that had a very strong, almost excessive impact on the actors involved. There are several theoretical models that may be helpful in analysing and deconstructing these frameworks. The most frequently mentioned is the concept of *securitization*. Analysts maintain that securitization is effective when it is audience-centred, context-dependent and power-laden, involving not only discursive elements but actual processes, measures and tools (Balzacq et al. 2016). The Hungarian government's active involvement in handling the refugee reception crisis through legal, administrative and logistical interventions is a vivid example of this complex process of securitization (Szalai and Gőbl 2016).

Another interpretative framework used by analysts of the discursive patterns of the government's messaging is the theory of *moral panic*. According to this concept, a moral panic occurs when the importance and significance of a social process or problem is exaggerated, either in comparison with its assessments based on other, more reliable and valid sources, or in relative terms compared with other, apparently more serious, problems. It is important to note that, although there exist exaggerations around it, the problem is real, it exists and it is not only a construction by those setting the political agenda (Cohen 1972). Generating and maintaining moral panic can be an effective tool for social and political mobilization, as the events around and following the reception crisis showed (Sik 2016).

The communicative framing of the Hungarian situation emerged in a relatively early phase of the crisis, with the first set of billboard posters and the questions of the first national consultation on the issue establishing the framework.[19] What came afterwards was only a gradual shift of the emphasis in line with contextual changes and the intrinsic inertia and evolution of the political messaging. We can identify three discourse trends:

1) Framing the situation as an economic issue. Immigration and immigrants are depicted as a threat to the labour market and the domestic labour force. They compete for employment, they lower wages and they "take the jobs from Hungarians", as one of the billboards said. A counterpart of this message is immigrants' access to welfare support without contributing to its costs. These

[19] For a detailed analysis of the discursive framework of the consultation see: Á. Bocskor (2018).

messages had a long history in Hungarian political communication and were the main foundations of negative sentiments towards immigrants or towards ethnic Hungarians enjoying preferential immigration or naturalization rights (Enyedi et al. 2004). Interestingly, this was the message that was least supported, according to public opinion polls, and references made to the threats concerning employment or welfare were quickly abandoned by the government's communication strategy.[20]

2) Framing the situation as a security issue. Immigration, especially in a mass and uncontrolled form, is portrayed as a threat to public order and a source of conflict. Immigrants committing petty crimes or sexual and gender-based violence against members of local communities have been recurrent communication topics, often serving as a "last resort" when there are no major issues to report. Another more emphasized aspect of the security issue is the threat to national security, especially the risk of terrorism caused by immigration. This narrative was especially strong during 2016, when several radical Islamist terrorist attacks provided grounds for keeping it alive. Towards the end of 2017 and throughout 2018, the narrative on national security and terrorism somewhat receded, making room for a more general discourse around public security and criminality.
3) Framing the situation as a cultural conflict. In this discourse, immigration is depicted as a threat to the cultural integrity of the community. The identification of the community in question varies from Hungary only to the Central-Eastern European region or Europe as a whole. According to this narrative, democratic values and fundamental freedoms are at risk. Non-EU migration represents a threat to both left-wing liberal values and to a "Christian Europe". This cultural threat results from unconscious or even deliberate mistakes reproduced by cosmopolitan, liberal elites (the political and bureaucratic elite in Brussels in particular), the left-wing and liberal political opposition in Hungary, international and national NGOs and various UN organizations. This culturalist narrative often refers to Islam as a cultural system that is fundamentally incompatible with European norms and values.

Apart from mainstream narratives, there have been several counter-narratives emerging from civil society movements, academia and the political opposition in Hungary. The most common counter-narrative has taken a reactive position, opposing the claim that mass irregular migration would represent a threat to security, the economy or culture. Relativizing the extent of the issue has been another typical counter-argument, supported by references to the relative proportion of newcomers among the overall European population, or comparisons between the Hungarian situation and that of other European countries.

Many actors, especially within church-based movements, framed the situation as a humanitarian issue. Their counter-narrative tended to depict newcomer asylum seekers as people escaping from violence and poverty, in need of immediate care and help. Providing support, accordingly, is a moral duty, regardless of the broader political,

[20] See: Századvég, *Plakátháború kinek van igaza* [Billboard war, who is right], 2015 (in Hungarian), https://szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/plakathaboru-kinek-van-igaza, accessed June 13, 2019.

cultural or economic connotations of the crisis. Aid organizations often adopted this specific perspective and focused only on providing support to migrants, without taking a position in the public and political debate. However, the moral argument appeared as a rationale behind the symbolic protest against the government's policy: by declaring the government's action and message as cruel and inhuman, volunteers could engage in philanthropic actions as a restorative process, or to express their disapproval of the government's policy.[21]

Framing the situation as a human rights issue was another counter-narrative, mostly used by human rights and advocacy organizations. This narrative depicted immigrants as targets of public communication campaigns and restrictive policies, and argued that their human rights were being violated. A somewhat similar counter-narrative views the refugee issue as an international legal and political matter taking place in a common European legal and political system. According to this narrative, Hungary should play by the rules. This more legalistic argument was often used by academics criticizing the government's policies, or by experts from NGOs advocating for refugee rights (Nagy B. 2017).[22]

Reaction of the public – survey and public opinion poll findings

The popularity of the Orbán government and its approach to the post-2015 refugee issue can be explained by Hungary's generalized negative attitudes towards immigration. Looking at the results of the last Eurobarometer survey dealing with migration- and asylum-related issues before 2015, Hungary's position then already indicated what the reaction to the crisis would be. Public opinion was already strongly critical before 2015, but immigration was not perceived by the majority of Hungarians as a central concern.[23] Surveys indicate that the government's communication campaigns had a strong negative impact during and after 2015, although public opinion did not really change. Rather, political actors influenced already existing trends and tendencies were reinforced or accelerated, while differences in opinion deepened and became more polarized.

Another telling example of the negative disposition of Hungarians even before the crisis is the study by Messing and Ságvári (2018), based on data from the European Social Survey between autumn 2014 and spring 2015. Operating with three composite indexes in the dimensions of "social distance", "fear" and "rejection", the data analysis shows that in all three dimensions, Hungarians have strong negative attitudes toward immigrants. Concerning social distance and fear, only Czechs show stronger negative

[21] A remarkable example of the above is the protest organized by Migration Aid in early September against the government's handling of the crisis, with the title "Not in My Name". See: Facebook, *Az én nevemben ne – Not in my name*, https://www.facebook.com/events/139528093057286/, accessed June 13, 2019.

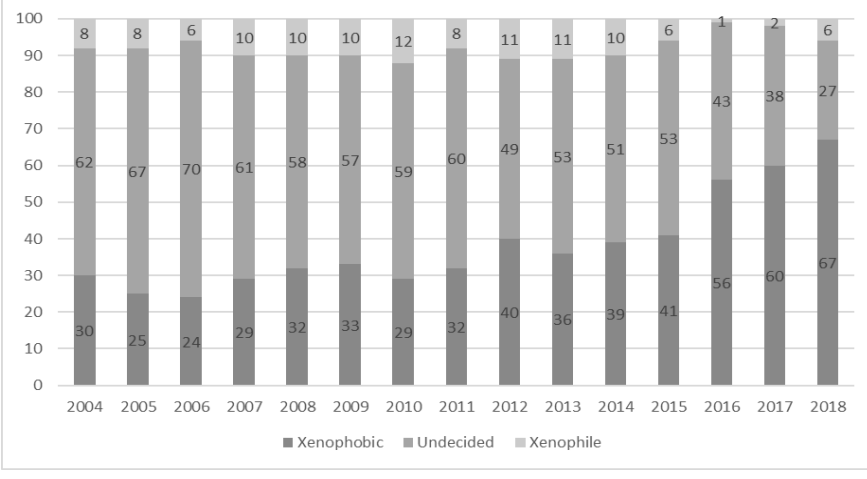
[22] See also: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, *No country for refugees*, 2015, https://www.helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/HHC_Hungary_Info_Note_Sept-2015_No_country_for_refugees.pdf, accessed June 13, 2019.

[23] Special Eurobarometer 415, *Europeans in 2014 – Report*, 2014, Wave EB81.2 – TNS Opinion & Social, p. 35 and 132, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_415_en.pdf, accessed June 13, 2019.

attitudes. Concerning rejection, Hungarians are the most negative: almost half of the population are in favour of not letting in anybody coming from a poorer country. In some other Central-Eastern European countries, this opinion is shared by only a quarter of the population, whereas in those Western European countries that have the highest proportion of immigrants, hardly anybody thinks this way.

The extremely polarized and one-dimensional nature of Hungarian public opinion on letting in immigrants is further demonstrated by a recent survey by the Pew Research Centre. Out of the twenty-seven countries surveyed worldwide, Hungary had by far the highest proportion (45 per cent) of those who did not want to let anybody in.[24]

Figure 4.3: Hungarians' attitude toward foreigners



Source: TÁRKI Omnibusz, 2004–18.

Looking at the results of a longitudinal survey conducted at least once a year by TÁRKI social research centre, the change in public attitudes during and after the crisis is clearly visible. There is not sufficient data available to demonstrate the impact of the government's communication campaigns, but it would be difficult to rule out their contribution to the changing attitudes (Sik 2016). TÁRKI's longitudinal research is a particularly good indicator of the changing attitudes during and after the crisis, as it consists of only one question about citizens' willingness to let in "fleeing people".[25] Based on the responses, there are three types of attitudes identified: those who do not want to let anybody in are called "xenophobes", those who would let everybody in are labelled "xenophiles", whereas those who would let in certain people while excluding

[24] See: Connor and Krogstad (2018). The detailed figures are available on page 4 of the topline results annex.

[25] The question deliberately avoids using the term "refugee" or "asylum seeker" so as not to offer the respondents a narrow, legalistic interpretation of the situation.

others are called "undecided".[26] As Figure 4.3 shows, the proportion of xenophobes, who would not let in anyone, has grown significantly since 2015.

Citizens' Mobilization During and After the Reception Crisis

The activities of volunteer movements in Hungary have been short-lived but particularly intense. In contrast with other countries where the arrival, transit and settlement of asylum seekers and refugees lasted for several months or even years, in Hungary everything happened in a short time period from mid-June to mid-October 2015. The volunteer movements emerged relatively quickly and the time they were active was not long enough to undergo different phases of organizational development and diversification. Many questions related to the sustainability and institutionalization of volunteer movements are less relevant in the case of the Hungarian movements, as their operational environment changed quickly and abruptly. On the other hand, the scale and magnitude of social mobilization was rather extraordinary, though in the context of the severity of the crisis in Budapest and in some country towns, together with the highly politicized nature of the issue, it was not surprising.

Overall, four major phases can be identified in the lifespan of the voluntary movements. The first phase corresponds to the month-long period from mid-June to mid-July, when the movements were brought to life and their organizational profiles and identities were shaped. The second phase covers roughly two months between mid-July and mid-September (the time of the closure of the Serbian border and the disappearance of migrants from public spaces), when the volunteer groups (alongside many individuals) were in full operation, coordinating and providing services. The third phase is the transition period during the month between the two border closures, first with Serbia and subsequently with Croatia, when volunteers were trying to maintain access to people they were determined to help, even if this was with diminishing success due to the lack of cooperation from the authorities. The last phase corresponds to the aftermath of the crisis months, when volunteer groups were trying to refocus their activities and resources in order to keep their services running. Indeed, some continued their activities abroad along the Balkans Route, others were trying to extend help to different disadvantaged groups in Hungary, while others tried to gain access to asylum seekers and refugees within the Hungarian asylum system. Several individuals who played a crucial coordinating role in these movements ended up working or volunteering for professional organizations in the field of asylum or migration.

Remarkably, the mobilization and the emerging volunteer groups and grassroots organizations were almost exclusively pro-refugee or pro-migrant. There were only sporadic attempts to actively mobilize against migrants. The most visible of the negative forms of mobilization were the actions of the mayor of Ásotthalom, a village on the Serbian border, which will be discussed in more detail later in this

[26] See the latest results and analysis: 24, *Nyomkodja a kormány a pánikgombot, így egyre jobban irtózunk az idegenektől* [The government is pushing the panic button, so we are getting more and more xenophobic], 2018 (in Hungarian), https://24.hu/belfold/2018/12/19/migrans-moralispanik-kutatas/, accessed June 13, 2019.

chapter. Another example was a demonstration organized by the far-right movement Hatvannégy Vármegye against migrants and citizens helping them. It took place in mid-July in front of the Keleti Railway Station, where most refugees stayed before boarding a train to Austria. Although they announced the continuation of such demonstrations, there was no follow-up to the event. On an earlier occasion, members of the Betyársereg far-right paramilitary group visited Ásotthalom to help the locals patrol the border and protect their village. The mayor refused their help, and the group got lost in the border zone and ended up in Szeged harassing the volunteers who were helping migrants to board trains to Budapest.

In light of the above, one may wonder why there has not been stronger anti-immigrant mobilization. The government's negative communication campaigns seemed to fuel these sentiments, as reflected by the previously discussed public opinion poll findings. The government's communication campaigns and the restrictive administrative measures probably had the effect of reassuring the public that the migration and asylum issues were being handled properly by the responsible authorities and that there was no need for additional mobilization.

Civil society organizations involved in the reception crisis

It is important to emphasize that engagement among civil society was not only characterized by the emergence of grassroots voluntary movements. Existing formal structures also turned their attention to migrants, offering various types of support. Some of these organizations also attracted volunteers, therefore civil society mobilization took place in several parallel frameworks. Organizations that became active in supporting migrants during the crisis display certain specific characteristics. The following categorization is an attempt to highlight the main specificities of each of them.

Firstly, specialized organizations that were already active in the field can be identified. For many of these organizations, the reception crisis posed a professional and strategic challenge. They had the expertise and infrastructure to react quickly, although maintaining a balance between existing and new activities was not always easy. Most of them did not engage in the relief and aid work carried out by the volunteer groups and rather integrated the work of the volunteers with professional input, catalysing or even coordinating services. In a later phase, the crisis meant new funding and support opportunities for some professional NGOs. Some of these organizations became the targets of criticism by volunteers for their low visibility and apparent reluctance or inability to engage in new activities.

A second typology is other human rights organizations. The crisis meant an opportunity for engagement for these organizations, which quickly took the lead in framing the issue as a series of human rights violations, as mentioned earlier. They often entered into conflict with political entities and the administration, and established strong contacts with grassroots volunteer movements in supporting mobilization and in providing legal support and advice.

Mainstream service providers and aid organizations were also involved in the refugee issue, although these actors were probably the least visible during the crisis. Some of them were NGOs, while some were governmental or municipal agencies

working in social welfare, child protection, healthcare or education. Their involvement was based on professional commitment, opening up their targeted specialized services to migrants. They were relatively slow to react, since establishing working relationships based on trust with volunteer groups or migrant-specific organizations took longer. This was also because most of them had an interest in keeping a low profile, as sometimes they lacked the legal or administrative authorization to extend their services to immigrants, or they were afraid of negative repercussions from the ministries or municipalities under which they operated.

Traditional welfare and aid organizations in the Charity Council were also slow to react on their own. In the initial phase of the reception crisis, they seemed to be hesitating or maintaining ambiguous positions. These organizations were characterized by double (or multiple) loyalties, commitments and conflicting interests. On the one hand, they were accountable for the public supporters of their charity-driven missions and humanitarian principles. On the other hand, they were highly dependent on governmental and state funding, and their loyalty was demanded by the administration. However, the government decided to rely on the services of these organizations during and after the crisis, excluding the services of the volunteer movements and other sectorial NGOs. Once engaged, their involvement was mainly symbolic and mediatized, often due to their lack of sufficient capacity and strategic guidance from the authorities. Towards the end of the crisis, and especially between the two border closures, their involvement became more established, though there was much criticism from the volunteer groups regarding the efficiency of their work. It is hard to assess retrospectively, as there is surprisingly little public and transparent evidence of their contribution.[27]

Grassroots movements brought into being by the crisis were the most dynamic and visible actors on the scene. The most active phase of the crisis (the four months from mid-June to mid-October) was characterized by the strong visibility of these organizations in the public space, where migrants appeared in large numbers, and in the community media space, where people were organizing their activities, exchanging information and entering into public discussions and debates. These groups had a strong base of participants and were able to react quickly and flexibly and to mobilize considerable means and resources, human capacity and later expertise. Initially, the focus of their activity was strongly pragmatic and humanitarian, responding to the immediate needs of the migrants. The main aims were facilitating people's movement during their transit across Hungary and alleviating suffering through responding to basic nutrition, health and accommodation needs. The majority of the people involved were non-professional individuals volunteering in their free time, acting based on moral considerations. This makes a professional assessment of their work difficult and somewhat out of place. There were significant differences between groups regarding the level of coordination and the efficiency of their work. In areas where a single group dominated, the issue of coordination was less problematic than in areas where several groups appeared. Their relationship with the authorities was rather controversial:

[27] One exception is the report by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (Győri-Dani and Solymári (2016).

they made a continuous effort to claim formal recognition, which hardly ever came, and once they joined the protests and mobilization efforts organized by advocacy and human rights organizations they quickly became the target of the government's communication campaigns. However, their high visibility and the continuous media attention around them made it possible for some groups or individuals to emerge as new voices. Lay volunteers and spokespersons for volunteer groups were invited to policy debates on the future of the European asylum system, and Migration Aid, the biggest group, became active in mobilizing, organizing protests and calling for action against the government's policy.

A survey conducted in October 2015 found that there might have been as many as 190,000 people involved in volunteering, donating goods or other forms of engagement during the reception crisis (Zakariás 2016). The same survey found that about 30 per cent of the population were open to helping refugees, most of them motivated by religious or philanthropic aims or adhering to the moral duty of alleviating suffering. Another 20 per cent supported the general objective of helping refugees, but thought that it should be responsibility of the state or public institutions rather than of volunteers. There were another 20 per cent who strongly opposed support for refugees under any circumstances. The survey also showed that the majority of respondents had a seemingly inconsistent attitude toward volunteering and humanitarianism: they could support arguments both for and against helping refugees.

Another factor that contributed to volunteer mobilization during the crisis was the potential for political protest through actions that were clearly in conflict with the government's views (Feischmidt and Zakariás 2019). As the opposition parties could not offer an alternative to the government's policies, and they could not join the philanthropic mobilization either, many people interpreted the volunteering as a symbolic protest against the government or against Fidesz, the leading party.

The unfolding conflict between the government and civil society

It is important to note that the various civil society actors had different types of relationship with the government during the reception crisis. There are two problems with interpreting the civil society–government relationship that should be acknowledged here. When identifying the actors, not only does civil society prove to be a heterogeneous entity, but the government appears to be an equally elusive concept. On a discursive or policymaking (legislative) level, the situation is relatively easy: we can easily identify the government with the Prime Minister, relevant ministers or government spokespersons and sometimes officials and civil servants presenting or interpreting strategies or policies. When it comes to everyday policy implementation or general operation in a critical situation, there are several further interfaces where representatives of state authorities, public institutions, law enforcement or service providing agencies encounter individual citizens or members of civil society organizations or movements. Due to the great variety in the actors involved, these interactions can be characterized by a wide range of modalities.

The government's relationship with the human rights advocacy agencies that had been heavily criticizing both its political discourse and its administrative measures was characterized by open conflict. The most notable organizations of this kind

were the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and Amnesty International Hungary. As a reaction, the government mostly ignored, belittled or negated the activities of the volunteer movements. Although these initiatives mobilized enormous resources and made huge efforts to help people gain access to basic care and provisions, their work has never been formally acknowledged by the authorities they worked with, or by the government in general. These volunteer movements appeared in the protests and demonstrations organized during the summer of 2015, but remained non-political throughout the crisis period. Migration Aid, the largest of them, was something of an exception. Indeed, its spokesperson received significant media attention and regularly appeared in public and political debates. In September, the movement organized a demonstration against the proposed restrictions of immigration and asylum laws.

Yet there were also organizations, usually already active in the field, that simply continued their migrant- or refugee-related activities without any notable conflicts with the authorities. These were smaller, professional NGOs such as Menedék Association, Artemisszió Foundation and Cordelia Foundation. These organizations often closely cooperated with the authorities in a pragmatic and focused manner. For example, Menedék Association operated a crisis counselling team around the police collection points along the Serbian and Croatian border, in close cooperation with the Border Police Headquarters in Szeged.

Especially during the first two years after the unfolding of the reception crisis, the government's communication campaigns were less critical regarding the activities of civil society organizations helping migrants and asylum seekers. Initially, the benevolence of these organizations and individuals was not questioned; only their supposed lack of knowledge of the larger scale of the problem was mentioned occasionally. However, as the volunteer organizations became more outspoken in claiming rights and fair treatment for the people they were supporting, including the right to freedom of movement and access to asylum and fair administrative procedures, as well as to care and basic reception conditions, the government became more explicit in condemning or discrediting their activities.

The mobilization brought into being by the reception crisis became increasingly politicized over time, which also brought an additional dynamic into the relationship between the government and civil society actors. Human rights advocacy groups and grassroots migrant organizations organized or joined demonstrations and engaged in mediatized public communication criticizing the government's measures. This situation resulted in a gradual shift in the relationship: as the crisis accelerated, it became increasingly conflict-ridden, and the debate over migration and asylum policies became extremely polarized. The debate remained strongly polarized after the peak of the crisis was over in Hungary as well, and was further amplified when the government started its campaign against the EU relocation scheme in the spring of 2016. Several civil society organizations took an explicitly political stance, ending up actively campaigning for preventing the success of the referendum in October.

Lastly, we should mention those organizations with whom the government established a strategic or political (symbolic) alliance. These were the large established charity or aid organizations that had already participated in government-sponsored programs or played a crucial role in maintaining healthcare, education or social welfare

services. These were, most notably, the six member agencies of the Charity Council, established in 2000 to administer the distribution of confiscated goods among people in need.[28] These agencies joined the civil society mobilization somewhat belatedly. The only exception was the Hungarian Red Cross, which replaced the services of Menedék Association in the border collection centre at the end of June. Members of grassroots organizations often complained about the lack of visibility and accessibility of these organizations, which avoided drawing much public and media attention to the services they provided.[29] In any case, once the borders were sealed, psychosocial services in the border transit zones were taken over by member organizations of the Charity Council and other organizations gradually lost their authorization to operate in those premises.

In the initial phase of the crisis it is possible find some examples of constructive cooperation between authorities and civil society actors in the field. This cooperation was hindered by conflicting identities within the administration. Representatives of the authorities had to balance loyalty to political directives with their professional conscience. This gradually resulted in either adjustments to the political directives or important impacts on professional careers, including changing position or leaving the administration. At an early point, there was a widespread approach within the administration that made a distinction between media-broadcast political rhetoric and pragmatic action, but actions gradually adjusted to match the political and discursive frameworks. Once the strong pressure caused by mass irregular immigration lowered, criticism towards civil society actors for being opposed to government policies became increasingly prevalent in the mainstream political discourse. Depicting civil society organizations as non-patriotic, even as threats to national security, was the discursive framework that preceded the introduction of the legislative amendments sanctioning NGOs and the political campaign against George Soros and EU institutions.

Summing up the present situation

The following quotation from Prime Minister Viktor Orbán summarizes the full spectrum of the Hungarian government's interpretation of the situation during and after the reception crisis:

> Those who do most to endanger the future of Europe are not those who want to come here, but the political, economic and intellectual leaders who are trying to reshape Europe against the will of the people of Europe. This is how, for the planned transport [sic.] to Europe of many millions of migrants, there came into existence the

[28] Its member agencies are the following: Caritas Hungary; Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta; Hungarian Interchurch Aid; Hungarian Red Cross; Charity Service of the Reformed Church; Hungarian Baptist Aid. See more: Karitativ Tanács, http://karitativtanacs.kormany.hu/, accessed June 13, 2019.

[29] An exception is the demonstrative visit of the Prime Minister's wife to a temporary refugee shelter in early July as the Goodwill Ambassador of the Hungarian Interchurch Aid, which got considerable media attention.

> most bizarre coalition in world history: the people smugglers, the human rights activists and Europe's top leaders.[30]

Following 2015, there has been a continuous dismantling of the refugee protection system as a result of the anti-immigration political campaign. In essence, the government did not create an immigration system that could effectively control the borders on one hand and safeguard human rights on the other hand. At the same time, symbolic and strategic political communication has had a strong impact on the level of administration and law enforcement, causing serious harm to field actors, structures and practices. The anti-immigration narrative is still alive today, with even more radicalized positions seen both in the discourse and in political action.

There has not been any effective counter-narrative that has been able to gain significant popular support. Experts, civil society and international organizations are isolated from mass communication and increasingly targeted by the anti-immigrant rhetoric. The visibility of and social support for civil society actors involved in immigration issues grew significantly during the crisis and in the subsequent months. Later, social support diminished and the debate concerning civil society actors and their role became increasingly polarized. A vocal minority has remained supportive of refugee-oriented or human rights NGOs, whereas a similarly vocal majority has aligned with the position of the government. Most of the volunteer movements have ceased operating or have lost the attention of the public media. Most NGOs try to remain non-political, whereas human rights organizations are increasingly taking on a political role. Overall, grassroots movements and human rights organizations have become the target of political attacks as the last phase of the government's political campaign. They have been labelled foreign agents, traitors or enemies of the nation. As already mentioned, the new legislation on NGOs and the related political communication campaign restricted the space for civil society action, and open support for pro-refugee organizations is becoming a risky business. Although to date there has not been any direct measure taken against these organizations based on the new legislation, there have been several indirect administrative and journalistic inquiries and actions that can considerably hinder their work. The general public attitude towards civil society action is now overtly politicized. Participation in support activities, volunteering and even expressing political support are today affected by a fear of repercussions from the government or public authorities.

[30] See: Kormány, *Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's State of the Nation Address*, 2016, https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-state-of-the-nation-address, accessed June 13, 2019.

CHAPTER V

Unravelling Solidarity and Hostility: Mobilizations Concerning Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Anti-Migrant Times in Greece

Theodoros Fouskas

Introduction

Since the 1990s, migration flows, together with a mentality of non-acceptance displayed by parts of Greek society, have decisively contributed to the development of hostile attitudes against migrants. On the one hand, social discourse in favour of solidarity, support and humanitarianism has always been widespread in Greece. On the other hand, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have often been viewed as unwanted or as a threat, as uneducated and uncultured, as individuals who take jobs from native-born workers. They are seen as inevitably interfering with the homogeneity of the country, as responsible for the downgrading of urban areas. They are dubbed a health crisis time bomb due to their own poor health and their unsanitary living and working conditions before, during and after their arrival to Greece.

Both the media and politicians have played a decisive role in forging a negative stereotypical association between migration and crime (illegal migrant equals dangerous criminal), which has been embedded in social consciousness. This has led to the erroneous supposition that there is an ethnic predilection of specific immigrant groups to commit specific types of crimes and offences, thus generating a stigma against third-country nationals (TCNs). This notion still reigns supreme, even when the legal status of the migrant is regularized and normalized, allowing migrants to be used as scapegoats. Migrants are often blamed for all evils in contemporary Greek society, ranging from the economic crisis to rising unemployment rates and petty crime. At the same time, there is growing evidence attesting to the existence of racism, xenophobia and their consequences in Greece, bringing about negative ramifications for Greeks and migrants alike and forcing a polarization of public opinion.

In 2015, the Racist Violence Recording Network recorded 273 incidents of racist violence with more than 300 victims.[1] In seventy-five cases, migrants or refugees were targeted based on their national origin, religion or skin colour. In 2016, ninety-five incidents of racist violence with more than 130 victims were recorded. In thirty-one cases, migrants or refugees were targeted based on their ethnic origin, religion or skin colour, and in one incident both the building housing an organization that offered refugee accommodation and its staff were targeted. In 2017, incidents of racist violence with more than 120 victims were recorded. In thirty-four cases, migrants or refugees were targeted based on their ethnic origin, religion, skin colour or gender identity. In 2018, 117 incidents of racist violence with more than 130 victims were recorded. In seventy-four cases, migrants or refugees were targeted based on their ethnic origin, religion or skin colour. Associations of migrant communities and human rights advocates were also targeted. However, Triandafyllidou (2015) mentions that public opinion in Greece has remained welcoming to migrants and refugees overall, while Glorius (2018) states that survey respondents mostly replied positively to the question of whether helping refugees is a national responsibility, although there was a slight decrease from 85 per cent in 2015 to 70 per cent in 2017. Immigration from third countries and the contribution of immigrants to the country, though, are viewed in a negative light.

The perceptions and treatment of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Greece between 2015 and 2018 have been characterized by strong contradictions. On the Greek islands, the selfless care offered by individual members of society, local communities and civil society, as well as the acts of solidarity of Greek citizens towards the incoming populations, have been extremely significant and extensive. This warm reception has been outstanding both at a European and an international level, attracting global attention. Greek fishermen have conducted multiple rescues on a daily basis. Citizens have shown outstanding solidarity and support to the refugees by providing all possible means of assistance and care, via collective and coordinated actions and sensitization campaigns, and also through individual initiatives. Professionals of all specialisms, including medical doctors, teachers, students and entrepreneurs, have launched and continue to launch initiatives aiming to provide humanitarian assistance in every region of the country. In November 2017, however, residents of Lesvos island went on strike to protest against European policies, claiming that the latter would turn the island into a "prison" for immigrants, asylum seekers and those of unrecognized status, pending status recognition as refugees or applying for international/humanitarian protection. There was a general closure of businesses, stores, municipal offices, nurseries and pharmacies, and dozens rallied in a central square, calling on the government to transfer asylum seekers to the mainland and chanting the phrase "Lesvos is not a place of exile".[2] In 2015, nearly a million people, most of them fleeing Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, landed on its shores before heading

[1] Racist Violence Recording Network, *Annual Reports 2015-2018*, 2018, http://rvrn.org/, accessed January 2, 2019.

[2] Kathimerini, *Lesvos on Strike in Protest against becoming Migrant 'Prison',* 2017, https://bit.ly/2YE5Z0B, accessed January 2, 2019.

north, mainly to Germany. Thousands of asylum seekers have been stranded on Lesvos and on four other islands close to Turkey since the implementation of the EU–Turkey Statement in March 2016, which shut down the route through Greece. Some have been moved to camps on the mainland, but authorities say that the terms of the Statement prevent asylum seekers from departing from the islands to continue their journey. In many cases, international organizations have characterized Greece as a transit country. However, government officials admitted in February 2016 that Greece is now becoming a place of reception, rather than a transit country for migrants.

This chapter focuses on mobilization concerning migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Greece. It describes pro-migrant and anti-migrant citizen mobilization, highlights how these mobilization evolved during the years 2015–18 and discusses the factors that triggered and influenced these mobilization. First, information about the migration and refugee flows to Greece before, during and after the so-called refugee reception crisis of 2015 is presented and discussed. The main themes include reception, responses and integration policies as carried out both by the state and by Greek society. Second, the politicization of migration issues and the political landscape in Greece are presented. Third, the study examines pro-migrant and anti-migrant citizen initiatives and mobilization supporting migrants and refugees before and after 2015. To this end, thirty-eight in-depth interviews were carried out in Greece with members of organized initiatives, civil society organizations and activists, mobilized citizens and mobilized migrants who made various forms of contributions in the period from 2015–18. The qualitative data offers insights and examples regarding both pro- and anti-migration mobilization and attitudes within the context of a polarized Greek society.

Immigration and Asylum in Greece

Greek society saw massive flows of migrants from the neighbouring Balkan countries, Republics of the former Soviet Union, in the early 1990s, as well as significant numbers of immigrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia in early 2010 (Fouskas and Tsevrenis 2014). Between the years 2015 and 2017, refugees were mainly from Syria, and current migration flows are mixed (migrants, asylum seekers and refugees). In the late 1980s, Greece became a country that received immigrants rather than a country from which citizens emigrated. Recent census statistics show that in 1981 there were 180,000 foreigners residing in Greece, which amounted to 2 per cent of the total population, and that 63 per cent of these foreigners had come from the most developed countries. In the 1991 census, although there were no significant changes in numbers, less than 50 per cent of foreigners had come from developed countries. However, in the 2001 census, the number of foreigners had more than quadrupled, as those residing in Greece without Greek citizenship reached 762,000, registering at 7 per cent of the total population, which was then just over 11 million. In the most recent census in 2011, there were 912,000 registered foreigners in Greece,[3] marking an increase of 150,000 individuals in relation to 2001. Under the "hotspot approach" of the European Commission's European Agenda on Migration (European

[3] Hellenic Statistical Authority, *2011 Census*, 2014, https://bit.ly/2JmA0yw, accessed January 2, 2019.

Commission 2015) as an initial response to the exceptional flows, Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) were established in Greece on the islands of Lesvos, Kos, Chios, Samos and Leros (see Table 5.1). The competent authority for providing such services was the First Reception Service (FRS), established by L. 3907/2011. First reception procedures included identity and nationality verification, registration and medical examination. They also provided essential care including psychosocial support and the provision of information regarding newcomers' obligations and rights, including the conditions under which they could access the asylum procedure.

They also handled the identification of those belonging to vulnerable groups so that they could consequently follow the relevant procedure. This was first implemented by the First Reception Centre (FRC) set up in Evros in 2013. Joint Ministerial Decision 2969/2015 provided for the establishment of five FRCs in the Eastern Aegean islands. However, under L. 4375/2016 the FRS was succeeded by the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and was subsumed under what has now been established as the Ministry for Migration Policy (MMP). According to Article 9(1), all TCNs and stateless persons who enter without complying with the legal formalities of the country must be submitted to reception and identification procedures. These procedures include: a) the recording of personal data and fingerprints for those over the age of 14; b) the verification of their identity and nationality; c) a medical screening and the provision of any necessary care, including psychosocial support; d) the provision of information regarding their rights and obligations, in particular the application procedure for international protection and the procedure for entering a voluntary return program; e) paying special attention to those belonging to vulnerable groups, in order for them to undergo the appropriate procedure and be provided with specialized care and protection; f) referral to the relevant services for initiating the international protection status procedure for those who wish to apply; g) referral to the relevant services for readmission, return or expulsion procedures for those who do not submit to the procedures or for those whose application for international protection has been rejected during their stay at the RIC.

Table 5.1: RIC-Occupancy/capacity

RIC	Lesvos	Chios	Samos	Leros	Kos	Total
Occ./Cap.	5010/3100	1252/1014	3723/648	936/860	762/816	11683/6438

Source: Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2018.[4]

Since 2015, a dramatic increase has been noted in the flows of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants (Hatzopoulos et al. 2017); Greece has borne the brunt of this influx. The country has been Europe's main entry point for almost a million refugees and migrants seeking security for themselves and their families. The unprecedented asylum seeker, refugee and immigrant flows of 2015, coupled with the movement of the migratory route leading into Greece from Turkey, have tested Greece's asylum system, which was already quite overstretched. It also drew attention to the difficulties

[4] Ministry of Citizen Protection, *National Situation*, 2018, https://bit.ly/2tiE6gB, accessed January 2, 2019.

of handling the dramatic rise in numbers of migrants and refugees and meeting their humanitarian needs.

In recent years, Greece has received wave after wave of TCN flows, coming in both across the land border of Evros and from its sea borders. Statistics from 2013 to 2018 by the Hellenic Police and Hellenic Coast Guard regarding foreigners apprehended for entering and remaining under irregular circumstances show that there were 43,002 arrivals in Greece in 2013, 77,163 in 2014, 911,471 in 2015, 204,820 in 2016, 68,112 in 2017 and 93,367 in 2018.[5] These numbers clearly demonstrate the pressure exerted on state mechanisms, related services and Greek society in the management of the aforementioned flows: for example, receiving, identifying, managing and rendering statutory status to these individuals. The total number of asylum seekers residing in structures under the control of the Greek state amount to 70,000.[6]

Apart from the six RICs for refugees and migrants on the islands and in Evros, a total of twenty-eight temporary accommodation camps have also been in operation close to the borders. By 2 January 2019, 27,116 accommodation placements had been made available to 22,699 vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees in buildings across the country via the ESTIA programme,[7] with the cooperation of local government bodies. According to the National Centre for Social Solidarity, the estimated number of unaccompanied minors amounted to 3,741, of which 93.8 per cent were boys and 6.2 per cent girls, while 7.2 per cent were under the age of fourteen. Both on the islands and on the mainland, the total number of long-term accommodation placements in shelters was 1,064, while there were 895 placements in temporary accommodation such as safe zones and emergency hotels (NCSS 2018).[8] As of 31 December 2018, the legally residing TCNs in Greece amounted to 551,868.[9]

According to the Asylum Service, the number of asylum applications by TCNs within the Greek territory more than doubled during 2013–18 (Asylum Service 2018). In 2013, there were 4,814 applications at a monthly average of 688, representing a 14.3 per cent rise between 2013 and 2014. In 2014, there were 9,431 applications at a monthly average of 786, a rise of 39.8 per cent between 2014 and 2015. In 2015, there were 13,187 applications at a monthly average of 1,099, an increase of 287.1 per cent between 2015 and 2016. In 2016, there were 51,053 applications at a monthly average of 4,254, an increase of 14.9 per cent between 2016 and 2017. In 2017, there were 58,642 applications at a monthly average of 4,887, marking an increase of 14.2 per cent between 2017 and 2018. In 2018, there were 66,970 applications at a monthly average of 5,581. As far as the recognition rate of refugee status during First Instance procedures is concerned, in 2013 the recognition rate of refugee status was 15.5 per

[5] See: Hellenic Police, *Irregular Migration-Statistics,* 2018, https://bit.ly/2KNh5sg, accessed January 2, 2019.

[6] Secretariat for Crisis Management Communication, *4th Newsletter on the Refugee-Migration Issue*, 2018 (in Greek), https://bit.ly/2wh6DV8, accessed January 2, 2019.

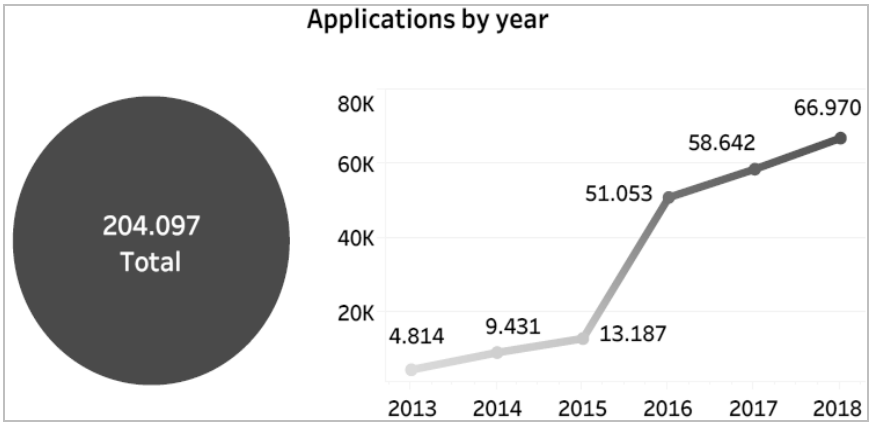
[7] UNHCR, *ESTIA,* 2019, https://bit.ly/30yDu5Q, accessed June 15, 2019.

[8] National Center for Social Solidarity, *UAC in Greece,* 2018, https://bit.ly/2GzqiWR, accessed June 15, 2019.

[9] Ministry for Migration Policy, *Monthly Statistics,* 2018, https://bit.ly/32iAD1G, accessed June 15, 2019.

cent, in 2014 28.7 per cent, in 2015 47.4 per cent, in 2016 29.1 per cent, in 2017 46 per cent and in 2018 49.4 per cent. Between 2013 and 2018, the total recognition rate of refugee status during First Instance procedures was 43.3 per cent. The countries of origin with the highest recognition rates were Syria, Yemen and Palestine, while those with the lowest recognition rates were Georgia, Albania and Pakistan.[10]

Figure 5.1: Applications by year (2013–18)



Source: Asylum Service, 2018.

National strategy for integration

For many years, the organized reception and integration of migrants, asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection had not been a priority for the Greek migration policy. The focus was on managing migratory flows with an emphasis on border guarding, regularization of irregular migrants and issuing residence permits. The integration process was mainly based on the individual efforts of migrants and of the small number of refugees. This was made easier by the support networks formed by their already established compatriots. The integration of the first flows of migrants was facilitated by their direct access to the Greek labour market. The first substantial and coordinated effort towards integration, apart from the scattered and provisional actions towards the integration of migrants led by various ministries, began with the co-financed European Integration Fund (EIF) for the period 2007–13 (implemented in 2009–15). This effort was made by the Social Integration Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, which designed, coordinated and funded ninety-two actions. Although these actions partially made up for the absence of a comprehensive operational integration plan, they were fragmented, short-term and non-sequential. The National Integration Strategy (NIS), established in 2013, emerged as a response to an EU request for the design of national strategies by all member states. Its purpose was to ensure coherence between the strategic objectives and the actions of the EIF and to identify the policy sectors that would finance the

[10] All data are retrived from: Asylum Service, *Statistics 2013-2018,* 2018, https://bit.ly/2Mt2CEw, accessed June 15, 2019.

Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the period from 2014–20. The new NIS, established in 2018,[11] takes into account new EU and national positions, including the Conclusions of the Council of Ministers of Europe on Integration under the EU Presidency by Greece (2014), the European Commission's Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals (2016), the multiannual programme of the AMIF and the national legislation on integration incorporated in the Immigration and Social Integration Code (L. 4251/2014). The changes also include the establishment of the MMP, which brings together all migration and asylum services and plays a central role in the coordination of reception and integration actions. The NIS reflects a revised strategy for the integration of migrants, applicants for international protection and beneficiaries of international protection in Greece. It is accordingly adjusted to the new local, European and international contexts.

Methodology

The research methodology for this chapter is based on the examination of examples of citizen mobilization that have emerged since 2015. From 5–11 January 2018, thirty-eight in-depth interviews (in Greek) were conducted in Greece (see Table 5.2). Purposive sampling was used with members of organized initiatives, civil society organizations and activists, mobilized citizens and mobilized migrants who contributed in various ways during the period from 2015–18. The interviews were conducted using snowball sampling, according to which every research participant directed the researcher to organized initiatives or other mobilized citizens from his or her broader network. Total anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed via a consent form. The interviews oscillated to saturation point and a semi-structured interview guide with three sections was used to collect the qualitative material. Creating codes for data summarized and classified similar phenomena and emphasized their frequency, intensity and similarity. By these means, it became possible to identify the interviewees' motivations, perceptions, strategies and practices.

[11] Ministry for Migration Policy, *Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Ένταξη* [National Strategy for Integration], 2019 (in Greek), https://bit.ly/2LLMEXI, accessed June 15, 2019.

Table 5.2: List of interviews

Anti-Fascist Coordination of Athens-Piraeus	Athens	1
Anti-Nazi Zone		
ANTIGONE	Thessaloniki	1
Antiracist Initiative of Thessaloniki		1
ASANTE	Athens	1
Municipality of Athens		1
Generation 2.0 RED		1
Golden Dawn Watch		1
Observatory on the Fascist and Racist Speech in the Media		
Greek Forum of Migrants		1
Greek Forum of Refugees		1
Melissa Network of Migrant Women in Greece		1
Mobilized citizen	Crete	2
	Athens	15
	Lesvos	2
	Chios	1
Movement Expel Racism	Patras	2
Movement Expel Racism	Athens	1
Migrants' Sunday School		
Network for the Political and Social Rights		1
Network for the Social Support to Refugees and Migrants		
Racist Violence Recording		1
United Movement Against Racism and the Fascist Threat		1
Pikpa Camp	Lesvos	1
FEOX	Chios	1

The Political Landscape in Greece: the Politicization of Migration Issues

The level of politicization of migration issues by Greek political parties has been extremely significant, and remains so to this day. Since 1990, all aspects of the migration phenomenon have been a source of conflict and dispute, culminating in the 2015 "refugee reception crisis". This intensified the debate and caused migration issues to move further up the agendas of political parties in Greece. The management of the migration issue is at the centre of an ongoing political debate involving arguments that highlight the existence of mixed migration flows and the questionable conditions of the asylum system. These arguments mostly concern internal security, cultural issues and social welfare implications, focusing less on integration. This vividly demonstrates the political controversy around this issue in Greece. Due to the politicization of migration, anti-migration rhetoric has become part of a process of enhancing the nation-state concept by differentiating citizens from migrants and refugees. The overwhelming majority of interviewees considered migration issues to be highly politicized by Greek political parties. Since 2009, Greece has had multiple Greek parliamentary elections. In September 2015, there were early elections

triggered by the resignation of Alexis Tsipras's government in August 2015,[12] after the withdrawal of a large number of members of Syriza and the adoption of a new three-year loan agreement. The election results were as follows: Coalition of the radical left (Syriza) – 35.46 per cent; New Democracy (ND) – 28.10 per cent; Golden Dawn (GD) – 6.99 per cent; Democratic Alignment (DISI)[13] – 6.28 per cent; Communist Party of Greece (CPG) – 5.55 per cent; To Potami (The River) – 4.09 per cent; Independent Greeks (ANEL) – 3.69 per cent; Union of Centrists (UC) – 3.43 per cent. Syriza and ANEL formed a coalition government that lasted until 2019.

As far as the parties' official rhetoric on migration is concerned, the following observations can be made: Syriza, a left-wing and radical left party, maintains that in 2013 the party treated the complex subject of migration as a humanitarian, class and international issue. They advocated the abolition of the current inhumane detention centres for migrants and the creation of open centres allowing for decent living conditions. In 2016, their aim was to implement a coherent policy on the protection of refugees and the integration of migrants into society. They called for the eradication of extreme right-wing, racist views and practices. For Syriza, the solidarity movement has been of exceptional importance in the implementation of all these practices. However, most of the interviewees emphasized that many of the above claims have not been adhered to by Syriza, as it has ultimately implemented vastly different migration and refugee policies.

ND, which is a liberal-conservative political party, emphasizes that in 2017 they strove to safeguard public safety and the human rights of migrants. They have called for faster processing of asylum applications through strengthening the relevant structures and assisting the return of those not entitled to stay. They advocate the effective control of land and sea borders and point out the role of the Turkish authorities in the smuggling or trafficking of refugees to the Greek islands.

GD, which is an ultra-nationalist, far-right political party or "popular association", advocates the immediate arrest of all irregular immigrants and their return to their countries of origin. This is ultimately GD's central position on the migration issue, blaming migrants for all problems associated with employment, healthcare, demography, crime rates and remittances. GD employs a populist agenda revolving around themes such as opposition to migration and to the Islamic world, Euroscepticism, nationalism, anti-globalization, nativism and protectionism. As part of GD's populism, in recent years it has attempted to construct the image of a pro-working-class organization, in terms of *jus sanguinis* and racial or nation-based ideas, while expressing its scepticism about institutional processes.

The Movement for Change (KINAL), which is a centre-left political alliance, states that Greece cannot and should not be expected to cope with all the issues that arise in a refugee reception crisis. KINAL emphasizes that it falls within Greece's responsibilities to structure a viable and self-sufficient operational plan from reception

[12] Ministry of the Interior, *Parliamentary Elections September 2015,* 2015, https://bit.ly/2WNEyVp, accessed June 15, 2019.

[13] Renamed KINAL in 2017.

and asylum to social integration and, where necessary, to organize the return of those who are not entitled to international protection.

CPG, which is a Marxist-Leninist political party, treats migrants as an integral part of the working class and strives to strengthen class unity between Greek and foreign workers. The party advocates that migrants' remuneration should be in accordance with union contracts and sectorial conventions without discrimination. They are in favour of abolishing the Greek and EU legal framework that deprives migrants and refugees of elementary rights and restricts their right to go on strike and to demand labour and democratic rights.

To Potami, which is a centrist and socially liberal political party, have highlighted that the problem of migration is not a Greek problem but a European problem, and that on the basis of solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibility, its management must also come from Europe. To Potami have emphasized that migration policy should be based on granting international protection, combating irregular migration and promoting legal migration and migrant integration.

ANEL, an ultra-nationalist and ultra-right-wing populist political party, aims to limit the migrant population to a maximum of 2.5 per cent of the total population of Greece, provided that this is financially and socially sustainable. They advocate abolishing the Dublin II agreement and changing the Greek Nationality Code, while also supporting the mandatory recording of both documented and undocumented migrants and the return of the latter to their homelands.

The UC, a centrist and liberal political party, demands constantly updated information on the residence and work situations of economic migrants and the return of those who do not have sufficient proof of legal residence to their homelands; they also propose setting a limit on the amount of remittances to 25 per cent of migrants' total income. Other actions they support include raising the penalties for discrimination based on origin and race, the application of a quota when calling all migrants to register and the implementation of a policy of controlled entry migration.

Interviewees who were strongly mobilized and active in pro-migrant mobilization had links to the Greek Left, to self-organized and solidarity initiatives, to left radical movements and to networks for the radical left, and criticized Syriza heavily. Their criticisms centred on the fact that when Syriza was still an opposition party it used to be in constant contact with anti-racist initiatives, and Syriza members supported these initiatives. However, as emphasized by many interviewees, this changed after the referendum of 2015, when Syriza, the then governing party (in coalition with ANEL) accepted the EU–Turkey Statement in 2016. Although Syriza did not adopt anti-immigrant rhetoric or an anti-immigrant agenda, the actual actions they took made it apparent that their rhetoric of solidarity and sympathy for refugees had been hypocritical. Hence, a different agenda with an emphasis on detentions, the construction of camps and a set of restrictions was subsequently followed by Syriza.

Pre-Existing Citizen Initiatives and Mobilization in Support of Migrants and Refugees

In Greece, there are a significant number of citizen initiatives supporting migrants and refugees, and many of the civil society organizations that identify as pro-migrant

pre-existed the 2015 refugee reception crisis. As early as the beginning of the 1990s, a growing number of Greek non-governmental organizations (NGOs) started to work in defence of migrants' rights. At the same time, both national and international NGOs were active in the provision of basic necessities such as accommodation, clothing, food and legal support, while also spreading awareness of migration issues. National and international organizations proposed measures intended to defend migrants' human rights and address their problems, often openly opposing Greek state policies, which between 2010 and 2014 mainly promoted anti-immigrant measures based on the prevention and detention of migrants and returning them to their homelands. In the 1990s, pro-migrant initiatives such as civil society organizations, migrant community associations, solidarity networks, advocacy associations and migrant workers' associations, as well as workers' organizations and centres, were established. Until 1999, Balkan immigrants were their main focus, and between 2000 and 2014 they supported previously established migrants and newly arrived Asian and African groups. Regardless of nationality, citizen initiatives and civil society organizations had to deal with partial integration measures, anti-immigrant attitudes and violence from the police and extreme rightists. In addition, uninhabited buildings were taken over by squatters in an effort to provide housing to migrants and refugees and to promote solidarity.[14] Between 2013 and 2014, there were multiple calls for solidarity mobilization by the insurgent migrants of the Amygdaleza Detention Facility, where people lived in degrading and dehumanizing conditions.

The study of civil society organizations[15] in Greece before 2015 was centred on the role and actions of NGOs. As a rule, it ignored migrant associations and community groups as well as anti-racist initiatives. Interviews with members of organized initiatives, mobilized citizens on pre-existing citizen initiatives and civil society actors who support migrants and refugees led to the following categorizations.

First, since the early 1990s, an increasing number of NGOs run by Greeks have been set up with the aim of defending migrants' rights. For instance, ANTIGONE (founded in 1993) focuses on the promotion of equal opportunities for all without any discrimination. Its activities are based on the expression of solidarity and active participation. It aims to raise awareness and educate society about issues of non-discrimination, human rights, environmental awareness, non-violence and interculturalism. In the early 1990s, both national and international NGOs began operating, and these partly operated in a consultative manner by mobilizing public opinion on migrant issues and on proposed state measures for defending human rights and for addressing problems to do with migrants. In addition, since the early 1990s, various migrant community associations have been formed. NGOs have recognized the need to set up pressure groups in order to carry out coordinated actions as a united

[14] For example, the occupation of the Law School of the University of Athens in 2011. It culminated in a hunger strike by 300 migrants demanding their legalization.

[15] NGOs, community groups, religious organizations, trade unions, informal groups (such as those without a statute, board of directors or other governing body) and any other form of collective.

front alongside other organizations, with the aim of influencing the public sphere and public debate.

Second, during the same period, initiatives emerged among the solidarity movement in response to migrant needs and to racist attacks against newcomer foreign populations. These included the following: the Network for Political and Social Rights (founded in 1994), which fought against nationalism and racism, for the unity of workers beyond borders and homelands, and against imperialism and militarism; the Network for Social Support to Refugees and Migrants (founded in 1995), which was composed of people who had previously participated in initiatives and committees defending the rights of political and economic refugees and minorities, as well as members of political organizations, migrants and refugees; the Migrants' Social Centre (founded in 1997), a place that encouraged meaningful contact and the cultivation of ties between Greeks and migrants; and the Antiracist Initiative of Thessaloniki (founded in 1999), an umbrella of leftist organizations. This last initiative has worked in a hybrid way, coordinated by an open assembly and by individuals who can participate without representing an organization. It has coordinated actions taken by migrants and other local movements on the issues of migration, refugees, racism, nationalism and anti-fascism. In 2018, it held its twenty-first Antiracist Festival, and it organizes annual campaigns on migration issues via mobilization and marches, as well as through participating in similar actions with other groups. It also operates the Thessaloniki Social Centre/Migrants' Place. Both NGOs and citizen initiatives often object to, criticize and condemn state policies.

Third, since 2000, self-organized solidarity initiatives supporting refugees and initiatives led by migrants have been expanding among the solidarity movement as new populations have arrived, with a corresponding increase in their needs and a concurrent rise in xenophobia and racism. These initiatives have focused particularly on anti-racist activity. Such initiatives include The Migrants' Sunday School (founded in 2004), an initiative run by migrants and Greek volunteers that offers free Greek language lessons to migrant workers and refugees. It is active in the movement for migrant and refugee rights and against racism and xenophobia. The Expel Racism movement (founded in 2007) is an organization of migrants, local workers and youth members. They fight for free movement, for the legalization of migrants and for the granting of asylum to refugees, insisting that no person is illegal. They advocate equal rights, freedom of religion, work for all and the integration of migrant workers into trade unions. They are also active in the disbanding of fascist gangs who attempt, via police tolerance and the support of state anti-migration policy, to turn entire neighbourhoods and schools into arenas of racist violence. The United Movement Against Racism and the Fascist Threat (KEERFA, founded in 2009) was concerned with combating the escalation of racist attacks on migrants and refugees. This was at a time when the ND government and the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) party were aligned on the view that being a refugee or a migrant was a crime punishable by placement in concentration camps, mass deportations, racist "sweeping" raid operations and the long-term imprisonment of asylum seekers; these parties turned migrants into scapegoats. KEERFA's activity escalated along with escalating racist attacks when GD was elected to Parliament and attempted to turn its electoral support

into raid battalions and street militia in the neighbourhoods. KEERFA pioneered the use of civil lawsuits, and the Jail GD initiative was launched: this civil action by the Anti-Fascist Movement was initiated by lawyers active in KEERFA. The Racist Violence Recording Network (founded in 2011) was established as an initiative of the National Commission for Human Rights and the UNHCR Office in Greece, with the participation of NGOs and agencies. It conducts systematic recording of acts of racist violence and has introduced the use of a common Form for Recording Racist Incidents, aiming to provide clear and complete indications of the quantitative and qualitative trends of racist violence in Greece. The interlinked initiatives Anti-Nazi Zone (founded in 2012) and the Anti-Fascist Coordination of Athens-Piraeus (founded in 2013) operate with the use of open assemblies. They were founded, by joint participants, on account of the rise of xenophobia and fascism associated with GD and the increase of this political party's voting power. The latter was accompanied by incidents of racist violence in certain neighbourhoods, especially in downtown Athens. Moreover, several initiatives formed in the periphery of the country that set up awareness-raising days on refugee issues and on the problems experienced by irregular migrants, including detention conditions and access to formal procedures. One of these initiatives was Lathra (founded in 2001), which works on refugee issues on the island of Chios. They conduct weekly meetings which are open to anyone interested in the issues of refugees and migrants, while decisions are taken unanimously. Leros Solidarity Network (founded in 2012) is a civil society association founded by local citizens who felt very strongly about solidarity. Via a wide network of partners and volunteers, they help people in need and mobilize in order to directly provide necessary items to refugees, filling the void created by an absence of infrastructure and by the indifferent attitude of the State. They implement collective ways of responding to the crisis.

Fourth, since 2000, NGOs and migrant community organizations have underlined the need to set up and organize broad, coordinated bodies of migrant organizations, with the intention of these having an institutionally recognized role and to promote the resolution of broader issues of immigration in Greek society (Papadopoulos and Fratsea 2017). To this end, cross-country networks and collectives of migrants and refugees were formed. The Greek Forum of Migrants (formed in 2002) is a network of migrant organizations and communities in Greece that envisages a society in which migrants have equal rights and enjoy fair treatment, interacting and cooperating with Greek citizens on terms of mutual respect. Its mission is to promote the integration of migrants by reinforcing their individual and collective responsibility and their involvement through cooperation with institutions, NGOs and society at both a national and European level. The Greek Forum of Refugees (formed in 2012) is a multinational network. Its main objective is to create a viable network that brings together all refugees living in Greece through a common course of action. It aims to provide assistance to refugees during the asylum process, to protect their rights and to help them integrate into Greek society. The Melissa Network of Migrant Women in Greece (formed in 2014) is a network for migrant women living in Athens. It targets women from over forty-five countries who live and work in Greece, operating on the basis of a common platform, a hub where networks and individuals can meet,

share their concerns and ideas and support one another in the pursuit of common goals. It focuses on community-building goals for integration. Generation 2.0 RED (founded in 2013) is a non-profit organization bringing together people of different origins who work together to promote equal participation in a diverse society through the empowerment of communities. They have carried out campaigns that have led to granting youths of second-generation immigrant origin the right to Greek citizenship.

Pre-existing organizations played a crucial role in pro-migrant mobilization and there was an immediate response in terms of support for and solidarity with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. These organizations mobilized the collection and distribution of goods meeting basic needs, such as clothing and food supplies,[16] personal hygiene items[17] and medicines. They worked simultaneously and had already paved the way for collective, self-organized, grassroots pro-migrant mobilization and hands-on solidarity work. The pre-existing solidarity movement helped to set up various working groups to meet everyday needs[18] and were active both in urban centres and on the Greek islands. They can be categorized based on the benefits to their members and the wider benefits to society. Their scope includes: a) advocacy groups interested in shaping the social, economic or political system and campaigning for specific interests or ideologies within the social movement, and b) groups offering services which mainly deal with the distribution of goods and the supply of services to people unable to meet their own needs, providing a safety net. Both kinds have evolved over time, along with circumstances and situations, often combining the abovementioned features in their efforts to respond to social change. At the same time, they have developed networks and interacted with each other and with other categories of actors, demonstrating the dynamics created by social networks in these organizations (Papadopoulos and Fratsea 2017).

Pre-Existing Hatred Against Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants: Golden Dawn (GD)

GD is neither an unanticipated nor a novel phenomenon, but rather part of a historical continuation of various far-right and anti-immigrant remnants of the military junta in Greece that survived the restoration of democracy in 1974. GD was founded in the early 1980s by N. Michaloliakos as a neo-Nazi, antisemitic organization. Its activity developed in the early 1990s, and since then dozens of violent attacks have been launched against both migrants and Greeks (Ellinas 2013). Its representatives have been systematically identified as nationalists, and the party's references to Nazism have been recognized. GD is considered a fascist and neo-Nazi organization on the basis of its symbols, historical references and ideology. It has been accused of extremist action, racist violence and murderous attacks (Ovenden 2018). GD's pre-2015 activity had begun to build its profile in certain neighbourhoods in Athens, using the economic recession along with the fall of the old political system and the incoming

[16] Sleeping bags, children's raincoats, thermal blankets, items for baby care, etc.

[17] Baby wipes, diapers, soap, toothbrushes, etc.

[18] Through soup kitchens, the distribution of clothes and information, health teams, advice on hygiene and groups engaged in children's activities.

populations of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to pave the way for its rise. Its aim was ultimately to be represented in parliament as a political party by attracting electorates from other parties, while escalating its visible violence (Psarras 2014) and neo-fascist character. GD is not only defined by its far-right ideology but also by its ability to successfully manipulate feelings of hatred and fear concerning migrants among sections of Greek society. The following incidents reveal the scale of anti-immigrant attitudes and violence between 2009 and 2015.

Since 2009, in the district of St Panteleimonas, nowadays a working-class neighbourhood, GD members have operated by coming in from nearby towns and portraying themselves as indignant local residents. In May 2009, members of GD held an anti-immigration rally, which resulted in clashes with migrants and Greeks participating in an anti-racist gathering. In 2011, a rally was held in Athens to protest the construction of the border fence in Evros; GD organized a simultaneous counter-rally in the district of St Panteleimonas. From 2010–13, violent anti-migrant raid battalions and vigilante-style groups launched racist attacks on migrants, ethnic businesses and community associations. A committee of residents forming raid battalions patrolled the area each night with the aim of shutting down stores belonging to migrants. There have also been conflicts with anti-fascist and extra-parliamentary leftist groups, including marches and attacks against GD and its offices. During a protest in 2011 after the death of a citizen by foreign perpetrators, clashes were triggered by a group of citizens who were reportedly GD members. During the clashes, stores belonging to non-Greeks suffered damage and several Greeks and foreigners were beaten. In 2012, there was an attack on Egyptians in Perama, as well as attacks on foreign street vendors in the flea markets of the districts of Rafina and Messolonghi.

Between 2012 and 2013, there were multiple instances of violence, including attacks on Pakistanis by raid battalions in the suburb of Metamorphosi, the murder of the Pakistani worker S. Luqman in Petralona city in 2013 and an attempted attack on the city mayor of Athens by a GD MP in 2013, when GD tried to organize food distribution exclusively for Greeks at Syntagma Square and the mayor prevented the event from taking place, defining it as illegal and provocative. In 2013, CPG members putting up posters in Perama city were attacked. In the same year, a GD member murdered an anti-fascist rapper, P. Fyssas. In 2014, cases of police corruption and connections between police officers and GD were recorded in a long-term investigation conducted by the Directorate of the Internal Affairs of the Hellenic Police following a prosecutor's order. Within the context of the trial (ongoing since April 2015), the Secretary General and several other GD MPs, cadres and members have been arrested on suspicion of setting up a criminal organization. Three felonies are being judged jointly: the murder of the rapper in 2013, the attempted homicides against an Egyptian fish worker and CPG executives in 2012 and the attempted homicides against All-Workers Militant Front members in 2013. Since 2008, sixty other cases have been trialled in parallel before other courts (Thoidou and Pittas 2013).

GD's public appeal between 2009 and 2015 saw them rise in the ballots, as the organization's strategic response to the Greek economic crisis paid off. In a society with a fragile electoral political body, GD successfully proposed a nationalist solution through the use of two fascist myths: social decline and national regression. With these

myths as its tools, GD managed to propose solutions to various economic, political and ideological problems which had been accentuated during the financial crisis, thus presenting itself as the nation's saviour on a nationalist mission (Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2015). Both the right-wing and the centre-left governmental parties weakened every concept of social solidarity, downgrading social ties and cohesion. Individualism and the impunity of the clientelist state prevailed where the rule of law and social policies should have taken precedence. Society was therefore imbued with a deeper sense of insecurity regarding the future and an inability to participate in its planning. This feeling of vulnerability and weakness has been the basis for the interventions of the physically robust members of GD, promising security, ethnic cleansing, an end to corruption and simplistic responses to complex problems.

Solidarity Versus Hostility: Pro- and Anti-Migrant Citizen Mobilization Since 2015

Despite the financial difficulties that the country faces, the Greek people have showed solidarity to the incoming populations. Citizen contributions have involved fishermen saving refugees from drowning in the Aegean Sea, as well as municipalities and regional authorities, numerous national and international NGOs and other international organizations offering their support (Serntedakis 2017). The Greek Church has contributed as well, as some clerics have offered extensive aid. However, examples have been noted of other clerics praying against immigrants. Numerous active citizen initiatives have included volunteering, squatting in uninhabited buildings and self-managed initiatives that have assisted refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. These pre-existed the refugee reception crisis in 2015, in mainland city centres, public areas, neighbourhoods[19] and on the Greek islands.[20] Since 2015, new mobilized citizen initiatives have been formed which support migrants and refugees by setting up solidarity kitchens and providing clothes, shoes, food, medication, financial support and blankets. There was a surge of new squatting in uninhabited buildings in order to provide accommodation to migrants and refugees and a rise in self-organized, grassroots initiatives based on open assembly decisions (Oikonomakis 2018; Knott 2018). Local activist groups and open autonomous social spaces have been functioning through self-organization and horizontal collaboration, based on the belief that solidarity is the only appropriate response to the crisis. They perform various activities including cooking and collecting basic essentials.[21] They provide support, solidarity, safety and empowerment towards integration. These groups and social spaces are supported by donations and by the work of volunteer activists, who store and arrange donated goods, clean rooms, prepare and serve meals and provide

[19] For example in Victoria Square, Pedio Areos, Idomeni.

[20] Such as The Hug, the Pikpa Camp and the Mosaik Support Centre (Lesvos Solidarity) in Lesvos, Leros Solidarity Network in Leros, Kos Solidarity in Kos and Lathra and FEOX in Chios.

[21] Non-perishable food, cleaning and personal hygiene items, baby food, bottles and diapers, bottled water and disinfectants.

medical care.[22] They move beyond tackling emergency situations and immediate needs for food and shelter, offering sustainable structures to support refugees in their wish to live with dignity. This is accomplished by providing legal and psychological support for asylum applicants, vocational training, arts and crafts workshops, music and dance classes, day care for children and cultural events, all supported by artists, activists, volunteers, initiatives and organizations from across the world.

Interviews with civil society actors and citizens on forms of pro-migrant and anti-migrant citizen mobilization which have emerged since 2015 have led to the observation that the following initiatives have been taken. The City Plaza Refugee Accommodation Centre is a self-organized housing project for homeless refugees in Athens that accommodates 400 people. It is a seven-floor abandoned hotel, which had remained vacant for seven years until it was squatted by activists and refugees in late April 2016. It functions based on principles of self-organization and political autonomy and depends entirely on support and practical solidarity from within Greece and abroad. It operates by calling regular assemblies of refugees and "solidarians" (people who show solidarity) and organizing different working groups for cleaning, cooking, security, logistics, education, childcare, medical care and reception. FEOX is a certified and registered volunteer organization. Since the summer of 2015, it has handled many precarious arrivals on rocky landing spots. Besides supporting individuals in Souda by meeting basic needs from a well-equipped warehouse, other activities include: movie nights, summer activities, supervised excursion trips and search and rescue missions.

Since 2015, the main focus of Golden Dawn Watch (GDW) has been continuously monitoring each day of the GD trial. It frequently publishes a summary report in order to inform the public of developments in the trial. At regular intervals, a review of reports in the Greek press on the GD trial is published via a working group of the Observatory on Fascist and Racist Speech in the Media. GDW's members believe that only a well-informed and conscious public can develop strong resistance against the spread of racism, fascism and neo-Nazism. Kos Solidarity is an independent movement made up of citizens of Kos, established in 2015. Since 2016, Pikpa Leros has offered safe accommodation to vulnerable families, the elderly, people with disabilities, unaccompanied minors and pregnant women. It also provides heated rooms, showers, utility rooms, playrooms and a kitchen. In 2012, the solidarity network The Village of All Together was formed and the group started offering accommodation to refugees on the site of the Pikpa camp in Lesvos. Since 2015, via Lesvos Solidarity, it has started hosting vulnerable refugees on the island. It provides accommodation, clothes, food, medical care, psychosocial support, legal support and educational and other activities.

Regarding anti-migrant citizen mobilization since 2015, after the prosecution of its leadership and the commencement of the trial, GD was forced to temporarily withdraw its raid battalions from the streets, resulting in a drastic reduction in attacks. However, organized violence has not altogether disappeared, regardless of whether the mode of operation and frequency has changed. A common feature is the targeting

[22] For example via paediatricians, physicians, nurses, translators, psychologists, social workers and transport vehicles.

of victims based on their migrant background and planned attacks. Smaller neo-Nazi organizations and groups that imitate GD's paramilitary action and its Nazi constitution, structure, slogans and phraseology have attempted to fill the void. As a result, there have been ongoing racist acts. In April 2018, a large group of civilians led members of right-wing groups and organized football fans to attack groups of refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, who had squatted on Sapfous Square in Mytilene on Lesvos. In recent years, GD has also used social media platforms to spread its ideas.

Protesting for humanitarian and for hostile causes during and after 2015

Since 2015, mobilized citizens, anti-racist and anti-fascist networks, migrant community associations and civil society organizations have staged protests and taken action against racist and fascist attacks on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and have mobilized citizens around humanitarian ideas.[23] These protests coexist with practical support for refugees through collecting and instantly delivering essentials,[24] seeking donations and managing the distribution of goods. Apart from anti-racist and anti-fascist demonstrations, the Annual Antiracist Festivals in Athens and other cities host a number of discussions and concerts and offer food from a multicultural cuisine. The organizers distribute informative flyers and organize talks, demonstrations and in some cases protests. These solidarity gatherings and demonstrations are against fascists and neo-Nazis, expressing solidarity with refugees and migrants, while also voicing anti-imperialist demands. These forms of mobilization are organized by left, radical left, non-parliamentary left and/or anarchist initiatives, collectives, unions, anti-fascist movements and initiatives and student associations that organize marches on Parliament, ministries, EU offices, embassies and city halls. Anti-fascist rallies are aimed against intolerant and racist voices, against the drowning of refugees in the Mediterranean and towards the support of hunger strikers. Anti-racist and anti-fascist organizations and collectives have also held action days for the GD Trial and solidarity events, as well as mobilizing in opposition to racist gatherings of nationalists in favour of banning refugee children's schooling. The interviews with members of organized initiatives and mobilized citizens showed that some of the slogans presented during demonstrations were: "Solidarity-resistance-self-organization everywhere" and "Golden Dawn murderers – neo-Nazis must be imprisoned".

As far as the spatial perspective on citizen mobilization is concerned, most of the initiatives of the solidarity movement take place in urban centres of large cities and on the islands faced with significant numbers of incoming populations, and are much less prominent in rural areas. Collectives have been calling for gatherings, coordination between anti-fascist groups from various cities, anti-fascist and anti-racist initiatives and migrant community associations and organizations. These gatherings are often supported by anarchist initiatives, trade unions, anti-authoritarian and radical left

[23] Such as opposing deportations, the closure of borders, camp construction and the inhumane living conditions of asylum seekers in camps, and advocating faster access to asylum via organising protests and distributing flyers and posters.

[24] Such as clothes, shoes, blankets, essentials for baby care and health and food products.

movements, leftist groups, networks for the radical left and revolutionary youth organizations. GD also organizes activities that take place all over Greece.

Since 2015, there has been ongoing opposition to migrants and refugees by various groups, such as committees of parents, store owners, local media representatives and residents who express anti-migrant sentiments and show intolerance of the continuing presence of TCNs on the islands (e.g. Panchiaki Committee of Action) or in city centres or schools (e.g. Lamia and Chios), or by city councils against the accommodation of refugees in their city (e.g. Messolonghi and Larissa). Often these acts are connected to or incited by GD. Anti-fascist groups have been vigilant in dealing with such phenomena; however, anti-migrant initiatives remain active. GD is still active, even though it has remained on the sidelines of Greek politics since 2015. Since then, GD has been organizing open protests against migrants and refugees, but the anti-fascist movement has for the most part managed to halt its events. GD's activity has been severely reduced after multiple violent incidents, including GD spokesman I. Kasidiaris slapping a CPG MP during a panel discussion on national TV in 2012, as well as the murders of S. Luqman and P. Fyssas in 2013. The latter immediately led to anti-fascist supporters and leftists marching against racist and fascist attacks. A subsequent police crackdown led to raids on GD offices and the arrest of several party members. However, in April 2016, GD supporters clashed with supporters of refugees in Piraeus port and on Chios island.

In Greece, the increasing polarization of society caused by the economic recession, taxation, high unemployment rates and precarious labour, along with the reception crisis, was exacerbated in 2012–13 by GD's anti-immigration actions in areas of high migration. In such areas, GD distributed meals for Greeks only, while it also organized events on national anniversaries. Many interviewees have insisted that the fight against Nazism and neo-fascism is not over. Although GD is currently rendered unable to influence the social discourse on refugees, asylum seekers and migration, and is politically isolated in Greece, it is making continuous efforts to retain and expand its electorate via nationalist student protests against the newly signed Prespa Agreement.[25] However, local and student societies and mobilized citizens have been active in working to eradicate the nationalist and extreme-right ideas of GD. The ongoing situation of uncertainty and helplessness and the entrapment of migrants and asylum seekers in squalid conditions on the mainland and on the Greek islands leave room for acts of racism.[26] GD's local branches all over Greece and other nationalist initiatives under its umbrella (e.g. the National Coordinating Body and the Non-Aligned Meandrian Nationalists) organize mobilization in urban centres against current issues, including opposition to the construction of Islamic mosques (September 2018), demonstrations against the accusations that GD faces and the trial

[25] An agreement between Greece and FYROM resolving a dispute over the latter country's name. Following its completion, FYROM's name changed to Republic of North Macedonia in February 2019.

[26] In 2018, for example, a Bangladeshi man who was helping customers of a supermarket in Lesvos was violently attacked and seriously injured when he advised a customer not to park his vehicle in the spot reserved for people with disabilities.

(October 2018) and events hosted in memory of murdered nationalists (2013). GD's main slogans are: "Blood, honour, Golden Dawn" and "Illegal migrants out".

Mobilized citizen profile: "solidarians", raid battalions, activists and self-mobilized citizens

The mobilized citizens of pro-migrant initiatives emerge when any kind of support and assistance for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees is needed, as mentioned by the interviewees. Their mobilization is based on a feeling of unity among people who find a connection through common interests, goals or challenges. Solidarity with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants has emerged because the state mechanism has proven unable to act swiftly and decisively against the climate of fear cultivated by the media. After the 2015–16 period, some pro-migrant mobilized groups assumed legal form as NGOs, aiming to manage the possible sources of support more effectively and continue their activities. However, a number of citizens who had been political activists kept going until 2018 but subsequently became exhausted and ceased their efforts. Some interviewees have chosen to take a break and distance themselves from their dramatic experiences. After a period of reflection, they will consider returning to an initiative. The majority of interviewed mobilized citizens with no previous political experience or those outside self-organized, grassroots and solidarity initiatives have stepped back. They have been disappointed by the ongoing situation, which was initially seen as urgent but has become irreversible and perpetual. Some mentioned their emotional fatigue. Their withdrawal was also affected by the lack of tangible state solutions. In addition, some pro-migrant mobilized groups have changed their approach and adapted to the current ongoing situation. One of these is FEOX in Chios. Other pro-migrant mobilized groups have continued their activities beyond the 2015 reception crisis, working on other issues such as combatting migrant and refugee immobility (or "limbo") and promoting integration. GD, on the other hand, continues its long-standing anti-migrant action, despite its ongoing trial. In late 2018, GD's new candidates for the municipal elections of 2019 were announced; GD activists made threats against the tenants of buildings hosting refugees; a raid battalion intimidated train passengers; and GD members threatened the public with clashes in squats in school buildings. The party's members exhibit strong commitment to their leader and to GD itself.

According to the interviewees, the profile of pro-migrant mobilized citizens could be applied to both political activists and to citizens with no previous political experience. Among the interviewees, the majority belonged to the latter group, but over time those who have endured and continued through the aftermath of the 2015–16 period are those individuals who are considered political activists. More categories emerged: a) those who joined various initiatives after their involvement, and who, despite being self-mobilized, became more politicized later, and b) those who participated individually in an ad hoc way. The latter group had no previous political experience and contributed with specific resources in a specific place and period. These were citizens who expressed practical solidarity such as offering clothes and shoes, but did not partake in pro-migrant mobilization, as they wanted someone else to carry out the next steps and deal with the issue. In any form of initiative, such

as an anti-racist collective or a group collecting food and clothing, one may find all of these profiles. A solidarity structure has emerged from the interviews: an umbrella initiative which is more visible and is coordinated in the form of an all-embracing network, for example, a group of anti-racist initiatives. As the interviewees described it, the profile of a citizen engaging in anti-migrant mobilization associated with GD is an individual with intolerant beliefs. Most pro-migrant mobilization operates with no leadership and hierarchy but under a voluntary open assembly. Often those who have organized initiatives are members of left-wing radical movements, leftist groups and networks of the radical left. Anti-migrant mobilization and initiatives, on the other hand, have an organizational structure and follow a leadership and hierarchy, or even a specific formation – when protesting against migration, GD activists walk in paramilitary formation.

Many pro-migrant mobilized groups have retained their characteristics and are still active, but have adapted their role in response to the current situation of immobility for men, women, children and families, and promote their integration. Many interviewees mentioned that the solidarity movement is present but not with the same intensity. It is standing by until needed again. The situation has changed, and the everyday needs of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees must be dealt with for an unspecified period of time while awaiting a decision on their asylum status and intermediate state. In most cases, mobilized citizens who were already political activists contributed in 2015 and kept going until 2018, but now have stepped back temporarily. Self-mobilized citizens with no previous political experience who volunteered for a short time, or those outside of self-organized, grassroots and solidarity initiatives who simply contributed in a specific period and place and with particular resources (e.g. by offering clothes and food) have currently distanced themselves completely or indefinitely because of their disappointment with the ongoing, irreversible situation that was characterized as urgent but has become permanent due to a lack of solutions from the Greek government and the European Union. Interviewees were of the opinion that NGOs had professionalized the migration and refugee issue, putting the "NGO" label on solidarity, so to speak. This has been seen as vastly different from pro-migrant mobilization based on solidarity, self-organization and grassroots initiatives.

In some cases, after years of involvement volunteers were obliged to register as employees of a solidarity initiative as its status had changed in order to deal with various sources of support, as the initiatives needed to find better ways to respond to the needs of migrants and refugees. Most interviewees believed that there should be no professionalization of citizen movements; however, most also noted that politicization has in effect existed from the beginning through those who are political activists and that there has been no further politicization of these movements. Some citizens with no previous political experience have become more politicized following their involvement and contributions. On the side of anti-migrant mobilization, GD's professionalization emerged after the start of the civil lawsuit. In particular, after entering Parliament, the party gained access to state funding, while other important sources of funding for GD were the sale of merchandise and security services offered by members to shops and bars.

Conclusion

From 2015 onwards, the arrival of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants has made a heavy impact on the national and European political landscape. It has revealed weaknesses in their mechanisms and integration policies in employment, education, healthcare, social care, housing and intercultural coexistence. These inadequacies were the cause behind the mobilization of a large number of citizen initiatives and NGOs. Citizens expressing solidarity, local activist groups, open and autonomous spaces functioning under self-organization, grassroots initiatives and horizontal collaboration based on solidarity proved to be the only appropriate response to the reception crisis. This pro-migrant citizen mobilization has provided tangible solutions to essential problems faced by refugees and migrants, offering relevant onsite support at a local level, based on solidarity, safety and empowerment towards integration. Citizen initiatives have assisted and motivated local authorities to take active steps. This shows that the solidarity of pro-migrant citizen mobilization can have a positive and virtually interventional effect on the political environment, the politicization of migration issues and the way in which solidarity is organized and structured in Greek society, at a local and national level. These groups and initiatives may contribute to wider mobilization, which sometimes seems more feasible around important incidents. However, it is very challenging in everyday life and there are but a few vocal anti-racist, anti-fascist organizations left, which are unable to fight for the improvement of the general conditions alone. As interviewed political activists stress, the goal is to achieve widespread mobilization. There is staunch and constant belief within the circles of the movement that solidarity will continue to flourish.

However, there is a risk that hostility against migrants may easily be expressed. In November 2018, the Greek Minister for Migration Policy, when replying to the Messolonghi city mayor regarding the decision of the city council against the accommodation of refugees in the city, emphasized: "Get ahead in a race where solidarity and human values do not align themselves with those who sow fear and hatred".[27] In this case, solidarity groups have again been called upon to play the central role in supporting refugees and dealing with the issue. However, for activists and "solidarians", the way forward for social movements is unclear. Citizen mobilization can maintain or increase the size of self-organized solidarity, which affects the way people think, as well as the way the state deals with solidarity. This mobilization also puts pressure on the Greek government and its institutions at both a national and local level to improve the management of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, taking into account not only humanitarian needs but also social integration. It must also continue to put pressure on political parties, bringing forth meaningful practices towards displaced populations and people on the move. Citizen mobilization will always constitute a long-lasting form of resistance to neo-fascism and to racist perceptions and practices, irrespective of political considerations or the slow reflexes

[27] Ministry for Migration Policy, *Απαντητική επιστολή ΥΜΕΠΟ Δ. Βίτσα προς Δήμαρχο Μεσολογγίου σχετικά με αντίθεση διαμονής προσφύγων στην πόλη* [Letter from D. Vitsas to the Mayor of Messolonghi in response to the opposition to the staying of refugees in the city], 2018 (in Greek), https://bit.ly/2LPktr3, accessed June 15, 2019.

of civilians. It is not possible to overturn the policies in force solely with the help of anti-racist and anti-fascist organizations. Broader coalitions are needed with workers' associations, citizen initiatives, local actors and municipalities.

CHAPTER VI

The Imaginary Invasion: How the Discourse on the "Refugee Crisis"[1] Has Impacted Italian Politics and Society

Maurizio Ambrosini

The Context: Immigration in a Historical Country of Emigration

Italy has been a reception country for international immigrants for only thirty years, like other countries in Southern Europe. This important transformation has occurred mainly in spontaneous and informal ways, driven by the labour market, ethnic networks and civil society. National policies have mainly followed behind the immigration process, trying to give a legal framework to the practical inclusion of foreign citizens in the economic system and local society. Despite the approval of several laws, the main pillar of Italian immigration policies has been the amnesties for irregular immigrants and their employers: seven in twenty-five years, to mention only the most important and explicit measures, beyond other minor or hidden regularizations (Ambrosini 2018). The four amnesties enacted between 1986 and 1998 regularized the positions of 790,000 immigrants; the amnesty of 2002, following approval of the Bossi/Fini Law, regularized 630,000 immigrants. In 2009, the Maroni Law, which applied only to the domestic and care sector, prompted nearly 300,000 applications for regularization. In 2012, during a profound economic crisis, the Monti government enacted another amnesty; although it fell short of expectations, this amnesty yielded approximately 120,000 new regularizations. It must be stressed that Italian amnesties are conceived as the granting of permission to employers to legalize workers previously hired in informal ways. This means that behind every legalized immigrant there is an employer, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, it is an Italian one.

[1] The expression "refugee crisis" is reported here in quotes to refer to the way the post-2015 refugee issue has been referred to in the Italian public debate.

Family reunifications followed, and they have triggered the formation of a second and even a third generation of people of immigrant origin. In total, at present there are about 5.3 million foreign nationals legally residing in Italy. They are mainly women (52 per cent), mainly Europeans (50.9 per cent, and 30.4 per cent are EU citizens) (IDOS 2018), and they come mainly from countries with a Christian religious tradition (57.5 according to estimates, in comparison with 28.2 per cent from traditionally Muslim countries) (Caritas-Migrantes 2018) – see Table 6.1. Furthermore, the numbers have been stable over the past four years. In previous years, newly arrived immigrants found informal jobs, and sooner or later found an opportunity for regularization; however, the lack of job opportunities, even in the informal economy, has heavily impacted on the new flows in recent years.

Statistical data does not confirm what most Italians have believed in recent years: that the country has been invaded, that the immigrants arriving are overwhelmingly African men and Muslims, and that they primarily arrive by sea to apply for asylum (Allievi and Dalla Zuanna 2016).

Moreover, despite the obstacles created by the citizenship code (see below), the number of naturalizations has rapidly increased in recent years: 129,887 in 2014, 178,035 in 2015 and 201,591 in 2016.

Table 6.1: Composition of the immigrant population in Italy (ten main nationalities, 2017)

Rank	Country	Residents (in thousands)	% of the immigrant population
1	Romania	1,190	23.1
2	Albania	440	8.6
3	Morocco	417	8.1
4	China	291	5.7
5	Ukraine	237	4.6
6	Philippines	168	3.3
7	India	152	3.0
8	Bangladesh	132	2.6
9	Moldova	132	2.6
10	Egypt	120	2.3

Source: IDOS, Dossier statistico immigrazione 2018.

The economic insertion of immigrants is a crucial aspect of the settlement of the immigrant population in Italy. Despite the country's economic difficulties, the long recession of the 2008–14 period and the weak recovery of recent years, 2.4 million immigrants have regular jobs. They represent 10.5 per cent of total employment, with a notable concentration in some sectors: 16.6 per cent in the construction industry, 16.9 per cent in agriculture, 18.5 per cent in hotels and restaurants, reaching a peak of 71 per cent in domestic services[2].

[2] See: Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Ottavo Rapporto annuale 2018 "*Gli stranieri nel mercato del lavoro in Italia*" [Eighth Annual Report. Foreigners in the Italian Labour

In comparison with North-Western Europe, the unemployment rate is lower, but the quality of jobs is worse (Fullin and Reyneri 2011). Only a few immigrants obtain white-collar jobs, partly because of the barriers to their insertion into public employment and the scant recognition of their qualifications.

The possibility of self-employment, which has grown during the recession, now including almost 600,000 migrants, 9.4 per cent of the total, is relatively more accessible. For instance, at present about half of the street vendors in Italy were born abroad (IDOS 2018).

While the economic insertion and settlement of immigrant families have largely occurred, the political acceptance of this demographic and the accompanying social change has always been difficult. The citizenship law is testimony to this difficulty. It was approved almost unanimously by Parliament in 1992, at a time when immigration to Italy began to increase on a large scale, and it was intended to maintain a strong link between citizenship and Italian descent: it enables the grandchildren of former Italian emigrants to maintain or acquire citizenship, and remains very strict towards non-EU foreigners who want to access Italian citizenship. The law requires ten years of residence, while processing time can take up to four years (following a recent measure introduced by the new government).

In contrast, becoming Italian by marriage is easier than in most other developed countries, which is why, until some years ago, the majority of naturalizations were awarded following a marriage. Zincone (2006) cites a "familial" concept of citizenship.

The right to vote has shared more or less the same fate. Since the national elections of 2006, Italian emigrants have been able to vote without returning to Italy, and to elect members of Parliament to represent them; by contrast, long-term foreign immigrant residents have not yet gained the right to vote in Italian elections.

Furthermore, Italy is home to one of the oldest and strongest anti-immigrant parties, the (Northern) League, which in the past was a strategic partner of centre-right governments headed by Silvio Berlusconi, controlling the Ministry of the Interior from 2008 to 2011. As we will see, this party occupies a leading position in defining the migration policies of the present government, again controlling the Ministry of the Interior.

The construction of the "refugee crisis" in Italy

It is necessary to specify that the maritime borders have never been the main gateways for immigrants into Italy. Most of them have entered in regular ways, mainly with tourist visas if necessary, then overstayed their visa, especially if they found a job in the hidden economy. The length of the Italian coasts, contrary to popular wisdom, is not the main reason for the formation of an irregular immigrant population in Italy. The labour market and the labour demand by Italian households have been much more important (Ambrosini 2018).

It is true, however, that in recent decades Italy has also been the gateway to Europe for inflows of asylum seekers and other kinds of immigrants arriving on its shores from

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market], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.lavoro.gov.it/priorita/Pagine/Ottavo-Rapporto-annuale-Stranieri-nel-mercato-del-lavoro-in-Italia.aspx, accessed September 23, 2019.

south of the Mediterranean Sea. The so-called 'North Africa Emergency' (*Emergenza Nord Africa*) in 2011, when more than 62,000 people from African countries arrived in Italy by sea, was a turning point in public discourse. The mass media, public opinion, governments in office and political forces began to emphasize boat landings as the source of immigration. They interchanged the terms "migrants" and "asylum seekers", so that it was believed that people arriving by sea wanted to settle in Italy and that immigration was growing hugely as a consequence of landings made by African people. A deep divergence between perception and statistical evidence has marked the Italian debate on immigration and asylum in recent years.

As already stated, over the past four years the volume of foreign population in Italy has been stable overall, and (the few) new entries from non-EU countries for familial reasons have always outnumbered entries for asylum-seeking reasons (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Residence permits granted to non-EU citizens in Italy (percentages, 2015–17)

Reasons	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*
Family reasons	43.7	45.8	44.3
Work	6.3	4.3	3.2
Asylum, humanitarian reasons	27.3	34.3	38.3
Other reasons	22.7	15.6	14.2
Total (in thousands)	226	227	263

Source: Ministero dell'Interno.

A research institute (Istituto Cattaneo of Bologna), drawing on data from Eurobarometer, shows that EU citizens in general overestimate the proportion of non-EU citizens living in their country (16.7 per cent against 7.2). In the Italian case, however, the gap between perception and reality is much wider, the highest indeed among all the EU countries, with a perception of 25 per cent against an actual figure of 7 per cent.[3]

It is not only a problem of inaccurate information, or a lack of information. The Istituto Cattaneo also takes into consideration the "NIM index", developed by the Pew Research Centre and measuring hostility against immigrants and religious minorities. In this case, too, Italy occupies the leading position among thirteen countries of the "old" EU. Furthermore, the two indicators are related: those with a hostile attitude towards migration tend to overestimate the number of immigrants. This does not come as a surprise, but what is striking is that in Italy this way of thinking has become the conventional wisdom and the hegemonic narrative, including in the mass media, in culture and in politics. The chapter by Van Hootegem and Meuleman in this book confirms the rapid rise of a hostile attitude among Italian citizens.

In fact, the number of people rescued at sea is not only less than is imagined, but until 2015 most of them preferred to continue their journey towards Northern Europe by crossing the Alps as well. Thus, the implicit role of Italy was that of a bridge,

[3] See: Istituto Carlo Cattaneo, *Immigrazione in Italia: tra realtà e percezione* [Immigration in Italy: between reality and perception], no date (in Italian), https://www.cattaneo.org/2018/08/27/immigrazione-in-italia-tra-realta-e-percezione/, accessed December 13, 2018.

enabling their passage and not strongly enforcing the Dublin rules on asylum seekers' identification at the arrival point. Only a minority of people landing in Italy claimed asylum in the country and there was therefore a gap between the number of landings in Italy and that of applications for asylum.

In 2015, however, the EU partners imposed the establishment of so-called "hotspots" on Italian soil and made it clear that the fingerprints of asylum seekers had to be taken immediately, even against their will. The European agreement also envisaged the resettlement of asylum seekers in other countries, fixing precise national quotas; but the national governments of other EU countries, explicitly or implicitly, rejected the enforcement of that agreement, or its application was slowed down. Only about 13,000 asylum seekers were relocated, and in the end the project was abandoned.

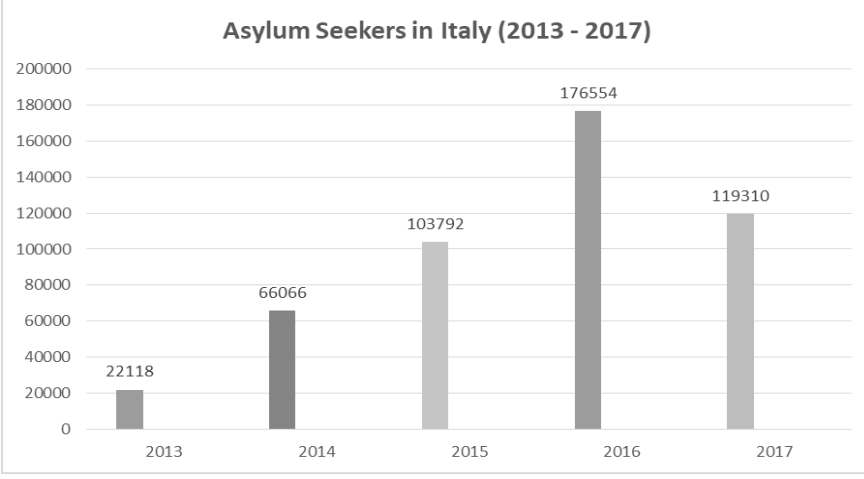
Consequently, the rate of applications for asylum in Italy against the total number of landings has rapidly increased, rising from 37 per cent in 2014 to 56 per cent in 2015 and to 68 per cent in 2016. In 2017, it surpassed 100 per cent, because of arrivals by land through North-Eastern borders and rejections of people applying to Italy as the first country of arrival, according to the Dublin conventions.

Then the number of asylum seekers hosted in Italy grew until July 2017 (Figure 6.1), when the government (a centre-left coalition headed by Paolo Gentiloni, with Marco Minniti as Minister of the Interior) enforced the Memorandum of Understanding signed in February with the Libyan government and local forces, and began to hinder search and rescue operations by NGOs' ships. The consequence was a sharp reduction in new inflows from the Libyan coasts. Most asylum seekers were blocked or intercepted by the Libyan navy and held in detention centres where there was a stark absence of international control.

By the end of 2017, the number of arrivals by sea had dropped to 119,310 (Figure 6.1), with a first period, up until July, which was much more intense, and a second period, after July, when arrivals of this kind were much scarcer.

In 2018, the new government (composed of the Five Star Movement and the League, with Matteo Salvini of the League as Minister of the Interior) had a hostile attitude from the beginning towards asylum seekers, immigrants and NGOs rescuing people in the Mediterranean (see the following section). As a consequence, the number of people arriving by sea dropped dramatically in 2018 to 23,370, less than in Spain or in Greece.

Figure 6.1: Asylum seekers in Italy (applications, 2013–17)



Source: Ministero dell'Interno

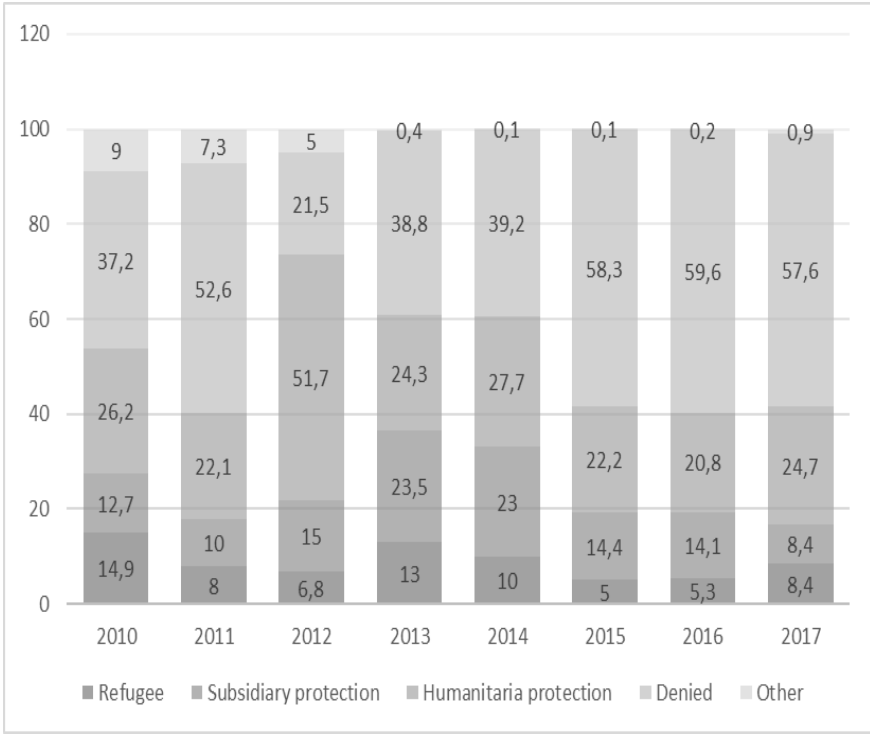
Over the years, the recognition rate of a legal form of protection has decreased, from about 60 per cent in 2014 to 41.5 per cent in 2015 and 39.4 per cent in 2016, with a slight recovery in 2017 to 40 per cent. Some asylum applicants have received protection after appealing against a negative decision regarding refugee status: there is no official data, but some estimates claim that about 50 per cent of appeals succeed.

Overall, Italy is less generous than the other main Western European countries, with the exception of France. The rate of recognition in 2017 was 64.6 per cent in Belgium, 53 per cent in Germany and 46.9 per cent in Sweden (AIDA 2018).[4]

Moreover, in Italy the most common formula adopted to grant legal status to asylum seekers is "humanitarian protection", the weakest and most temporary form of asylum. Only 5 per cent of applicants in 2015, 5.3 per cent in 2016 and 8.4 per cent in 2017 received full refugee status; 14.4 per cent (2015), 14.1 per cent (2016) and 8.4 per cent (2017) obtained subsidiary protection; 22.2 per cent (2015), 20.8 per cent (2016) and 24.7 per cent (2017) received humanitarian protection (Figure 6.2).

[4] Source: Asylum Information Database AIDA, *Asylum Statistics 2017: Shifting Patterns, Persisting Disparities*, 2018, http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/18-01-2018/asylum-statistics-2017-shifting-patterns-persisting-disparities, accessed December 13, 2018.

Figure 6.2: Outcome of asylum applications in Italy (2010–17)



Source: Ministero dell'Interno.

The new government, furthermore, has abolished "humanitarian protection". Only a few special cases will be admitted (people with serious diseases, victims of natural disasters or people who have performed "acts of exceptional civic value"). The estimate is that among the 150,000 applicants under consideration, about 100–120,000 will be rejected. Since the capacity to repatriate them is very low, the vast majority will remain in Italy, without the possibility of working legally or finding accommodation, thus raising fears and hostility among the native population.

The overwhelming majority of asylum seekers are men; women represented only 16.2 per cent in 2017, even if there was an increase from 15 per cent in 2016, 11.5 per cent in 2015 and 7.7 per cent in 2014. The three main countries of origin in 2016 were: Nigeria (27,289 applications), Pakistan (13,660) and Gambia (9,040); in 2017 Nigeria was again in first position (25,964), followed by Bangladesh (12,731) and Pakistan (9,728).[5] For 2018, the Ministry of the Interior has provided only the number of people who arrived in Italy by sea. With these much-reduced numbers, the ranking is now: Tunisia (5,181), Eritrea (3,320) and Iraq (1,744).

[5] Source: Ministero dell'Interno, *I numeri dell'asilo* [The numbers of asylum], http://www.interno.gov.it/it/sala-stampa/dati-e-statistiche/i-numeri-dellasilo, 2017 (in Italian), accessed December 13, 2018.

In dealing with this unexpected inflow, the Italian authorities have mainly adopted an emergency approach. While a national system of reception, SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), has been in place since 2003, the emergency approach has always been the prevailing frame of management of asylum issues. In accordance with this, a leading role was allocated to the Civil Protection system in the management of the so-called "North African Emergency" (2011–13).

The disembarkation of 170,000 asylum seekers on Italian shores in 2014 led to an Agreement between the state, the regions and the local authorities (*Accordo Conferenza Unificata*, 10 July 2014)[6] and to the approval of a law (legislative decree no. 142/2015)[7] which attempted, not always successfully, to overcome the previously dominant emergency approach. The two main issues were: reaching, through a quota system, a homogeneous distribution of asylum seekers in all the regions (until 2014 there were huge imbalances and 70 per cent of asylum seekers were hosted in three southern regions: Sicily, Apulia and Calabria), and achieving effective institutional cooperation between different levels of government.

The second point includes the designing of a reception system where the national level assumes the role of coordinator (Campomori 2018). This system consists of two phases: from initial aid to a second level of welcome and integration (the SPRAR), which should have become the norm for all asylum seekers. Local authorities play a crucial role in the institution of a SPRAR project because they are requested – on a voluntary basis – to launch the reception project, in collaboration with NGOs and associations. The Ministry of the Interior has encouraged implementation of the SPRAR, which is conceived as a structured means to achieve widespread reception, replacing temporary emergency solutions, and at the same time taking into account diverse local situations, avoiding imbalances and unequal distributions. The resistance of local authorities, however, has led to a lack of reception facilities and a concentration in southern regions. Only 35,881 places are provided (as of July 2018), since only 1,825 municipalities out of more than 8,000 have agreed to take part in the system.[8] Furthermore, almost half of the places are located in southern regions and in Lazio, where local authorities more clearly perceive the benefits of hosting asylum seekers, in terms of job creation and a stimulus to the local economy. The richer regions, in which the possibility of refugees' employment should in theory be higher, are less willing to cooperate. In recent years, only refugees who have received legal

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[6] Source: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, *Intesa tra il Governo, le Regioni e gli Enti locali sul piano nazionale per fronteggiare il flusso straordinario di cittadini extracomunitari, adulti, famiglie e minori stranieri non accompagnati* [Agreement between the Government, the Regions and the Local Authorities on the national level to deal with the extraordinary flow of non-EU citizens, adults, families and unaccompanied foreign minors.], 2014 (in Italian), http://www.prefettura.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1247/Accordo%20Conferenza%20Unificata.pdf, accessed December 28, 2018.

[7] Most Italian legislation on asylum originates from the transposition of EU directives. Legislative decree no. 142/2015 is no exception, since it implements directives 2013/32 and 2013/33.

[8] Siproimi, *I numeri dello Sprar/Siproimi* [The numbers of the Sprar/Siproimi], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.sprar.it/i-numeri-dello-sprar, accessed December 20, 2018.

protection (but not all of them), unaccompanied minors, families and frail people have been hosted in the SPRAR system.

The government has responded to this lack of reception facilities by creating a parallel system based on the Centres of Extraordinary Reception (CAS) – once again, an emergency response to a recurrent structural problem. Indeed, the vast majority of asylum seekers have been hosted in the CAS. In this case, the national authorities bypass local governments by assigning to private actors (mainly NGOs, but also hotel owners and other private companies) the task of establishing and managing various kinds of reception facilities: often large, with large numbers of guests, and with uneven levels of professional competence, experience and commitment with regard to the integration of hosted people and relations with the territory and its services (Marchetti 2014; 2016).[9] In some cases, infiltration by criminal organizations has been identified, while in others unscrupulous providers have been detected, discrediting the whole system of reception.

The number of asylum seekers hosted in reception facilities was 138,858 at the end of 2018, and their distribution across the country, mainly through the CAS system, is related to the population of the Italian regions: Lombardy, the largest Italian region, hosts 14 per cent of asylum seekers; Lazio and Campania 9 per cent each; Emilia-Romagna, Sicily and Piedmont 8 per cent each.[10]

The new government recently decided to exclude asylum seekers from the SPRAR, hosting them only in the CAS. Furthermore, in these centres several services have been cancelled (including psychological and medical assistance, Italian lessons and orientation for the labour market) because the daily rate paid to the managing institutions has been reduced from €35 to about €20. The underlying reasoning is that most applications for asylum will be rejected under the new legal regime, so it is pointless to invest money in teaching Italian or in preparing people who will not be authorized to reside and work in Italy for its labour market.

The anti-refugee wave in Italian politics

As has been widely recognized, the asylum and immigration issue played a major role in the last Italian general elections (March 2018), contributing to the collapse of the Democratic Party and to the victory of two anti-establishment parties, the Five Star Movement and the League. In May 2018, they signed an agreement and established the new government. For the first time in Western Europe, the so-called 'populist' parties won a democratic election and achieved political power at a national level.

To understand this dramatic change, it is necessary to observe that, according to Amnesty International Italy (2018), hate speech has invaded the information system (newspapers, TVs, social media, etc.) with growing force, raising arguments that are "openly racist and discriminatory" (*ivi*, p. 2). In Italy, hate speech, in particular against

[9] Also from: conversation with Chiara Marchetti, researcher and expert on the reception of asylum seekers.

[10] Source: Ministero dell'Interno, *Sbarchi e accoglienza dei migranti: tutti i dati* [Landings and reception of migrants: all the data], 2019 (in Italian), http://www.interno.gov.it/it/sala-stampa/dati-e-statistiche/sbarchi-e-accoglienza-dei-migranti-tutti-i-dati, accessed January 2, 2019.

asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants in general, is not limited to marginal groups on the far right or anonymous trolls on the internet; it is openly employed in the political arena by candidates and political parties, particularly during the campaigning for the last general elections. According to Amnesty International Italy, hate speech was exhibited consistently over three weeks of monitoring the electoral campaigns. In twenty-three days, 787 instances were collected, with more than one demeaning, racist or discriminatory message posted on social media every hour. These messages came from 129 candidates, seventy-seven of whom were elected, 43.5 per cent as political leaders. They belonged mainly to the League (51 per cent), followed by Fratelli d'Italia ("Brothers of Italy", right wing, 27 per cent), Forza Italia (centre-right, 13 per cent) and CasaPound (far right, 4 per cent). 91 per cent of these examples of hate speech referred to asylum seekers and migrants, 32 per cent conveyed fake news and counterfeit data, while another 37 per cent employed data that was imprecise or hard to verify. Facebook (73 per cent) was the social media platform on which most messages were posted.

The League was the leading party in this exploitation of the asylum issue. The party is the oldest political party in the Italian system. In the past, it had important responsibilities in the governments headed by Berlusconi. It fell into a deep crisis between 2011–12 after the collapse of the last Berlusconi government and a corruption scandal that involved Umberto Bossi, the former leader of the Northern League, his family and his more faithful collaborators. The party lost many votes in local elections and seemed close to disappearing. However, under the new leadership of Matteo Salvini it has changed its political message and presented itself as a "new" actor. It has softened its regional identity, removing the term "Northern" from the name of the party, and has abandoned its traditional adversarial language against Rome and Southern Italy, making nationalism its main identity. Furthermore, Salvini has established international connections with leaders of the populist-nationalist right wing: Marine Le Pen (Front National) in France, Viktor Orbán (Fidesz) in Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS) in Poland. In addition, he has repeatedly praised the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the US President Donald Trump.

Hostility against immigrants was a key aspect of the League's political message from the outset, but under the new leadership it has been emphasized and linked with sovereignty, security, priority for the needs of Italians and strong criticism of the EU and Italy's traditional European partners. All in all, Salvini has moved the position of his party to the right – indeed, in several respects to the far right – by connecting populist and anti-establishment arguments with more traditional issues of the political (far) right: more freedom for private citizens to use weapons, more resources for the police, more emphasis on national borders and interests, lower taxes and fiscal tolerance for self-employed workers. A recent book has defined Salvini's League as the "far right of government" (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018). This message has obtained political success: the League has widened its electoral constituency, gaining votes and winning local elections in the centre and south of Italy. Recent polls show that more

than 30 per cent of Italian voters would vote for the League at present, and the League would become the leading Italian party.[11]

Another actor that has overtly employed adversarial language against asylum seekers and immigrants (the two categories in general overlap) is Fratelli d'Italia. This party was founded in 2012 from a split of Popolo della Libertà, as a consequence of the decline of that party and of Berlusconi's leadership. Headed by a young woman, Giorgia Meloni, from the traditional Italian right, the party has tried to recover the heritage of the old Movimento Sociale Italiano – Destra Nazionale (the post-fascist party of the 1946–94 period), whose symbol appears on the flag of Fratelli d'Italia. In this case as well, hostility towards asylum seekers and immigrants has been widely employed to assert the political identity of the party, but with less success than in the case of the League. This political space appeared to be already occupied by the League; however, Fratelli d'Italia obtained a good result in the last European Parliament elections (6.4 per cent and 5 seats), demonstrating the possibility of negotiation within a future coalition with the League.

A third highly vocal actor in campaigns against the reception of asylum seekers is CasaPound. This party was established in Rome in 2008, after the occupation of a building that became the first "social centre" of the Italian far right. Although it has competed legally in general elections since 2013 and in some local elections, CasaPound is primarily an Italian version of a far-right movement. It has squatted several buildings in Rome, and has often been involved in riots with leftist militants and the police. Violence is part of its culture, but it also has a pop culture aspect (something quite new for the Italian far right, but similar to what happens in other EU countries), having created a musical group, a theatrical company and an online radio station. A recent book terms CasaPound "fascists of the third millennium" (Rosati 2018). The party has been very active in organizing demonstrations against asylum seekers, NGOs and even Catholic institutions hosting refugees, which is new and unusual in Italian politics.

It is also important to mention the convergence between the League under Salvini's leadership, Fratelli d'Italia and far right groups such as CasaPound: a party with governmental responsibilities and another party represented in the Italian Parliament do not hesitate to share attitudes, claims and political actions with the radical right. Reciprocally, in the last general elections (March 2018), Simone Di Stefano, the leader of CasaPound, made public his support for Salvini and the League.[12] In May, he expressed his "sympathy" for the new Five Star Movement–League coalition government.[13] Hence the fight against the reception of asylum seekers has been an

[11] See for example: TG La7, *Il sondaggio politico di lunedì 3 dicembre 2018* [The political poll on Monday 3 December 2018], 2018 (in Italian), https://tg.la7.it/politica/il-sondaggio-politico-di-lunedì-3-dicembre-2018-03-12-2018-133769, accessed January 3, 2019.

[12] *Corriere della Sera*, "Elezioni 2018, CasaPound: 'Sì a sostegno a governo con Salvini'" [Elections 2018, CasaPound: "Yes to support the government with Salvini"], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.corriere.it/elezioni-2018/notizie/elezioni-2018-casapound-si-sostegno-governo-salvini-ac7b09e2-1b14-11e8-b6d4-cfc0a9fb6da8.shtml, accessed January 3, 2019.

[13] *Giornalettismo*, "CasaPound "guarda con simpatia" il governo M5S-Lega" [CasaPound "looks with sympathy" the M5S-Lega government], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.

opportunity for a recomposition of the various segments of the Italian right, with the League (no longer only "Northern") assuming the leadership of that coalition.

The position of the Five Star Movement, now the main Italian party, is less clear. In this party, different positions coexist. As a matter of fact, however, leaders of the movement repeatedly took positions against asylum seekers, NGOs and the reception system before the elections, and later shared the programme of the League on this issue and voted for its proposals in Parliament. The former leader of the movement, the comedian Beppe Grillo, has on several occasions posted negative messages about immigrants and asylum seekers on his influential website. Many spokespersons, members of Parliament and activists among the movement raise doubts on the role of NGOs, referring to "taxis of the sea".[14] The movement's current political leader Luigi Di Maio has published several messages on social media, accusing NGOs of being connected with human traffickers[15] and spreading suspicion about the "business of immigration",[16] even if he later denied such accusations. Even recently (in April 2019) he emphasized "migration policies", meaning the harsh closure of Italian borders against asylum seekers, as a key point of convergence with the League under Salvini.

In more formal terms, the agreement between the Five Star Movement and the League for the new government programme (May 2018) includes a section on immigration titled: "Immigration: repatriations and a stop to the business".[17] Immigration (but in reality, asylum) is described as an unbearable issue for Italy, considering its costs and the related illegal business. Throughout the section there are references to removals, controls, criminal infiltrations, threats to security and detentions, whereas references to human rights are few and marginal.

The implementation has been even harsher: NGOs' ships have been prevented from disembarking rescued migrants in Italy, and a ship of the Italian Coastguard, the Diciotti, was also refused permission to disembark a group of Eritrean asylum seekers for many days. Among the various actors who reacted to the Diciotti affair, the intervention of the Italian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CEI), which agreed to take in the asylum seekers, was decisive in finding a solution.

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giornalettismo.com/casapound-ok-governo-m5s-lega/, accessed January 3, 2019.

[14] *The Submarine*, "L'attacco di Di Maio alle Ong è frutto del peggiore razzismo" [Di Maio's attack on NGOs is the result of the worst racism], 2017 (in Italian), https://thesubmarine.it/2017/04/25/di-maio-ong-razzismo/, accessed January 4, 2019.

[15] *Vita*, "Accuse alle Ong sui migranti: un esempio lampante di post-verità" [Accusations against NGOs on migrants: a striking example of post-truth], 2017 (in Italian), http://www.vita.it/it/article/2017/04/26/accuse-alle-ong-sui-migranti-un-esempio-lampante-di-post-verita/143141/, accessed January 4, 2019.

[16] *La Repubblica*, "Migranti, Di Maio: 'Ipocrita chi difende le ong'. Replica Saviano: 'Cerca voti di chi li vuole morti'" [Migrants, Di Maio: "Hypocrite who defends NGOs". Saviano replies: "He is looking for the votes of those who want them dead"], 2017 (in Italian), https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/04/23/news/di_maio_saviano_ong-163704617/, accessed January 4, 2019.

[17] *Quotidiano*, "Contratto di governo in Pdf, il testo definitivo di Lega-M5s" [The Government Contract in Pdf, the final text of Lega-M5s], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.quotidiano.net/politica/contratto-governo-1.3919012, accessed January 4, 2019.

Only in the most recent reception crisis in January 2019, when the ships Sea Watch 3 and Sea Eye were denied permission to disembark thirty-nine migrants rescued at sea, did Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte overtly challenge his deputy Prime Minister Salvini, deciding to open the door to fifteen migrants, who were taken in by the Waldensian church.

The Opposition of Local Authorities to the Settlement of Asylum Seekers and to Reception Facilities

This national policy also reflects what has happened at a local level in recent years. Many local governments, after having rejected the invitation to manage a SPRAR project, have protested against and tried to resist the settlement of refugees in their territory through CAS centres, when the Prefects identify a suitable facility or a private organization responds to the public tenders for the management of such centres.

This local opposition openly targets asylum seekers and the public policy of reception, even if it often fosters a confusion between refugees and other immigrants. For instance, mayors often claim that they already host a huge number of immigrants in their territory, and they cannot afford to receive other Third Country Nationals.

The policy of reception through CAS centres also favours a local politics of exclusion in which mayors and municipalities protest against the imposition of refugees by national powers on local communities. A frame of contrast between overbearing central powers and peaceful local communities, which are obliged to host unknown and dangerous aliens, is recurrent.

Connected to this is the victim complex: local communities present themselves as the "victims" of an "invasion".[18] This frame permits the political construction of an opposition between "us", the peaceful and integrated local community, and "them", the aliens, who are the bearers of danger, insecurity and the diminishment of welfare resources. Furthermore, this view promotes the idea that "we" are under attack and have the right to defend ourselves, our families, our homes and our properties. Historically, this kind of victim complex has triggered the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities: the majority feels itself threatened by the presence of aliens, and it depicts its reaction and even the recourse to violence as a legitimate defence against this deadly danger.

In addition, the local territory is conceived as private property, or as an extension of the home. A famous anti-immigrant slogan of the League declares "Masters in our own home" (Ambrosini 2018).

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[18] See for example: *Libero Quotidiano*, "Immigrati, carovana di 25mila persone verso l'Italia: ecco la data dell'invasione" [Immigrants, caravan of 25 thousand people heading to Italy: here is the date of the invasion], 2019 (in Italian), https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/italia/13448177/immigrazione-carovana-25mila-persone-verso-italia-dai-balcani-data-invasione.html, accessed June 21, 2019; Riscossa Cristiana, *Immigrazione di massa: un'invasione pianificata dal nuovo ordine mondiale* [Mass immigration: an invasion planned by the new world order], 2019 (in Italian), https://www.riscossacristiana.it/immigrazione-di-massa-uninvasione-pianificata-dal-nuovo-ordine-mondiale-prima-puntata-di-mdg/, accessed June 21, 2019.

An important aspect is that the protests have involved many regions and municipalities, and not only the northern regions of Italy, where the League has its strongholds, as occurred in the past with previous waves of local politics of exclusion (Ambrosini 2013). As a consequence, more so than in the past, municipalities ruled by centre-left coalitions are also involved.

Following Faist (2002), this could be seen as an example of "symbolic politics" or "meta-politics", in which "real world issues" are connected with "fears around international migration" (*ivi*, pp. 11–12). In particular, "through meta-politics, low-level threats usually gain out-of-proportion significance" (*ivi*, p. 12). An important aspect is that, by establishing a sharp dichotomy between "us" and "them", local authorities and their supporters in some ways create a community, reinforcing the bonds between local residents who feel and share a common threat. They find an explanation of, and an actor responsible for, their problems: their impoverishment or economic decline, feelings of insecurity and lack of prospects are connected to the arrival of these unknown aliens. Paradoxically, fragmented local communities experience a new sense of unity in protesting against the settlement of a few asylum seekers.

More specifically, local governments have used a mixture of old and new reasons to justify their resistance against the reception of asylum seekers. Some general reasons, for instance, are "inconvenience for citizens", "the transformation of a green portion of our territory" and citizens' worries about the numbers (mayor of Bagnolo, province of Brescia, 10 July 2015).[19]

Security is obviously a major issue, and it can be expressed in many forms: not only as a fear of terrorism or common crime, but also as a worry about public health. In a village of the Veneto region (Albettone, province of Vicenza), the local council adopted a resolution against the establishment of a CAS, demanding that the mayor "protect the community" against "risks connected to security and the possible spread of diseases or plagues".[20]

Another recurrent message is that of the priority of citizens' needs – a message that traverses the entire country and easily obtains consensus in times of crisis and reduced welfare provisions. For instance, the mayor of Bagnoli (province of Naples) claimed: "Social conditions would be deficient. I think that the demands of local residents should prevail. It is better to help them in their own country" (4 March 2017).[21]

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[19] *Il Giornale*, "Sindaco non vuole i profughi e il prefetto deve arrendersi" [Mayor does not want refugees and the prefect must surrender], 2015 (in Italian) http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/sindaco-non-vuole-i-profughi-e-prefetto-deve-arrendersi-1150548.html, accessed December 9, 2018.

[20] *La Repubblica*, "'Un muro in paese per bloccare i rifugiati' l'ultima sfida del sindaco-sceriffo" ["A wall in the village to block refugees" the last challenge of the mayor-sheriff], 2015 (in Italian), https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2015/07/20/un-muro-in-paese-per-bloccare-i-rifugiati-lultima-sceriffo14.html, accessed December 9, 2018.

[21] Palazzo Tenta 39 (Associazione Culturale Bagnoli Irpino), *Rifugiati a Bagnoli? Il no e i dubbi del sindaco* [Refugees in Bagnoli? The no and the doubts of the mayor], 2017 (in Italian), http://www.palazzotenta39.it/public/rifugiati-a-bagnoli-il-no-e-i-dubbi-del-sindaco/, accessed December 9, 2018.

Another reason given in many instances by local authorities is that of possible negative consequences for the town's attractiveness to tourism. This is the case of Capalbio on the Tuscan coast, a well-known holiday resort for leftist politicians, intellectuals and managers of public companies. Here the mayor declared: "We must welcome [asylum seekers], of course. But here there are villas. And very luxurious ones. With gardens. Finely furnished. In the historic centre" (14 August 2016). Some intellectuals and affluent holidaymakers supported this position more or less overtly.[22]

The mayor of Positano, a village on the beautiful Amalfi coast, has expressed a similar reason: "The reception [of asylum seekers] is not compatible with our distinctive features. This is not racism, but protection of a place, and there are also reasons of public order and security" (22 February 2017).[23]

Local authorities do not limit themselves to declarations and verbal protests. In Saronno, Lombardy, a town with 40,000 inhabitants, the mayor managed to block the opening of a reception centre for thirty-two asylum seekers in October 2016. The property (a former school) belonged to a congregation of nuns and was refurbished with significant expenditure by the Catholic organization Caritas Ambrosiana, following a request by the Prefect. The mayor employed legal impediments to prevent the transformation of the school into a reception centre, but his motivations were made clear by his declarations: "The citizens of Saronno do not want clandestines, and national sovereignty belongs to the citizens of Saronno, not to the refugees […] It is an administrative act, not a political one. Anyway, the citizens who elected me demand that I do it. When they meet me in the street, the vast majority insist that I remain firm on asylum seekers."[24] In another interview, he declared: "I do not want African males in proximity to schools attended by our girls."[25]

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[22] *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, "Capalbio, l'arrivo di 50 profughi fa discutere la sinistra. 'Alcuni territori sono speciali'. Le accuse: 'Ipocriti radical chic'" [Capalbio, the arrival of 50 refugees makes the left-wing discuss. "Some territories are special". The accusations: "Radical chic hypocrites"], 2016 (in Italian), https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/08/14/capalbio-larrivo-di-50-profughi-fa-discutere-la-sinistra-alcuni-territori-sono-speciali-le-accuse-ipocriti-radical-chic/2974710/, accessed December 10, 2018.

[23] *Capri News*, "Il caso migranti dopo Capri investe la costiera amalfitana. Il sindaco di Positano: 'Diciamo no ai rifugiati, il Governo è sempre più lontano dai nostri territori'" [After Capri the migrant case invests the Amalfi coast. The mayor of Positano: "We say no to refugees, the Government is further and further away from our territories"], 2017 (in Italian), http://www.caprinews.it/leggi1.asp?cod=8084, accessed December 10, 2018.

[24] *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, "Migranti, sindaco leghista blocca il centro accoglienza delle suore. Ma non ha fatto i conti con il Viminale" [Migrants, League mayor blocks the nuns' reception center. But he did not come to terms with the Ministry of the Interior], 2016 (in Italian), https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/10/01/migranti-sindaco-leghista-blocca-il-centro-accoglienza-delle-suore-ma-non-ha-fatto-i-conti-con-il-viminale/3067047/, accessed December 29, 2018.

[25] *La Repubblica* – Milano, "Lega Nord condannata a Milano per discriminazione: 'I profughi non sono clandestin'" [Northern League sentenced in Milan for discrimination: "Refugees are not illegal"], 2017 (in Italian), https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/02/23/news/clandestini_lega_condanna_discriminazione_profughi-158956059/, accessed December 29, 2018.

As in other cases, there also local actors who dissent from the administration's view. In Saronno, a network of associations called "Quattro passi di pace" [Four steps of peace] mobilized in favour of the reception centre, but without achieving the purpose of changing the local administration's course. What they obtained was a conviction against the League (who were fined €10,000, as well as €4,000 in legal expenses) for having described the thirty-two asylum seekers who were meant to be hosted as "clandestines" in posters that they displayed in the town.[26]

A radicalization of the fight against the establishment of reception centres for asylum seekers was also expressed in the resolution adopted in August 2017 by the (League) mayor of San Germano Vercellese, a small town in Piedmont, which obtained widespread coverage in the national press and in the political debate. In the title of the resolution adopted by the municipal council, the mayor included the phrase "Protection of the territory against invasion/immigration by populations coming from Africa and other places".[27] She threatened people who rent out properties in order to host asylum seekers, including non-profit and religious organizations, with fines (from €150 to €5,000). The resolution explains the reasons:

> It is not possible to tolerate the undermining of the authority of the Mayor, elected by citizens, as regards hospitality towards migrants; that hospitality, given hypocritically and at all costs, has an end result of dumping on the shoulders, on the budget and on the responsibility of municipalities (especially the small ones) the presence of hundreds of people who are alien to the local context and who, after a few months, will come knocking on the Mayor's door to demand assistance which very probably it will not be possible to provide.[28]

The regional ombudsman of Piedmont wrote a letter inviting the mayor to revoke the resolution, but she refused, saying that she did not even read the letter and that she was proud to have prevented the establishment of reception centres in her municipality.[29]

A different type of conflict occurred in Ventimiglia, a key transit point on the border with France. Hundreds of asylum seekers arrived in the area, especially between

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[26] *Corriere della Sera* – Milano, "Lega condannata per discriminazione. 'I profughi non sono clandestini' [League sentenced for discrimination: "Refugees are not illegal"], 2017 (in Italian), https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/17_febbraio_23/lega-condannata-discriminazione-profughi-non-sono-clandestini-949736fa-f9b1-11e6-9b43-a08eac6546a0.shtml, accessed December 29, 2019.

[27] *Vita*, "La delibera del Comune che si tutela dall'invasione delle popolazioni africane e non solo" [The resolution of the Municipality that "protects itself from the invasion of the African populations, and not only"], 2017 (in Italian), http://www.vita.it/it/article/2017/08/29/la-delibera-del-comune-che-si-tutela-dallinvasione-delle-popolazioni-a/144335/, accessed January 5, 2019.

[28] *Ibid*.

[29] *La Stampa*, "Bufera sul sindaco di San Germano: 'La delibera anti profughi è da annullare'" [Storm on the mayor of San Germano: "The anti-refugee resolution must be annulled"], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.lastampa.it/2018/06/05/vercelli/bufera-sul-sindaco-di-san-germano-la-delibera-anti-profughi-da-annullare-ZV6fRNebsVQBM4E5Tw2qRN/pagina.html, accessed 5 January, 2019.

2014 and 2017, after having landed in Southern Italy with the purpose of crossing the border and applying for asylum in France. French authorities enforced the border and asylum seekers were blocked. Some of them were assisted in a Red Cross camp, others by the local branch of Caritas, but many others remained without any shelter, living and sleeping outdoors along the River Roja. No Borders movements and other activists came to support them, providing tents and some food, and an informal camp grew, a situation similar to other border zones, such as the so-called Jungle of Calais (Sandri 2018). After some months, the local residents began to protest, and in August 2016, in the peak period of the tourist season, the local mayor (Democratic Party, centre-left) issued an ordinance forbidding the distribution of food outside the Red Cross camp or the Caritas facilities.[30] While covered by the pretext of alleged hygienic reasons, the meaning of the ordinance became clear when the public fountains near the train station were closed. Some activists were fined for having infringed the ban. This measure lasted some months, raising many protests, including by Amnesty International, MSF and Caritas, among others. A public demonstration in Ventimiglia was announced. At that point, in April 2017, the mayor withdrew the ordinance.[31]

Only in some cases have the inhabitants mobilized against asylum seekers spontaneously. A relevant case is that of Gorino, a hamlet with about 600 inhabitants in the province of Ferrara (region of Emilia-Romagna), with a long-standing leftist tradition. Here, in October 2016, about one hundred residents blocked the three access routes to the hamlet with barricades, protesting against the settlement of twelve refugee women with eight children in a local hostel, in which five rooms had been requisitioned by the Prefect. The coach with the women inside was forced to go back, the Prefect had to change his decision, and the refugees were hosted in other facilities of the province. The political parties were apparently not involved at the beginning, but immediately afterwards the right wing supported the protest. The local secretary of the League spoke of "new heroes of the Resistance against the dictatorship of reception", while the mayor (Democratic Party) expressed understanding of "the fear of citizens".[32] In the elections of March 2018, the League achieved locally 43 per cent of votes in the Lower Chamber, and the centre-right 68 per cent.[33]

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[30] *ANSA* – Liguria, "Ventimiglia: stop a cibo non autorizzato" [Ventimiglia: stop to unauthorized food], 2016 (in Italian), http://www.ansa.it/liguria/notizie/2016/08/12/ventimiglia-stop-a-cibo-non-autorizzato_1f8c7a35-78fa-435d-8ce1-b4fc1dfdb2a7.html, accessed January 5, 2019.

[31] *L'Espresso* (*La Repubblica* – Genova), "Ventimiglia, revocato il divieto di distribuire cibo ai migranti" [Ventimiglia, lifted the ban on distributing food to migrants], 2017 (in Italian), https://genova.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/04/23/news/ventimiglia_revocato_il_divieto_di_distribuire_cibo_ai_migranti-163684319/, accessed January 5, 2019.

[32] *MicroMega*, "Le barricate caserecce di Gorino e gli imprenditori politici del razzismo" [Gorino's homemade barricades and racist political entrepreneurs], 2016 (in Italian), http://temi.repubblica.it/micromega-online/le-barricate-caserecce-di-gorino-e-gli-imprenditori-politici-del-razzismo/, accessed January 5, 2019.

[33] *Il Resto del Carlino* – Ferrara, "Elezioni 4 marzo, a Gorino la Lega Nord arriva al 43%" [Elections March 4, in Gorino Northern League reaches 43%], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.

The far right and mobilization against asylum seekers

Protests by local authorities and the mobilization of far-right movements intersect and support each other. Castelli Gattinara (2017) has analyzed the political discourse of such movements, highlighting some key points. In general, far-right movements build their identity *ex negativo*, targeting a set of enemies and distinguishing between friends and foes. While in the past they emphasized racial superiority or inferiority, now they focus on "incompatibility", reframing their racism in cultural rather than biological terms. Furthermore, they present themselves as the defenders of traditional (Christian) European values against Islam, which they portray as the historical enemy of European civilization. Consequently, they act upon loyalty to liberal values and democracy as a way to reject the demand for basic rights by Muslims and asylum seekers.

Beyond this general framework, in the case of asylum seekers in Italy, the far-right discourse refers to other arguments that can attract a broader consensus, even "invading the linguistic territory of their opponents" (*ivi*, p. 87). Some examples of these arguments follow: the need to respect the human rights of refugees; accusing aid organizations of hosting asylum seekers in degraded facilities; "fake solidarity"; pointing to corruption in the third sector; the infiltration of private interests in reception activities; the accusation of "fake refugees" or disguised "economic migrants" exploiting the asylum system. Overall, "the idea is that corrupt NGOs, the mass media, and multiculturalist elites have strategically constructed the concept of refugee crisis to generate a moral panic, softening public opinion and legitimizing the invasion of Italy by economic migrants" (*ivi*, p. 88).

An example of the mobilization of far-right groups, together with local residents and elected authorities, occurred near Verona. Here, in 2017, the anti-immigrant movement "Verona ai Veronesi" [Verona for its citizens], for many days and nights surrounded a reception centre in which twenty-five asylum seekers were hosted, insulted and intimidated refugees and social workers and damaged properties, without any intervention from the public authorities. Some mayors in the area, including the mayor of the village of Roncolevà, where the reception centre was located, supported the protest. On the other side, a network called "Verona che dialoga" ["Verona in dialogue"], in which about 100 local associations took part, mobilized (July 2017). Pro-immigrant associations threatened to boycott the products of a firm which backed the protest by offering logistical support, and declared: "We also ask those who have the responsibility, first the Prefecture, which is responsible for reception, to put an end to such acts of violence and to prevent new ones, and to engage seriously in appropriate management of reception which protects the rights of all."[34]

The opposition to asylum seekers and the establishment of reception centres has often been a source of legitimization for far-right movements, such as CasaPound.

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ilrestodelcarlino.it/ferrara/politica/elezioni-4-marzo-risultati-gorino-1.3769292, accessed January 5, 2019.

[34] *Radio Popolare Verona*, "Fermare subito la violenza razzista" [Stop racist violence immediately], 2017 (in Italian), http://www.radiopopolareverona.com/old/?q=content/fermare-subito-la-violenza-razzista, accessed January 10, 2019.

They could demonstrate together with local residents and sometimes also with mayors, finding support for their rallies, traffic blockades and riots, as happened in Casale San Nicola, a neighbourhood of Rome.[35]

Another relevant example is provided by Spinetoli, a small town (of about 7,000 inhabitants) in the region of Marche, with a leftist tradition. Here, in November 2017, the mayor (Democratic Party, centre-left) demonstrated together with the League and CasaPound against the establishment of a CAS centre hosting thirty-seven people. The mayor called them "an enormous number".[36] About 300 people took part in a torchlight demonstration. Then CasaPound distanced itself from the mayor, leaving the hall during his speech. Before the arrival of the asylum seekers, the house in which they were supposed to reside was burned down. The police never found the culprits of the crime.

As in other countries, the issue of asylum has been an opportunity for the radical right to find a new political space, to reach a larger public and to acquire new supporters.

A report by Lunaria, an anti-racist organization, has highlighted this convergence and underlined the resonance that such demonstrations have achieved through social media. According to the report, initially the extreme right and the League operated in substantial autonomy and at a local level, carrying out single actions and events with few participants. However, their initiatives became structured in a more organized and transversal manner, linking to spontaneous protests in the territories in question, also thanks to the use of social media. On many occasions, political groups have joined emerging committees organizing against the reception of refugees. Nocturnal raids, daytime assemblies, demonstrations and street protests have been amplified thanks to the increasingly frequent use of "virtual squares" (Lunaria 2017: 65).

There were relatively few participants in the demonstrations, even though sometimes in small villages a substantial part of the population was involved; but the audience they reached, through new and traditional media, was much wider.

Mobilizations and Initiatives in Favour of Refugees

As already observed, protests and mobilizations against reception centres and asylum seekers have not met with simple consensus in public opinion, but have also been an opportunity for activism and visibility for a heterogenous set of pro-immigrant actors, ranging from the radical left of the social movements (such as No Borders movements) to Catholic institutions: an advocacy coalition that recalls the "strange bedfellows" identified by Zolberg (2006) in US immigration policy.

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[35] *Leggo*, "Residenti e Casapound contro gli immigrati: scontri alla manifestazione a Roma" [Residents and Casapound against immigrants: clashes at the demonstration in Rome], 2015 (in Italian), https://www.leggo.it/news/roma/roma_protesta_casale_san_nicola_casapound_immigrati-1148232.html, accessed January 10, 2019.

[36] Osservatorio Repressione, Spinetoli (Ap): Il sindaco Pd sfila con Casapound contro "l'invasione" di 37 profughi [Spinetoli (Ap): The Pd mayor marches with Casapound against "the invasion" of 37 refugees]", 2017 (in Italian), http://www.osservatoriorepressione.info/spinetoli-ap-sindaco-pd-sfila-casapound-linvasione-37-profughi/, accessed January 10, 2019.

Here, four main categories of actors can be distinguished. First, NGOs, or Third Sector Organizations (TSOs), which provide services to migrants and asylum seekers in mainly professional ways, and often in agreement with public bodies. This is the case for SPRARs and CASs, which are mainly managed by NGOs receiving government funding. But in other cases, as in the dispute on NGOs rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, they can act with some independence from public policies, and even against the will of governments.

Second, we can identify other organized actors, including trade unions, churches and associations, which often combine practical support with political and cultural activities. They employ professionals but also many volunteers. They may cooperate with public powers, but also act outside of the law, for instance by providing help to people with a dubious or irregular legal status (for a comparison with the US, see Hagan 2008). This side of their activity is likely to grow as a consequence of the new rules on asylum which will very probably create a huge number of migrants remaining in Italy without legal status. The activism of civil society in favour of immigrants has been a constant feature of Italy's experience as an immigrant-receiving country: many gaps in the provision of services to immigrants are filled in various ways by non-state actors (Ambrosini and Van der Leun 2015). The new issue of asylum seekers has reaffirmed this long-standing aspect.

Third, there are social movements, which place the defence of immigrants' rights alongside other battles against the state and the capitalist system. However, they also provide more concrete services to migrants and asylum seekers: what Zamponi (2017) has called "direct social actions", defining these as "actions that do not primarily focus upon claiming something from the state or other power-holders but that instead focus upon directly transforming some specific aspects of society by means of the action itself" (*ivi*, p. 97). The difference between these activities and more traditional forms of volunteering is an issue under discussion, but the connection between political protest and practical support to asylum seekers should be stressed.

Fourth, there are support groups that spontaneously form, especially around refugees settled in particular localities, for instance providing help for people in transit at the railway station in Milan, or in the border zone of Ventimiglia, Val Roja (Giliberti 2017), or organizing sport and leisure activities at reception centres. Individuals who offer specific assistance such as food, money and accommodation (Fontanari and Ambrosini 2018), or language lessons, supplementing those provided by law in reception centres, may be considered to fall into this category as well.

As regards the forms of support that such actors develop, it is possible to identify four types of activity. The first can be labelled "networking": as in the cases presented above, mainly (but not only) at local level, pro-refugee groups try to connect, overcoming their differences, signing joint pleas and in some cases integrating their services.

A second relevant aspect concerns assistance with legal procedures. Often through volunteer lawyers, many pro-refugee actors help people in compiling their applications for asylum or appeals against a refusal. An extension of this activity consists in pro-bono legal advocacy for both civil and criminal matters, which is often provided, in the Italian case, by associations of socially committed lawyers.

A third and crucial type of activity is the provision of services, particularly educational and social welfare services, such as language courses, basic health services, clothing, food, and shelters for the homeless; a category in which many rejected asylum seekers, but also recognized refugees, fall. These services are mainly supplied by volunteers and are often funded by private donations along with support from other social institutions. Overall, these activities provide what Leerkes (2016) in the Netherlands has called "secondary poor relief" and Belloni (2016) describes more positively as "welfare from below". Another type of service is the provision of moral support by some civil society actors, particularly faith groups (for a comparison with the British case, see Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2014).

Fourth, there are activities associated with political and cultural opposition to the criminalization of asylum seekers, protest activities against policies of exclusion, support for the free movement of asylum seekers, and the promotion of alternative views to dominant representations of the issue. These actors have tried to influence public opinion by organizing many conferences and debates at a local level. They have not obtained much success in political terms, but they have succeeded in reinforcing opposition to xenophobic policies and in showing that active minorities do not share the xenophobic policies of the present political majority.

The typology in Table 6.3 also describes the level of political engagement for each category of supporter, the degree of formalization of the various actors and activities, and the kind of human resources committed (whether professional or volunteer).

Table 6.3: Typology of supporters to asylum seekers and migrants in irregular condition

	NGOs and specialized organizations	**Other CSOs (associations of volunteers, churches, trade unions…)**	**Social movements**	**Citizens**
Main activities	SAR in the sea Reception on the territory	Language schools; Medical services; Legal advocacy; Bureaucratic assistance; Provision of basic assistance: bed and food	Political protest, but increasingly provision of services (e.g. accommodation in squatted buildings; legal and bureaucratic assistance; leisure activities)	Donation of food, clothes, money; Italian language lessons; Leisure and socialization
Political engagement	Variable, higher recently against harsher closure of borders	Variable, but increasingly coupled with the provision of services	Main focus (No Borders movements)	Variable, often relevant as the reason to mobilise

Formalization	High (formal organizations, contracts with public authorities)	Mix of formal structures, volunteering and informal activities	Low, but self-organization	Low (spontaneous mobilization)
Human resources	Mainly professionals, volunteers as supplementary resources	Variable, but often volunteering is relevant	Militants/ volunteers	Only volunteers

Three examples of pro-refugee mobilization

A number of civil society actors have launched innovative initiatives for refugee reception, and in some cases they also mobilized at a political level. I will consider here two examples of refugee reception and one case of political demonstration. As regards reception, the two cases are: a scheme for domestic hospitality of refugees with Italian families and the project of the so-called "humanitarian corridors".

Firstly, domestic hospitality was introduced for the first time in 2008 in Turin within the SPRAR project, and since 2015 it has been implemented in other cities, especially in the north and centre of Italy (Campomori and Feraco 2018; Marchetti 2018). These schemes display differences in their actual implementation as regards the economic contribution that the families receive or the length of the project. A common denominator, however, is apparent: on the one hand, it is believed that refugees staying (temporarily) with a family – including the possibility of sharing the family's relational resources – could enable the building of networks which are useful for both the labour market and for social integration. On the other hand, these projects try to achieve a cultural purpose: they hope that the example set by the host families could contribute to reducing people's prejudices and fears related to immigrants and refugees and generate trust at a local level.

As for the results, the Refugees Welcome Italia network (the national branch of a wide European network) has facilitated 120 experiences of familial reception (January 2018), in eighteen Italian towns, mainly located in the centre-north of Italy. Almost 1,200 Italian households have registered their willingness to welcome a refugee on the association's website. Caritas Italiana in turn, through the project "Protetto. Rifugiato a casa mia" ("Protected. Refugee in my home") has hosted 118 refugees in Italian households, in various Italian cities. Furthermore, 218 refugees have been hosted in parishes and seventy-two in religious institutes. Almost 300 have been provided with independent accommodation, but even then a local family, named the "tutor family", has been entrusted with the task of monitoring the refugees and giving them information, advice and support (Marchetti 2018).

While positive feedback has emerged in relation to the integration objectives, the number of refugees hosted in these projects is still low in comparison with the size of the country and the number of asylum seekers. Another weakness is the relationship between public and private actors: in the case of Caritas Italiana (and partially the Refugees Welcome Italia network), no official relationship is envisaged, while in other cases the project is officially part of a SPRAR or CAS.

The second relevant practice – humanitarian corridors – aims at innovating both asylum policies and asylum seeker integration. Humanitarian corridors organize the arrival of people in need of protection from the immediate reception areas at the borders of war zones. Asylum seekers receive a permit and they can reach a safe country through regular flights, without allowing dangerous journeys and profits for human smugglers. In Italy, humanitarian corridors started at the end of 2015 after the signing of an agreement among the Catholic St Egidio community, the Evangelical Churches Federation, the Waldensian Church and the Italian government. Around 1017 people arrived safely in Italy from Lebanon through these corridors. In 2017, another corridor opened from Ethiopia, promoted by the Catholic Church (Caritas, Fondazione Migrantes and the St Egidio community), and 500 people legally entered Italy (January 2019).[37]

After their arrival, asylum seekers are hosted in parishes, religious institutes or apartments in various towns and regions, in line with the idea of a "scattered reception". They follow a twelve-month integration process entirely funded by the private actors who set up the project, with the support of volunteers. In particular, in the second case (the humanitarian corridor from Ethiopia), every asylum seeker or family is supported by the "tutor family" mentioned above in acquiring knowledge of the local society, accessing services, attending Italian language courses, building social networks and looking for employment.

This is a clear example of the activism of civil society in cooperation with the state. France and Belgium have followed this example, signing similar agreements with religious actors. Notwithstanding the strong innovative potential for asylum policies, there are certain critical issues related to humanitarian corridors, such as the actual time required for integration (twelve months may not be enough for every person) and the difficult balance between the need to support these people and the need to foster their autonomy. Moreover, the selection of beneficiaries is a process that raises many dilemmas, for instance related to who takes responsibility for choosing the beneficiaries, and to the categories of people who should be given priority: the most vulnerable people or those with higher potential to enter the labour market.[38]

The third case concerns a large demonstration called "Insieme senza muri" [Together without walls] which took place in Milan in May 2017, with the participation of 80,000–100,000 people. Through this initiative, the city of Milan tried to present an image of an open and welcoming city to refugees and immigrants. In the presentation of the programme, the local administration claimed that Milan is "a metropolis integrating through work, knowledge, the will to keep busy. As a consequence, Milan is a city without walls […] A city which wants to continue to be a capital of rights and of the construction of a new culture of citizenship".[39] This mobilization emphasized the political character of the movement. On that occasion, indeed, diverse components of the pro-immigrant front took to the streets: political forces, associations, social

[37] Conversation with Daniele Albanese, Caritas Italiana.

[38] Conversation with Paolo Naso, head of Mediterranean Hope, Waldensian Church.

[39] See: Insieme Senza Muri, *Per una città aperta e accogliente* [For an open and welcoming city], 2018 (in Italian), https://www.insiemesenzamuri.it/, accessed January 12, 2019.

movements and people who work in providing services to immigrants. Nevertheless, what many observers emphasized was that many immigrants were also involved, probably for the first time. Among the speakers were the President of the High Chamber and the mayor of Milan (Democratic Party), while the presenter was the local councillor for Social Policies (Democratic Party).[40] Furthermore, "Insieme senza muri" has become a permanent label, giving life to a month of events held once a year: meetings, debates and festivals.

Conclusions: How the "Refugee Crisis" is Changing Italian Politics

Italy is a significant case in the European landscape of refugee policies for two main reasons. First, it has faced the so-called "refugee crisis" with growing difficulties and anxiety (see Meuleman and Van Hootegem 2019). The establishment of the "hotspots" required by the EU has been a turning point, partly because the enactment of tighter controls at the Alpine borders by the neighbouring states followed the new regulation. The Italian government was compelled to abandon its traditional, albeit implicit, policy of allowing the transit of asylum seekers towards North-Western Europe.

Not only was Italy closely involved in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea, it also had to rapidly increase its commitment to the reception of asylum seekers in the national territory. The Italian asylum system was not adequate for this, and extraordinary solutions became necessary, under the label of a permanent emergency. Last but not least, all this occurred in a period of deep financial and economic crisis, when the government was obliged to cut social expenditure, to raise the age of retirement and to deal with growing unemployment.

The second aspect concerns the cultural and political consequences of this unexpected entanglement in the refugee issue. Most Italians were convinced that they were being invaded by asylum seekers coming from Africa by sea. Anti-establishment and xenophobic political forces reached a wide audience, spreading fears and accusations against asylum seekers, the NGOs rescuing them and the associations providing reception services. Local authorities played a key role: after (in most cases) having refused to take part voluntarily in the ordinary reception system (SPRAR), they often protested against the establishment of extraordinary reception centres (CAS) by the Prefects.

The final act was the electoral victory of anti-establishment parties in the general elections of March 2018. Italy has become the first large country in Western Europe with a populist government. In the electoral campaigns, in the government agreement and in the following actions, the new political majority has taken vocal anti-refugee positions, denying access to Italian ports to NGOs' ships, disputing with Italy's traditional European partners, expressing support for the Visegrad group and refusing

[40] Corriere della Sera – Milano, *La marcia "Insieme senza muri", centomila in piazza a Milano* [The march "Together without walls", one hundred thousand in the square in Milan], 2018 (in Italian), https://milano.corriere.it/cronaca/diretta-live/17_maggio_20/marcia-milano-dell-accoglienza-in-piazza-saremo-oltre-diecimila-aa10b920-3d4f-11e7-a425-2bf1a959c761.shtml, accessed January 12, 2019.

to sign the Global Compact on Migration. The landmark of the new approach has been the approval of a new bill under the label of "security package". This new law almost completely abolishes "humanitarian protection"; excludes asylum seekers from the SPRAR; sharply reduces the services provided by the CAS; and transfers European funds intended for integration policies to deportation policies.

This hardening of asylum policies appears to be supported by the majority of Italian citizens at present, according to several polls. The xenophobic League, after shifting to a far-right position, experienced a sharp increase in support from those surveyed (more than 30 per cent at present), and its leader Salvini enjoys much popularity.

This trend, however, does not go unopposed. Civil society is at the forefront of this resistance, whereas the political opposition, after its serious defeat in the general election, is struggling to find a new identity. As highlighted in this chapter, the activities developed by civil society initiatives in favour of refugees are manifold, ranging from political protest to the provision of services.

This analysis leads to two final observations. First, the restrictions enacted by the state are giving more space to alternative providers of services. This is the case for refugees who are legally authorized to reside in Italy, but do not receive any assistance, as well as for rejected asylum seekers, now growing in numbers as a consequence of the new legislation, but still remaining in Italy. This also applies to humanitarian corridors allowing the entry of asylum seekers, and even to the case of new arrivals by sea, for whom the hospitality supplied by religious actors has bypassed the government's opposition.

Second, the radicalization of the struggle on asylum and migration policies has given a political significance to ordinary actions of help and support as well. Anti-immigrant groups contest NGOs rescuing people at sea, associations managing reception facilities and religious institutions hosting asylum seekers. On the other side, social movements now provide various concrete services to asylum seekers; social activists take part in demonstrations alongside political activists; and volunteers assert the political significance of their activities.

Immigration and asylum are crucial issues in the present political debate in Italy. They are defining political and cultural identities, fostering militancy and social engagement, generating new actors and changing the attitudes of the established ones. It is not certain that this is the best way to find pragmatic solutions to the problems at stake, but there is no doubt that Italian politics and society have changed as a consequence of the refugee reception crisis.

CHAPTER VII

Mobilizations and Opinions Regarding Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Undocumented Migrants in Belgium: Frames, Motivations and Actions

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Preliminary Remarks on The Research

In the framework of our research, we consider 2015 as a potential temporal marking point due to the spread of a discourse on the "migration/refugee crisis" and on the "crisis of the reception system".[1] Migrants seemed to be most visible in society in that period, and citizens gathered to support them through grassroots initiatives held in sites that previously had little to no political relevance. Some scholars speak of the emergence of a "welcoming atmosphere during the first months of the so-called refugee crisis" (Karakayali 2019a: 192), while others describe the moral panic raised by the arrival of refugees "in record numbers" (Kosnick 2019: 171). At the same time, a clear shift in mobilization characteristics can be discerned with respect to the volunteers' level of institutionalization and politicization (Karakayali and Kleist 2016; Karakayali 2019b): the volunteers' involvement seems to have been more driven by a humanitarian concern than by an explicit (mostly left-wing) political conviction, even if an implicit political stance is still present. As a result, the new wave of volunteers is less integrated in established associations compared to the previous wave, acting rather within self-organized groups. Indeed, the field of volunteers has broadened: individuals with no mobilization history started to mobilize, as well as organizations that were previously involved in other fields (Cantat and Feischmidt 2018).

[1] As De Cleen et al. (2017) argue, the discourses on refugees and asylum in Belgium during the "refugee crisis" – especially in Flanders – were mainly presented in negative terms with a focus on culturalist, securitarian and economic arguments. These discourses have dominated the debate in Belgian society for several decades and remained dominant during the most recent influx of refugees. However, they do not prevent other narratives from emerging, such as those which encourage the development of citizens' initiatives in support of migrants.

Introduction

The increased influx of asylum seekers in 2015 has had quite an impact on local communities in Belgium: several additional reception centres opened throughout the country, as the capacity of the existing centres was too low at the time. As we have seen in the chapter by Van Hootegem and Meuleman in this volume, around half of Belgians favour a strict asylum policy, whereas around a third of the Belgian people support a more generous asylum policy. These numbers apply to the entire country, but would there be a difference between people from communities where asylum seekers have a relatively low visibility and communities where they are more visible? As it turns out, local reactions to the presence of asylum seekers are a topic often disregarded by the literature. At the same time, scholars are paying more and more attention to the initiatives which have emerged in Europe since 2015 to support a broad category of newcomers. In continuity with previous research on perceptions and attitudes towards migrants in Belgium,[2] then, the PUMOMIG project includes a focus on the interactions occurring between asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants[3] on the one hand and the local environment in which they are living on the other. The focus of the project on these composite target groups has been determined by preliminary observations that led the research team to expand the target compared to what was originally planned and has been addressed in the past. In fact, the humanitarian and civic mobilization around newcomers which has spread through the country at least since 2015, and which we will analyze in this chapter, concerns people associated with all three of these categories. Throughout this text, we will use these categories to define the migrants discussed here based on the meaning that they have in the administrative domain related to migration policies. In parallel, we will speak of "migrants" when referring to newcomers including all three of these legal statuses. In making this choice, however, we do not intend to overlook the performative effects of the use of these categories and the fact that words convey non-neutral meanings and judgements (Agier 2019). Equally, we will provide some examples to discuss the fact that the kind of reactions and forms of mobilization may also vary according to the specific category in question.

In this chapter, we will study in particular the way in which reactions may manifest in relation to the opening and/or presence of an asylum seeker reception centre, as well as which kinds of interactions are developed. In doing so, we pay specific attention to contemporary forms of mobilization emerging around institutional reception centres, but also to grassroots initiatives targeting non-institutional forms of migrant reception. As such, we aim to contribute to the literature on mobilization regarding newcomers and to provide new insights on the socio-political and interpersonal dynamics that this mobilization triggers, as this strand of literature mainly focuses on the response to the

[2] See research on perceptions and attitudes towards migrants in Belgium based on interviews about the last migration peak in Europe (1999–2000), funded by BELSPO (Meireman et al. 2004; Gsir et al. 2004; Meert et al. 2004).

[3] In our field sites, these are individuals whose residence permit has expired or whose asylum application was rejected, or individuals that have not submitted an asylum application. They are temporarily or permanently living in Belgium.

lack of (local) appropriate institutional intervention (e.g.: Feischmidt and Zakariás 2019; Milan 2018; Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019).

The starting point of our research is that a polarization exists between the possible positionings of social actors in relation to the arrival and presence of asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants in the territory where they live.[4] This means that solidarity movements[5] or protest movements are the most visible – and mediatized – actions,[6] while other possible opinions falling between these two poles remain quite unseen. This fact also corresponds to the perception that a large proportion of the local population is not necessarily concerned with migration issues – even if interactions with migrants may still occur – nor is it easily "cooptable" by one of these two opposed positionings. Moreover, as we will see later, we should not think of the polarization as presenting two opposing and incompatible sides, but rather as a continuum. By "local population" we refer to a variety of social actors, ranging from isolated citizens to members of associations (involved either with migration in some way or with more general topics, such as cultural activities) and political and institutional representatives.

The emerging forms of mobilization that we will discuss in this chapter also involve migrants themselves as active actors within the process we studied. Despite some interesting work on the organization of migrants (Koopmans and Statham 1999, among others[7]), the specific question of migrants' rights advocacy is often neglected. This chapter also aims at filling this gap by studying migrants' opinions and claims related to migration politics and policies, as well as to the rules and actors of the reception system,[8] highlighting how experiences result from the combination of structural opportunities – or structural constraints – and actors' own resources (Martiniello and Rea 2014). This also means drawing attention to the claims that migrants may express – in a variety of ways, including through formal discourse and diverse actions and practices – with the aim of arguing against contemporary migration politics and policies.

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[4] For an elaboration of this theory, see: Kriesi et al. (2006).

[5] While the literature describes reactions and opinions based on emotion and compassion (Stattham and Geddes 2006; Ellerman 2006; Fassin 2010; Düvell 2007), we will highlight a variety of other motivations as well.

[6] Although anti-immigrant sentiments have increased over the last three decades (Semyonov, Raijman and Gorodzeisky 2006; Meuleman, Davidov and Billiet 2009), solidarity movements have received important media coverage in recent times. This is in general true for French-speaking Belgian regions, while in Flanders the rather limited amount of protest was amplified by the local press and was thus strongly visible. Moreover, some authors show that anti-immigrant sentiments are relevant even if less visible than pro-refugee ones, one example being the campaign against dual citizenship (Joppke 2002).

[7] More specifically on undocumented migrants, see: Hayter (2004) and Mouchard (2002).

[8] We were able to include in our analysis the opinions of some social workers from the reception centres, some members of associations and some lawyers, for example, but not those of the representatives of the institutional bodies involved, such as the Migration Office, Fedasil or the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS, see below on the role of these bodies). This is due to the difficulties involved in contacting and obtaining permission to interview these representatives during our fieldwork.

Related to the different profiles of actors involved in our study, we endeavour to analyze the reasons for their actions (connected with contextual aspects, as well as with personal history and motivations), and their own opinions and discourses concerning migration policies, the asylum system in more specific terms and its impacts on society. We are also interested in the mutual representations that each of these actors shapes, and more generally in the interactions between migrants and the local population.

Previous research results

In what follows, we discuss the existing literature on attitudes and actions regarding asylum seekers and refugees at the local level in Belgium, mainly drawing on the aforementioned previous research funded by the Belgian Science Policy BELSPO (Gsir et al. 2004; Meert et al. 2004; Meireman et al. 2004). This research pointed out that the forms that the interactions between migrants and the local population take, in particular in connection with issues of living together and dealing with public space and resources, respond to various factors (Gsir et al. 2004). First, a combination of global and local dynamics impacts politics and opinions. Restrictive migration policies influence a process of construction of alterity (migrants against the local self) and racialization of the other. These policies can be explained by contemporary extreme right-wing anti-immigrant arguments according to some scholars (Fekete 2006), but also by less recent but still operational colonial and postcolonial prejudices. Moreover, interpersonal representations and interactions between migrants and the local population are connected to larger social facts. For example, fears of refugees or migrants are linked to an increase in feelings of insecurity and to social downward mobility. These factors would make asylum seekers and refugees "not wanted and not welcome" (Gsir et al. 2004), in particular because of the belief that they would not necessarily be engaged in local economic and productive processes. Among other elements that influence representations and interactions is the moral engagement, be it individual or collective and locally or internationally based, with others' suffering (Fassin 2011)[9] that may motivate solidarity with (and among) migrants. Specific forms of representation and interaction are also connected with the type and frequency of contact with newcomers, ranging from avoidance and distance to intercultural exchange (Gsir et al. 2004). They emerge in relation to contextual factors, in particular the demographic, geographic and historical characteristics of the sites where encounters among refugees and local populations are generated, for example by the presence of an asylum seeker reception centre.[10]

As Meert et al. (2004) show, the role of contextual elements in shaping representations and attitudes is not to be neglected, in particular the influence deriving from (historically rooted) geographic and socio-economic spatial factors.[11]

[9] Indeed, a process of othering and racialization is active here too.

[10] The opening of a new centre in particular may generate various responses from the local population, as we will also see with reference to present research.

[11] Here we need to make a distinction between the formation of attitudes and the further shaping of existing attitudes. Whereas contextual elements have a strong effect on *existing*

The multitude of contextual factors in shaping attitudes towards reception centres and their inhabitants mean that attitudes are rarely a black-and-white matter, but rather a greyscale continuum of opposing values. Although this is a general process, the attitudes of people living in the direct surroundings of a reception centre are especially dynamic and complex, whereas the views of those living further away are more static and clear-cut. This fact nuances our hypothesis on the polarization of attitudes, and brings complexity to the analysis of what lies between a positive and a negative positioning. Based on qualitative research in five Belgian municipalities with a reception centre, Meert et al. (2004) distinguished six different axes that influence attitudes towards asylum seekers, most of which can have both a positive and negative influence: the media, an extreme-right discourse, neighbourhood characteristics, the proximity of the reception centre, participation in open-door events at the reception centre, and individuals' ethnicity. First, the media can strengthen feelings of fear, but can also lead to more empathy. Second, an extreme-right discourse leads to an increase in negative attitudes only. Third, neighbourhood characteristics can have a negative impact when the neighbourhood consists mainly of private properties, but a positive effect when the neighbourhood is characterized by strong social cohesion. Fourth, the proximity of a reception centre generally leads to more positive attitudes towards asylum seekers, as the people in the immediate neighbourhood are more informed and involved. Fifth, participation in an "open day", where interested outsiders can visit the centre, also leads to more positive attitudes, as certain viewpoints are likely to be refuted. Finally, ethnicity[12] works in both ways: on the one hand, having experienced migration or being close to people who have can lead to a better understanding and more empathy towards those who have experienced the same. On the other hand, people with a person history of migration might start considering the asylum seekers as competitors for the scarce resources in society.

The previous research results (Gsir et al. 2004; Meert et al. 2004; Meireman et al. 2004) show that positive or negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and reception centres do not necessarily lead to the undertaking of some sort of action. Moreover, representations and interactions change over time. As Lubbers, Coenders and Scheepers (2006) show, negative attitudes towards reception centres in the Netherlands are widespread but stay mainly hidden. Paradoxically, however, most protest against the influx of asylum seekers has occurred in localities where a reception centre has *opened*, whereas the *presence* of an asylum centre in the neighbourhood leads to a decrease in negative attitudes towards the centre. Whether people mobilize depends on a range of factors. Most importantly, both the motivation and capability (in the form of political opportunity) to mobilize need to be present, while levels of motivation can differ between communities as a result of different local contexts prior to – in this case – the opening of a reception centre (Wright and Boudet 2012). Thus, in this chapter we also aim to identify personal motivations and contextual

attitudes, individual characteristics, such as education and religion, exert an influence on the *formation* of attitudes towards asylum seekers (Meireman et al. 2004).

[12] The original authors use the Dutch term "etniciteit", which means "ethnicity", to refer to people with a migration background.

elements underlying the emergence of local action related to the opening or presence of a reception centre.

Research topics summarized

As is apparent from the previous paragraphs, our focus in this chapter is threefold. First, we will discuss the discourses, actions and forms of mobilization that relate to asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants in local communities. Besides describing the various forms of mobilization with the aim of supporting or protesting against a reception centre or initiative in Belgium, we will highlight the frames of mobilization and the role of political opportunity structures and give an overview of the various reasons to mobilize. A second focus of the chapter is the overall influence of asylum policies (which we will describe in the following section) on local communities, as not everyone mobilizes or has a strong opinion on the subject. We will study the "general" local opinion in those communities and the impact of a reception centre on social cohesion. Finally, we pay attention to migrants' own experiences, both with Belgian asylum procedures and with Belgian society, and their own mobilization.

Context of the Belgian Asylum Policy

This section aims at introducing a general overview of the asylum policy in Belgium, starting with a historical approach to the refugee reception crisis in 2015, followed by a discussion of the national institutional and political context. We give some facts and figures on immigration and asylum, and discuss the role of the federal government and local governments in the policy field of asylum.

A history of refugee crises

The refugee reception crisis has received a lot of media attention, due to the extent and the urgency of the phenomenon. As in other European countries, the number of asylum applications also increased in Belgium, with a peak of 38,990 applications in 2015 (Eurostat 2016).[13] Although this was a record in recent history, in other periods Belgium also received a vast number of asylum applications (see below). The former director general of Fedasil (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers – see below), Bob Pleysier, wrote in 2011 that "Asylum policy is born out of crises" (Pleysier 2011). The author discusses four crises before the refugee reception crisis of 2015, each of which has led to changes in asylum policy.

The first crisis dates from the 1980s, when an explicit reception policy did not exist yet. Asylum seekers were allowed to settle freely in any municipality and the local social welfare service was obliged to take care of their needs. Local governments, however, protested against this situation and started to refuse to register asylum seekers in their municipality. As a result, the government opened the first collective reception centre in Brussels (Petit-Château, or Klein Kasteeltje). However, this was

[13] Eurostat, *Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015*, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-press-releases/-/3-04032016-AP, accessed September 12, 2019.

insufficient as a solution, and Miet Smet, the State Secretary for Equal Opportunities at the time, reached an arrangement with the Belgian Red Cross to open additional reception sites.

The second crisis took place in the beginning of the 1990s, when the number of asylum applications increased due to the arrival of asylum seekers from the Balkans after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Starting in this period, the reception centres have become the first resort for asylum seekers, and the local social welfare services only intervene when the number of asylum applications has been recognized as sufficient.

The third crisis occurred at the turn of the century, when there was an enormous rise in asylum applications as a result of the Kosovo war, among other reasons. New reception centres were opened, but this was not sufficient and asylum seekers were again referred to the local social welfare services. In 1999 the Minister for Social Integration, Johan Vande Lanotte, launched the Local Reception Initiatives:[14] individual accommodation (houses and apartments) was offered to asylum seekers instead of financial support, which made the local social welfare services again a structural partner in the government's reception policy. Another important policy measure was the establishment of Fedasil (Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) in 2002, the mission of which was to coordinate the reception network and operate reception centres. A further milestone was the approval of the Reception Act of 2007, implementing the European directive on minimal norms for the reception of asylum seekers. This law establishes the provision of material reception for asylum seekers throughout the entire asylum procedure, encompassing shelter, food, clothes, medical, social and psychological support, a daily allowance, legal assistance, translation services and training.[15]

The fourth crisis announced itself after the regularization programme of 2009. The government failed to guarantee reception to all asylum seekers according to the Reception Law of 2007, and consequently a vast number of asylum seekers had no shelter at all, or were housed in hotels; some went to court and asked for penalty payments in order to enforce their rights. These facts were largely covered in the media, which was particularly detrimental to the asylum policy. Moreover, disagreement existed among the various responsible politicians in the government, and particularly between the Liberal Party on one hand and the Socialist Party on the other hand.. This process ended with the appointment of Maggie De Block from the Flemish Liberal Party Open VLD – Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten as Secretary of State for Asylum, Immigration and Social Integration in 2011. Starting from that period, only one government member has been responsible for migration and asylum policy.

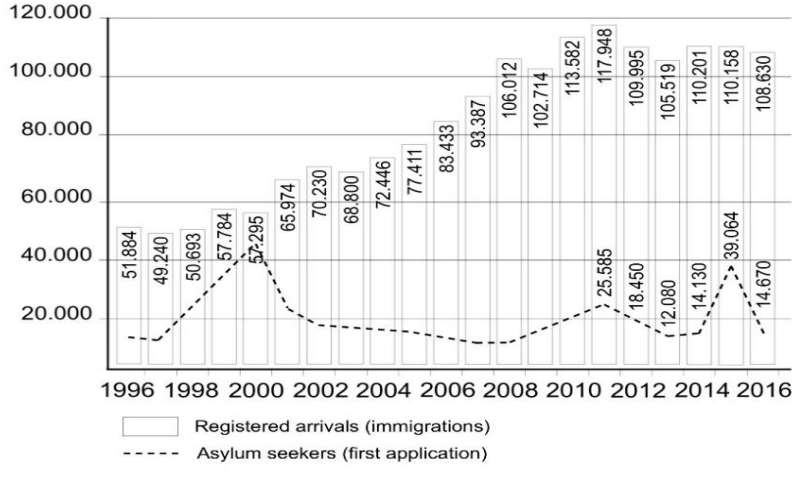
[14] In Dutch: Lokale Opvanginitiatieven (LOI); in French: Initiatives locales d'accueil (ILA).

[15] See: Fedasil, *Wettelijk kader* [Legal framework], (in Dutch or French), https://www.fedasil.be/nl/asiel-belgie/wettelijk-kader, accessed June 6, 2019.

Facts and figures

Although we focus on asylum in this chapter, it is important to note that asylum is part of a broader immigration phenomenon. Immigration to Belgium has increased in the last few decades. According to statistics from Myria[16], 51,884 incoming foreigners were registered in 1996, whereas registrations rose to 108,630 in 2016. Immigrants coming to Belgium are mainly EU citizens, making up 57 per cent of all registered immigrants in 2016. Concerning reasons for immigration, family reunification is the most important legal immigration motive for third countries (i.e. for non-EU citizens): it accounts for 50 per cent of the first residence permits in 2016. Since 2015, refugee status or the status of subsidiary protection comes in at second place with 17 per cent of the first residence permits, followed by educational reasons (12 per cent) and reasons of paid employment (10 per cent). Figure 7.1 shows the relationship between the asylum applications and general immigration flows. The figure shows that the year 2015 counted around 39,000 asylum demands (first application), while 110,000 immigrants were registered, which is a ratio of 4 to 10. In 2016 this ratio was 1 to 10.

Figure 7.1: Number of registered immigrations, with exception of register changes and new registrations, and asylum seekers (1st application) in Belgium, 1996–2016



Source: www.myria.be

The number of asylum applications increased between 2009 and 2011, then decreased, and reached the highest point in 2015 with 44,760 applications. Afterwards the number of applications decreased. The recognition rate numbers have also increased since 2012. While in 2012 only one fifth of asylum applications received a positive decision, more than half of the applications in 2015 did, which can be explained by the shift in countries of origin towards war-torn countries. Indeed, since

[16] Myria, *Migratie- en asielstromen: de cijfers ontrafeld!* [Migration and asylum flows: the figures unraveled], 2017 (in Dutch), Myriatics #8 – November, https://www.myria.be/files/171028_Myriatics_8_NL.pdf, accessed June 6, 2019.

2015 the majority of asylum seekers have come from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, while 2018 also showed a significant influx from Palestine. The recognition rates for these countries, however, are not equal. While almost 90 per cent of the asylum seekers from Syria and Palestine received a positive decision, the recognition rate for people from Afghanistan is around 50 per cent, and for Iraq 30 per cent.

Multi-level and multi-actor governance

Belgium is a federal state, which means that responsibilities are divided between the federal and the regional government level. Concerning asylum and migration, legislation, procedures and reception are the responsibility of the federal government. Once an asylum seeker is recognized as a refugee, the regional governments are responsible for integration. Responsibilities such as education, housing and professional training have been transferred to the regions as a result of the different state reforms. The division of responsibilities, however, is not always very strict, since initiatives for integration can also be taken when asylum seekers are still staying in reception centres. For example, children go to school, language or other training courses are organized and asylum seekers can accept jobs after a waiting period of four months. Asylum and migration are thus a typical example of multi-level governance, meaning that the government levels are intertwined and that several government levels intervene in complex policy issues (Adam et al. 2018 2017; Hondeghem 2017).

At the federal level, several public institutions take up important roles in asylum policy. The Immigration Office registers asylum seekers and is also responsible for an initial check (e.g. the application of the Dublin procedure). The Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) is responsible for the in-depth examination of asylum applications, and appeals are handled by the Council for Alien Law Litigation and by the State Appeals Council. Finally, Fedasil coordinates the reception network and is responsible for the coordination of asylum seekers' voluntary return. Regional institutions, then, are responsible for the integration of newcomers. Finally, local governments have an important role in the management of reception and integration issues, and the organization of the Local Reception Initiatives of the local social welfare centres.

At all levels of government, institutions collaborate with external, non-governmental actors (private organizations, civil society and citizens), a fact that prompts us not only to speak of multi-level, but also of multi-actor governance (Van Heffen et al. 2000). Societal problems have become a "governance" responsibility, meaning that the government has to cooperate with other actors in different combinations of roles and responsibilities. In the field of asylum policy, some non-governmental organizations play a key role. We have already referred to the role played since 1989 by the Red Cross in the reception of asylum seekers. Fedasil[17] has arrangements with this organization in order to make agreements on budget, operational issues and quality assurance. Indeed, public service delivery is partly outsourced to non-governmental organizations, which

[17] As Fedasil is at the same time operator (it manages some reception centres) and coordinator of the reception network, it is sometimes put in a difficult position as arrangements have to be negotiated with the non-governmental organizations.

fits into a tradition of pillarization in Belgium (Verschuere and De Corte 2017). But non-governmental organizations can also take up the role of pressure group or policy influencer by means of different insider and outsider strategies, such as writing policy briefs or organizing events and demonstrations. An interesting example is that of the Flemish organization Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen acting as a pressure group and policy influencer, but also creating and coordinating support initiatives for refugees and immigrant newcomers.

The involvement of local government in the policy field of asylum

Although asylum policy is under the jurisdiction of the federal government, local governments are strongly affected at the time of the opening and closing of collective reception centres, which can have a tremendous impact on the local community. The location of a reception centre is strongly determined by the availability of infrastructure, as well as by a political decision-making process in which an equilibrium is sought, for example between regions, but also according to the political composition of the local government. The decision regarding the location of a collective reception centre is made by the Council of Ministers and proposed by the Secretary of State responsible for asylum and migration. The role of Fedasil in this decision-making process is limited.[18] Equally, most of the municipalities involved have been allowed little or no participation or advice in the decision-making process concerning the opening of collective reception centres. Mayors are informed shortly before the opening of a centre by the Secretary of State.

As the management of reception centres was in the hands of Fedasil or non-governmental organizations, local governments mainly took up the role of facilitator, stimulating dialogue among the different actors involved, as well as with local populations. In most local governments, consultation structures were set up in order to discuss and solve practical issues (such as dealing with incidents and the enrolment of children in local schools), and to promote awareness-raising initiatives. In some cases, local governments resisted the opening of reception centres, putting forward arguments based on figures concerning the increased presence of foreigners in their municipality. In a couple of these cases, the political pressure has been sufficient to prevent the opening of a reception centre. However, in our research we have found that local governments have had a positive attitude overall towards the opening of collective reception centres. They saw it as their contribution within a collective responsibility to face the challenges of the refugee reception crisis.

Policy and discourses of the federal government

As well as other policy matters, immigration and asylum policies are not unified in the Belgian Federation. Flemish political parties, mostly in the right-wing spectrum,

[18] This is an illustration of the concept of "political salience": when a decision is highly political, politicians will take the lead instead of the administration (Koop 2011). A clear illustration of this principle is the decision on the closing of collective reception centres in 2018: the Council of Ministers decided to close all recently opened reception centres, whereas Fedasil put forward another proposal in an attempt to optimize the reception network.

bear a more restrictive and repressive political approach than French-speaking parties. Furthermore, the existence of a strong extreme-right party represented in all the parliaments in Flanders, the Vlaams Belang, pushes the media and political debate towards openly anti-immigration positions and even racist rhetorics (De Cleen et al. 2017). Since 2014 Belgium is governed by right-wing coalitions consisting of the Flemish-nationalist and right-wing conservative N-VA, Christian-democrats (CD&V), and Liberals (Open VLD/MR). In 2014 Maggie De Block was succeeded by Theo Francken – a member of the right-wing party Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) – as a new Secretary of State for Asylum, Migration and Administrative Simplification. To a large extent the former government's asylum policy was continued. The new Secretary of State, however, distinguished himself through his harsh discourse in the media (including social media).

The federal government declaration of 2014 aimed for "a coherent and effective asylum policy, with respect of international commitments, including quality of reception, simple and fast procedures, and a humane and severe return policy".[19] However, the new government showed a restrictive approach especially in the attempt to oppose asylum application by changing the list of safe countries. To reduce asylum applications, the government announced "dissuasion campaigns" to deter those asylum seekers with few chances to be accepted from coming to Belgium[20]. The government declaration also foresaw to limit family reunification, to push voluntary return and to increase places in detention centres, especially for families.

The government also stated a clear preference for collective reception sites, and stated that "individual reception should be reserved for vulnerable groups (e.g. disabled people, pregnant women, single parents with children, and unaccompanied minors) and asylum seekers with a high chance of recognition".[21] According to the Reception Act of 2007, reception was organized in different phases: while they were first hosted in collective reception centres, in theory asylum seekers could request a transfer to individual accommodation six months after their application for asylum. This was changed with the "new" reception model. Some groups can now be transferred earlier to individual accommodation, although this is not an automatic right, as it depends on the reception capacity. Other groups, however, will not have the possibility of transfer anymore. The rationale behind this change was not explained in the government declaration. Moreover, a report from the Central Audit Office[22] concluded that individual accommodation places are less costly than collective reception sites due to the staff costs, which are higher in collective centres than in individual accommodation. This evidence challenges the explicit policy preference for collective centres since the last government. Based on the interviews collected, we

[19] Prime Minister (Charles Michel), *Regeerakkoord/Accord de Gouvernement* [Government deal], 2014 (in Dutch and French), p. 103, https://www.premier.be/sites/default/files/articles/Accord_de_Gouvernement_-_Regeerakkoord.pdf, accessed June 6, 2019.

[20] *Ivi*, p. 153.

[21] *Ivi*, p. 157.

[22] Asylum in Europe, *Rekenhof. Opvang van asielzoekers* [Court of Audit. Reception of asylum seekers], 2017 (in Dutch), https://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017_41_opvangasielzoekers.pdf, accessed June 6, 2019.

can conclude that this can only be explained through the fear of attraction effects, as individual accommodation offers more comfort and privacy than collective reception sites. This policy aims at deterring asylum seekers from believing that they can stay in the country for a long period.

The "new" reception model also changed the role of local government and of some non-governmental organizations. While Local Reception Initiatives used to be responsible for all kinds of individual accommodation, they now have a specific mission, namely the accommodation of asylum seekers who are in a transitional phase, meaning in the period just before or after their recognition as refugees. This fits with the policy decision to reduce the number of individual accommodation sites in favour of collective centres. The NGOs organizing individual accommodation were expected to focus on vulnerable people only. Some NGOs, such as Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen and Coordination des Initiatives des Réfugiés et Exilés, did not agree with this new mission and therefore stopped their contracts with Fedasil. Although the "new" reception model was launched in 2014, it was not immediately implemented.

The huge influx of asylum seekers in the autumn of 2015 put high pressure on the federal government responsible for the reception of asylum seekers. Initially, the Secretary of State Theo Francken was decided that a maximum of 150 asylum seekers per day could register at the Immigration Office. This led to long lines of waiting asylum seekers, and people had to sleep outside, for example in the Maximiliaan Park nearby. Inspired by the Refugees Welcome movement, thousands of citizens mobilized in August 2015, assisting the asylum seekers who stopped in the park and offering food, clothes, first aid and hosting. Maximiliaan Park was actually turned into a transit camp (Lafaut and Coene 2019). In September, this mobilization structured in the Plateforme Citoyenne de Soutien aux Réfugiés: BxlRefugees, gathering volunteers, activists, students, undocumented migrants and several representatives of NGO's including Médecins Sans Frontières (Depraetere and Oosterlynck 2017). Park Maximiliaan and the actors involved quickly got media attention and became the most visible expression of the solidarity towards asylum seekers but also of the protest against the government's political orientation and discourse. At the same time, BxlRefugees had also access to logistic and financial support from the local government of the Brussels-Capital Region, finding opportunities in the multi-level governance system (Vandevoordt 2019). This kind of civil society initiatives have been interpreted in Belgium as replacing the government immobility.

The refugee reception crisis was a huge challenge for Fedasil that opened new reception centres itself, but also made an appeal to NGOs such as the Red Cross. The Belgian army provided empty barracks, but other buildings offered by real estate offices, holiday centres, youth movements and so on were made use of as well. In each case, an operator was contracted, by means of a decision taken by the Council of Ministers allocating extra budget. The reception capacity grew from around 17,000 places at the beginning of 2015 to 33,659 place at the beginning of 2016, with the level of occupation at 96 per cent.[23] When the refugee reception crisis became less acute

[23] Fedasil, *Review 2018*, 2019, https://www.fedasil.be/sites/default/files/content/download/files/annual_report_2018.pdf, accessed June 6, 2019.

in the spring of 2016, the government made the decision to decrease the reception capacity. Phase one of the plan entailed the closing of around 13,000 reception sites between June 2016 and September 2017. Criteria for closure were the bad quality of a given reception centre, the excessive costs of its operation and the termination of contracts for its management. Moreover, all reception sites managed by the private sector were closed. In phase two, the reception capacity of collective centres and reception sites owned by the local government would be further reduced. At the beginning of 2018, the decision was made that all recently opened collective reception centres would be closed;[24] this was a purely political decision that did not take into account the quality of the reception centres, contrary to what Fedasil had advised. In September 2018 the government had to revise its decision, as the number of asylum applications had increased again since the summer of 2018.

Concerning discourses, it is possible to observe the repressive nature of the government's approach in the debate concerning a draft law aimed at criminalizing asylum seekers support initiatives. In the Parliamentary sessions on 19 October 2017, Theo Francken declared that the restriction of uncontrolled migration was a main political priority for the EU in 2018.[25] To this aim, the politician introduced a bill which will allow police to search the home of citizens suspected of hosting irregular migrants, and to arrest undocumented people before their expulsion. Given that the draft law contravenes the principle of inviolability of the domicile inscribed in the Belgian Constitution and in the European Human Rights Convention, it has prompted strong criticism and opposition also within the government. Prime Minister Charles Michel decided to withdraw the draft law in September 2018. In any case, the debate over Francken's proposition had the effect to increase the civil society mobilization against the government's approach.

The Belgian government aligned with the two reception priorities established in 2015 by the European Commission: relocation, although Belgium received only 2448 people out of the 3812 planned, and resettlment. Overall, throughout the long summer of migration the country hosted numerous asylum registrations, similarly to what happened under previous governments. However, an evident change compared to the past has concerned the discourses, and the way these framed the political debate. Francken, in particular, contributed through his discourse and tweets to support a specific description of migration as a threat (De Cleen et al. 2017), and showed strong prejudicial attitude.[26] On several occasions, the former State Secretary expressed the

[24] Among others, six case studies examined in this research (Arlon, Namur, Saint-Ode, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Tournai and Houthalen-Helchteren) were involved in this plan for closing reception centres.

[25] Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers/Chambre des Représentants de Belgique, *DOC54 2708/017*, 2017 (in Dutch and French), p. 12, https://www.dekamer.be/doc/FLWB/pdf/54/2708/54K2708017.pdf, accessed July 30, 2019.

[26] In an incident on January 2016, for example, a newspaper reported that a minor was assaulted in the communal swimming pool of Koksijde, on the Belgian coast, by an asylum seeker. Without waiting for judgment, Francken decided to detain the migrant in a detention centre. Shortly later, it was established that the asylum seeker had actually helped the child who was struggling in the water. Following the 2015-2016 New Year's Eve sexual assaults in

will to reform the Belgian immigration and asylum system following the Australian model, based on strict selection of immigrants and the confinement of asylum seekers to a remote island in the Pacific Ocean.[27] In this scenario, it is not surprising Francken's refusal to sign the Global Compact for Migration, leading to a domestic political crisis and the decision from N-VA to leave the Belgian government coalition on December 2018.

Methodology

Choice of the field sites: localities with a reception centre

In order to explore this chapter's research topics, we conducted qualitative research in a series of sites, chosen by taking several factors into consideration. First of all (and, more specifically, with the aim of adopting a diachronic perspective), we decided to investigate sites where asylum seeker reception centres had opened before and after 2015. The sites where a reception centre had opened before 2015 that we included in our research[28] are Fraipont in Wallonia, Brussels (the Petit Château or Klein Kasteeltje centre) in the Brussels-Capital Region and Sint-Niklaas in Flanders. The selection of sites where an asylum seeker centre opened in 2015 or after was based on different criteria. First, we compared on the one hand the demographic data concerning the centre (for instance, the number of asylum seekers residing in it), and on the other hand the data concerning the village, town or city where the centre is located (mainly focusing on the overall number of inhabitants). A second factor upon which we based our fieldwork choices, and which influenced in particular our selection of case studies in Flanders, was the geographic location of the centre relative to the town's city centre: an asylum seeker centre can be located (far) out of town, at the town's border, or in the city centre. This rationale, and the need to choose contextually diverse but comparable case studies, led us to select the sites shown in Table 7.1 for conducting fieldwork.

Cologne, the former State Secretary wanted to create mandatory courses for asylum seekers to learn respect for women. The courses would be mandatory for Muslims in particular.

[27] See for example: *Le Soir*, "Asile et migration: Francken veut le modèle australien, le MR est ouvert" [Asylum and migration: Francken wants the Australian model, the MR is open], 2018 (in French), https://plus.lesoir.be/151261/article/2018-04-15/asile-et-migration-francken-veut-le-modele-australien-le-mr-est-ouvert, accessed August 6, 2019.

[28] These localities are among those where the previous research was conducted (Gsir et al. 2004; Meert et al. 2004).

Table 7.1: Fieldworks (reception centres).

Field site name	Location	Organization	Maximum capacity	Environment	Local population on 1/4/2019[29]
Opvangcentrum Sint-Niklaas	Sint-Niklaas	Rode Kruis	215	City centre	78,591
Opvangcentrum Houthalen-Helchteren	Houthalen-Helchteren	Rode Kruis	700	Peri-urban	31,308
Peeterskasteel	Scherpenheuvel	Caritas International	174	City centre	23,147
Belgrade	Namur	Croix Rouge	400	Peri-urban	111,717
Le Celly	Sainte-Ode	Croix Rouge	500	Rural	2,930
Visage du Monde	Arlon	Croix Rouge	970	Peri-urban	30,614
Centre d'accueil de Tournai	Tournai	Croix Rouge	750	City centre	70,039
Centre d'accueil Le Mérisier	Fraipont (Trooz)	Croix Rouge	305	Peri-urban	8,574
Petit-chateau	Brussels	Fedasil	813	Urban	183,971

Grassroots initiatives

As for the grassroots initiatives, we conducted fieldwork in three sites spread throughout Belgium, with different contexts and different levels of visibility in society more widely. The most mediatized location is Maximiliaan Park, located in front of the Immigration Office in Brussels, together with other areas around the North Station in Brussels, which to this day form the ground for large-scale pro-migrant action and mobilization. These have constituted grassroots-organized reception initiatives starting in August 2015, involving high numbers of volunteers and migrants in humanitarian action as well as in a mobilization process protesting the lack of intervention from public authorities in hosting asylum seekers or in guaranteeing the protection of their fundamental human rights, regardless of the legal status of the individuals.[30] The volunteers involved established an initially informal and later on more structured organization to coordinate their actions, named *Plateforme citoyenne de soutien aux réfugiés* [Citizen's Platform for Refugee Support]. In Liège, we studied the mobilization that emerged around the occupation of some public uninhabited

[29] Demographic figures (of this and the following table) have been retrieved from: Fgov, *Globaal bevolkingscijfers per gemeente* [Global population figures per municipality], 2019 (in Dutch), https://www.ibz.rrn.fgov.be/fileadmin/user_upload/nl/bev/statistieken/stat-1-1_n.pdf, accessed August 15, 2019.

[30] While this initiative provided assistance in 2015 to people willing and waiting to apply for asylum in Belgium, many of the migrants involved in these actions since 2017 do not *a priori* intend to apply for asylum and reside only temporarily, and without any residence permit, in Belgium, since they are destined for other countries, such as the United Kingdom.

buildings, which was started in 2015 by a group of migrants who were refused residence permits in Belgium. They founded a collective called *La Voix des sans-papiers de Liège* [The Voice of Liège's Undocumented Immigrants] (VSP hereafter) to claim regularization, not only due to the reasons that made them leave their country of origin, but also in recognition of their *de facto* integration in the local context. Their actions are backed by a group of volunteers (either belonging to associations and local institutions, or isolated mobilized individuals) constituting a *Comité de soutien* (support committee). Finally, we conducted fieldwork in the Belgian coastal village of Zeebrugge, where in 2015 a group of volunteers started to provide the most basic necessities (such as shelter and food) to refugees and migrants trying to reach the United Kingdom. Zeebrugge has been an attractive site for migrants since the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the war in Afghanistan led to a rise in the numbers of mainly Afghan migrants on their way to the other side of the North Sea. Table 7.2 summarizes some information related to these field sites.

Table 7.2: Fieldworks (informal settlments)

Field site name	Location	Organization	Maximum capacity	Environment	Local population on 1/4/2019
Maximiliaan Park	Brussels	Plateforme citoyenne de soutien aux réfugiés (Platform)	Approx. 200-300	City centre	183,971
n.a.	Zeebrugge	Local priest and volunteers	n.a.	Peri-urban	Approx. 4,300 (in 2014)
Burenville	Liege	La Voix des sans papiers de Liège (VSP) / Comité de soutien à la VSP	Approx. 100[31]	City centre	198,444

In these contexts, it has been interesting to analyze the interactions between migrants and a complex network of actors (including institutions, associations, isolated citizens and political representatives) in the implementation of the studied actions. We could also compare the rationales underlying the mobilization.

Fieldwork methodology

The methodology adopted to conduct fieldwork in these sites is composite, in order to respond to the variety of profiles of the actors involved. Recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted with research participants living in the neighbourhoods of all of the field sites above, and/or belonging to civil society, the political and administrative domain or the institutional reception system. We used collective interviews (either structured focus groups or more informal collective conversations) and participant observation to engage migrants, especially in our study of the non-institutional initiatives in Brussels and Liège, but also to observe the interactions occurring between migrants and the local environment, in some cases

[31] This number only includes the individuals residing in the occupations (others are affiliated to the group but live elsewhere in the city of Liège).

related to institutional reception centres, such as Fraipont and Namur.[32] We contacted our research participants mainly via the directors of the asylum seeker centres and the coordinators of migrant and citizen initiatives, and through getting in contact with local associations working with migrants in connection with the studied field sites. Fieldwork took place at slightly different times depending on the sites in question and contextual factors; however, overall it lasted from October 2017 to February 2019. It is important to mention that within this period, several policy changes were announced by the federal government that will probably have influenced the opinions and actions of our respondents. Most importantly, as mentioned above, it was announced in March 2018 that nine reception centres opened during the reception crisis would close, including all of the "new" reception centres in our fieldwork. While it is likely that this news influenced the opinion of local citizens, it definitely had an impact on our work in the reception centres themselves, as the centre staff were working towards the closing of the centres. In September 2018, a further announcement was made that several reception centres, including the ones where we conducted fieldwork, would stay open for a longer period of time, again causing diverse reactions among our research participants.

The total number of research initiatives, including all field sites, are as follows: 398 semi-structured interviews, 6 semi-structured collective interviews, 137 activities of participant observation. Moreover, these initiatives were accompanied by a non-systematic but still relevant review of press and online material (websites and Facebook groups connected to the volunteering initiatives, for example) that helped us to gather further or contextual information on the studied movements, as well as to access additional research data. The analysis of the collected material – recorded and transcribed interviews, field notes and online information – involved different methodologies, mainly depending on the researcher's approach, and included labelling and coding the interviews with the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, in particular for Flemish fieldwork material, and micro-analysis of written text (Emerson et al. 2011) for Walloon and Brussels-Capital Region fieldwork material. This composite analytical approach did not prevent us from establishing connections within the gathered material, finding recurrent themes, convergences and divergences, and thus reaching a complex description and examination of the dynamics at stake.

Pro-Migrant Mobilization Actions – Frames of Mobilization

The adopted methodology and the variety of sites that have been the object of this research enabled us to collect different examples of how mobilization around asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants has developed in Belgium. Contextual elements influence the emergence of certain frames of mobilization, since the latter develop in connection with previous dynamics that were already operating in the sites in question, as well as with the overall discursive environment. We here

[32] Observations targeted both internal services (medical and social services and internal workshops in several centres, for example) and external or open-doors initiatives (such as activities with young asylum seekers, or projects developed by asylum seekers in cooperation with organizations independent from the centre.

consider "frames" not only as interpretative schemes of experiences (see Goffman 1974) but also as performative patterns intended "to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists" (Snow and Benford 1998: 198). The initiatives studied, here conceptualized as social movements, operate with specific intentions and are based on specific rationales. Among our case studies, we observed actions contextually motivated by humanitarian concerns, by criticism specifically targeting the institutional system of reception as well as migration politics more broadly – and their effect in producing "illegal" migrants (De Genova 2002) – and by the will to promote a more inclusive form of citizenship. These three frames of action often overlapped in most of the sites where we conducted research, becoming porous categories (Vertongen 2018). Moreover, they interact with other factors (namely network dynamics) and additional rationales that we will illustrate in the following sections.

The humanitarian (and legalist) rationale in Zeebrugge and Brussels

The mobilization initiatives developed in Zeebrugge and Brussels mainly aim at providing humanitarian relief and basic necessities to migrants in need who did not necessarily apply for asylum in Belgium. Volunteers' commitment started with bringing daily meals to the migrants, and expanded to arranging shelter and sanitation and providing clothes. In Zeebrugge, the local police acted firmly against the migrants' presence: for example, the police periodically searched for migrants' backpacks and other belongings in the dunes, collecting and destroying everything they could find. The police also held raids at food distribution times, arresting the migrants present. This legalistic approach adopted by the local political actors conflicted with the volunteers' approach of providing humanitarian relief and resulted in contrasting frames in terms of the help provided. Whereas the volunteers see their actions as a way to minimize disturbances to the local community by migrants, since they believe migrants would still be coming to Zeebrugge even without their support, the local political actors at the time believed the volunteers' actions caused a so-called "attraction effect" in Zeebrugge. However, despite the visible contrast in frames, both the political actors and the volunteers did share the conviction that migrants should be convinced to apply for asylum in Belgium. Indeed, the volunteers provided information on the possibilities for asylum application in Belgium. In their eyes, however, providing basic needs as well as correct information on the possibilities of asylum in Belgium should be the government's job. As such, these particular actions can be interpreted as a criticism towards the institutional reception system that denies the presence of these migrants. Indeed, according to the volunteers, the police actions were counterproductive, as the migrants' trust in the government would decrease even more, diminishing the chances that they could be convinced to apply for asylum in Belgium. Even if the stances of both volunteers and political actors aimed to diminish the number of migrants coming to Zeebrugge in order to reach the United Kingdom, the underlying reasons for this aim range from humanitarian claims on the one hand to claims targeting the apparent disturbances the migrants cause on the other.

In Brussels, major criticisms were expressed by the Citizen's Platform against the federal government, and more specifically the Secretary of State for Migration and

Asylum, Theo Francken. Indeed, while most of the time both local and regional political stakeholders provided assistance to the Platform in order to facilitate the coordination of their support work, the federal government was held accountable for the migrants' humanitarian situation. The initiatives analyzed were organized in Brussels during the summer of 2017, when the centre of the city saw a substantial increase in the number of migrants arriving, passing through, waiting and wandering with the main objective of finding a way to reach the United Kingdom. Given the fact that they did not want to apply for asylum in Belgium, these migrants, mainly coming from the African continent, could not benefit from the official refugee reception system and raised several *de facto* humanitarian issues. The government's response focused on security and on short-term solutions to cope with those migrants, rather than on structural and political arrangements. The will to exclude migrants who did not correspond to any administrative category was also evidenced through the organization of police raids in the neighbourhood, leading to the detention and/or dispersal of migrants in an irregular situation: "The initial goal was to encourage people in the Maximiliaan Park to apply for asylum. However, it has had little or no effect until now. Therefore, it is recommended that police intervention be increased. [...] About 20 to 30 people are arrested every day during these interventions" (minutes of a meeting to prepare a police intervention, 4 September 2017). Using the situation in Calais as an example of one to avoid, and by means of agreements with some African countries to facilitate migrants' deportations as a deterring factor, policymakers at the federal level strongly opposed the assistance provided to irregular migrants in Belgium.

The Citizen's Platform has been operating since 2015, taking advantage of a legal framework allowing the provision of aid for humanitarian reasons to people in irregular situations.[33] Since the summer of 2017, the members of the Platform have tried to find a volunteer for each migrant in the neighbourhood every evening. The district of the Brussels-North railway station has become a meeting point where night-time accommodation is arranged, sometimes of up to 300 individuals.[34] In addition to housing assistance, the Platform has also developed political and advocacy actions aimed at challenging security policies and claiming human reception rights for migrants: "The Citizen's Platform for Refugee Support aims to build concrete solidarity with all migrants. It denounces and fights against the current state of Belgian and European migration policies. The right to live in dignity belongs to everyone".[35] The first aim of the Platform is to call for different institutions and political stakeholders to assume their responsibilities in the reception of migrants – whether or not they have applied for asylum: "The Platform does not want to take the place of the State, but to help to denounce its failings, to call [them] to assume their responsibilities and thus to encourage institutions and organizations to act according to their responsibilities"

[33] Article 77 of the law of 15 December 1980 on foreigners explicitly states that help can be provided to a person in an irregular situation "if the aid is provided mainly for humanitarian reasons".

[34] During the day and starting from this site, migrants try to find ways of "trying their luck", that is, reaching the United Kingdom.

[35] BxlRefugees, *About us*, http://www.bxlrefugees.be/en/qui-sommes-nous/, accessed April 8 2019.

(official statement before the local election, released on Facebook by one of the Platform coordinators, 10 October 2018). During our interview with the spokesperson for the initiative in 2018, he raised another dimension of their political goals, that is, including civil society and citizens in the political debate over migration issues: "The only strategy is to say, to some extent: 'Ladies and gentlemen, you have your place in the debate. You have the right to express yourself and to receive answers'" (interview, spokesman for the Platform, 2 March 2018). Political activism thus entered a frame of mobilization originally based on a humanitarian rationale, and the Platform played the role of an opportunity structure enabling this shift to emerge. Volunteers' involvement in political power struggles could also be seen in their participation in and organization of several *interpellations citoyennes*, that is, the raising of issues by citizens at the municipal level, concerning in particular the legislative proposal to facilitate arrests of illegal residents in private places,[36] and the campaign "*Communes hospitalières*" developed by the NGO CNCD 11.11.11.[37] Humanitarianism has thus had a subversive effect (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen 2019): "We have never seen so much demand for volunteerism. There is unanimity within the various NGOs, the Red Cross, etc. We have never seen so many politicians who have become pro-migrant. [...] It's a masterstroke" (interview, director of an NGO collaborating with the Platform, 11 June 2018). However, not all volunteers engaged in the initiative necessarily agree with its political orientation. At the start of the action, debates were held concerning the name of the Platform, leading to the choice that "refugees" rather than "migrants" would appear in it, so as not to engage with issues concerning people whose asylum application is rejected (and who thus become undocumented). In this case, the willingness to perform a charitable activity through providing assistance is seen as incompatible with (or at least not necessarily connected to) political ideas related to migration policies, migrant regularization and migrants' legal status: "I got there and there were people who needed help. […] [politics] did not interest me and I think that people are not interested in them either. Refugees Welcome […] there was a *bobo*-chic thing where everyone wants to do their little thing […]" (interview, member of Platform coordination, Brussels, 2 March 2017). As a consequence of this divergence of concerns, a "clash" appeared "between those who work on the regularization of undocumented migrants and those who work with migrants in transit. Those who work with undocumented migrants are in a significant social conflict. It's not the same people. When we see families who come with their young children to

[36] This bill, introduced on December 7 2017, aimed to amend the law of 15 December 1980 on access to the territory, residence, settlement and deportation of foreigners. See: Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers/Chambre des Représentants de Belgique, *DOC54 2798/001*, 2017 (in Dutch and French), http://www.lachambre.be/FLWB/PDF/54/2798/54K2798001.pdf, accessed April 8, 2019. The bill has not been approved nor implemented up until now.

[37] See: Commune Hospitalière, *Rendons Notre Commune Hospitalière* [Let's make our Municipality Welcoming], https://www.communehospitaliere.be/, accessed 27 February, 2019. This campaign aims at guaranteeing equal opportunities for, and facilitating services to, migrants (notwithstanding their legal status, and for example by supplying housing and access to medical assistance), as well as fighting against structural discrimination.

a demonstration with slogans like 'First, second, third generation', it's a little weird" (interview, director of an NGO, Brussels, 11 June 2018).

As we have seen, both in Zeebrugge and Brussels, the volunteers' primary concern is to provide humanitarian relief to those migrants who fall outside the administrative system. Whereas the "movement" in Zeebrugge remained rather small, the movement in Brussels gained ground rapidly and became a strong institutional actor. We believe one possible explanation for this difference lies in the political context: indeed, while the local political actors in Brussels were supportive of the Platform, the volunteers in Zeebrugge met with resistance from the local government. Initially, this seems surprising, as the mayor of Brugge (of which Zeebrugge is a part) at the time belonged to the socialist party in Flanders.[38] Their fear, however, was that the local government would lose votes to the extreme-right Flemish party in the then-upcoming local elections, whereas such a credible political alternative from the right of the political spectrum was not present in Brussels.

The rationale of the "transversal struggles" in Liège

The profiles of migrants involved in the mobilization initiatives that we studied in Liège are different from those in Zeebrugge and Brussels, although the majority of these individuals share the condition of irregular residency in Belgium. Again, in the case of Liège, actions based on an initial humanitarian concern later shifted towards a political objective, which is not necessarily directed towards the reception system and rules, but rather towards the regularization of undocumented migrants residing in Belgium for a long time (despite the rejection of their asylum applications, or of any other type of residence permit) and intending to stay. Moreover, this objective is embedded in a larger rationale which addresses contemporary migration politics that are considered inappropriate – and indeed inhumane[39] – and a willingness to promote a more inclusive citizenship "consisting of stable patterns of civic solidarity" (Heins and Unrau 2018: 228). This aspect, coupled with other contextual factors, determined the emergence of a specific frame of mobilization. The mobilization actions implemented by the VSP collective started in 2015 to support the occupation of uninhabited public buildings by migrants who had no other place to live and needed help in terms of basic needs (shelter, food, clothes, etc.). The political ideas emerging from these initiatives are often seen as being in continuity with struggles that have taken place in the past (at least since the end of the 1990s) towards the regularization of undocumented migrants. Two governmental one-shot regularization programmes were held in the country, one in 2000 – with the introduction of regularization records

[38] The current mayor, who belongs to a centrist party, announced in February 2019 that he would stop police actions against the migrants, claiming that he does not believe in the attraction effect. See: *De Morgen*, "'Geen razzia's meer op transitmigranten in Zeebrugge': nieuwe burgemeester wil andere aanpak" ["No more raids on transit migrants in Zeebrugge": new mayor wants a different approach], 2019 (in Dutch), https://www.demorgen.be/politiek/geen-razzia-s-meer-op-transitmigranten-in-zeebrugge-nieuwe-burgemeester-wil-andere-aanpak~b38b3030/, accessed August 15, 2019).

[39] These discourses also recall the historical opposition – and related protests – to the centre for illegal migrants in Vottem, established in 1999.

for around 50,000 individuals (Adam et al. 2002: 9) – and one in 2009, which led to the regularization of more than 26,000 people.[40] Liège and its political and social actors are described as having actively participated in these policies, a fact that would be in line with a narrative that puts forward the historical multicultural essence of Liège, as well as a general welcoming attitude (of both the local population and local policies): Liège has an "identity that has always fed on crossing and migrations, connected with science, work. [...] Thus what a foreigner is is not negatively construed here. I have the feeling that we see this more as a contribution. A contribution to the workforce, in the intellectual sphere, in culture, in gastronomy. Thus it is a state of mind, the state of mind of an open nation" (interview, Willy Demeyer, Mayor of Liège, 2 May 2018). Liège has also adhered to the abovementioned campaign "*Communes hospitalières*" and, contrary to the federal attitude on migration issues, the government has put in place a set of "sanctuary practices", that is, "an expression of anger and outrage; as such, it offers an opportunity to engage with new forms of social action and activism" (Vannini et al. 2018: 165).

Within this discursive context, a narrative emerged around the fact that migrants share some preoccupations (and related rights) with other local inhabitants, and consequently, common action may be of overall benefit to the local society. The rationale of the "transversality of the struggles" or of the "convergence of the struggles" (*transversalité des luttes* and *convergence des luttes* in French) is described as a necessary tool to ensure the fulfilment of individual and collective rights. It mainly develops in terms of class membership, such as workers' or precarious people's struggles, and it is based on the identification of the contemporary political and economic system as a driving factor of social inequality – impacting people whether or not they are migrants – thus absolving undocumented migrants, who are often blamed as being responsible for their own precarious living situations: "We try to work with the transversality of the struggles, [...] and thus implement actions where you find unemployed workers, unemployed Belgian people, but also asylum seekers or old Belgian people who have a small pension, or young people […] the idea is to understand that the origin of their alienation or of their exploitation is in contemporary political conditions" (interview, director of a local association working with migrants, 20 May 2018). Baron et al. (2016) have already argued that undocumented migrants embracing a "sans-papiers [undocumented] worker" identity can also facilitate alliance building and (potentially) provide more opportunities for regularization, even if this process emphasizes economic performance, and could lead to unequal opportunities for "deserving" workers and "undeserving" non-workers (on the notion of deservingness, see Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014).

Concretely, the rationale of the transversality of the struggle brings together undocumented migrants and local citizens, who participate in common protests at the local and national level (many events are organized in Brussels). Besides these actions, other forms of mobilization – mainly awareness-raising activities based

[40] Myria, Régularisation de séjour et droits des personnes en séjour irrégulier [Regularization of residence permit and rights of irregular residents], 2016 (in French), Chapitre 6, https://www.myria.be/files/Migration2016-6-Regularisation-et-sejour-irregulier.pdf, accessed June 6, 2019.

on artistic and other cultural activities – develop within a network (a "support committee"), consisting of independent citizens but also of individuals who belong to different kinds of organizations, such as local associations and NGOs working in the domain of migration specifically or targeting wider social issues, cultural associations or institutions, public services, trade unions and political representatives. Such networks are not exempted from the emergence of conflicts and competing interests, both internal (for example, alleged unequal gender dynamics in the networks were managed by actors whose initiatives were largely contested) and external. An external conflict occurred, for example, during an attempt at communication between the support committee of *La Voix des sans-papiers* and a group of citizens living in Liège who are active in hosting migrants coming from the Maximiliaan Park.[41] Approaching this group was aimed at stimulating solidarity with the undocumented migrants living in Liège as well, but the attempt was not well received: "[The coordinator of the group of citizens] told me that he did not want the forces of the Platform to be used for the VSP. I was a little surprised, I told him it was not my goal. We are fighting for the same cause […]. It was not at all a question of putting the migrants of the Maximiliaan Park in competition with the undocumented migrants of the VSP" (interview, member of the VSP support committee, 23 February 2018). However, there is the perception that ideas related to the profiles of undocumented migrants compete with the contemporary mobilization around asylum seekers and refugees, since "[media and politics] speak about refugees [...] and they forgot a mass of people that are in the situation of illegality [*sans-papiers*], and they leave these people in black work".[42] The assertion here is that the mediatization of the "refugee crisis" and the initiatives it has triggered lead to other (structural) issues being neglected.

The refugee reception crisis as humanitarian "momentum" in old and new reception sites

Most likely as a result of the media attention given to the "refugee crisis" in 2015, the number of volunteers and solidarity initiatives stepping up in order to "do something" in response to perceived humanitarian concerns boomed during that period (see also Karayali and Steinhilper 2019, describing the similar situation in Germany). Indeed, all reception centres where we conducted fieldwork – whether they opened in light of crisis relief policies or were established centres – perceived a large increase in the number of applications for voluntary work.[43] In general, we can speak of a certain "momentum", as this type of mobilization did not last long; a former employee of the centre in Scherpenheuvel estimated that most volunteers remained active for less than six months after they started. Similarly, a significant decrease in volunteers' participation was noted in Houthalen-Helchteren, Namur and

[41] See: Facebook, *Liège – Hébergement plateforme citoyenne*, https://www.facebook.com/groups/188031515075807/, accessed February 27, 2019.

[42] Member of the Coordination of undocumented migrants in Belgium. See: Coordination Sans-papiers Belgique, https://sanspapiers.be/, accessed on 27 February 2017.

[43] Interestingly, this was also the case for the established centre of Sint-Niklaas, which has been operational since 2001 – despite (or as a result of) the opening of another reception centre just outside Sint-Niklaas in 2015.

Arlon, where a relatively large number of people are however still active. During our conversations with both volunteers and centre employees, various explanations for this short-term mobilization were mentioned: the slow and rigid functioning of reception centres, which can be frustrating for volunteers; the need for volunteers lasting longer than expected, resulting in volunteers turning to other priorities; the realization that the volunteer is not the refugees' "saviour"; and the disappearance of negative reactions to the opening of a reception centre in the local neighbourhood to which the initial strong voluntary movement was a response. Another interesting finding was that irrespective of the location of the centre, most volunteers came from the wider local environment and not from the streets in the immediate proximity of the centre. As the asylum seekers are most visible to those who live closest to the centre, and volunteering often originates with "primary experiences" with the newcomers (Feischmidt and Zakariás 2019), this is in contrast with our expectations.

In some sites, this "momentum" emerged in continuity with other "waves of solidarity" developed in the past, for example in Fraipont, where at the opening of the centre, the arrival of asylum seekers from Kosovo was already perceived as a "refugee crisis". In fact, for some among the volunteers who were already active before 2015, there were no major changes in terms of the arrival of refugees, nor, as a consequence, in terms of reactions to it: "We did not see more [refugees]. [...] It is true that in the media we saw Calais, etc., we realized that the refugees were at the strategic points but here... I also suppose that it [the reception centre] was already full, so they could not overflow the centre. There was no real change" (interview, member of the neighbourhood committee, 2 July 2018). Conversely, in Houthalen-Helchteren, the heightened presence and visibility of asylum seekers and refugees in the local community raised new (political) concerns: a group of active Red Cross volunteers initiated a consultation process to try to influence the political agenda, and finally released a memorandum before the 2018 Belgian local elections. The memorandum proposed a number of action points leading to a humane approach and a better understanding of the situation and living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees. Through this action, humanitarian goals as well as inclusive citizenship are pursued by means of political representation.

In Scherpenheuvel, Houthalen-Helchteren, Namur, Tournai and Brussels, the increased influx of refugees in 2015 gave rise to grassroots mobilization initiatives in which social media, notably Facebook groups, played an important role. The Facebook group "Friends of the Refugees" (*Vrienden van de vluchtelingen*), based in Scherpenheuvel, is a grassroots initiative initiated by a Scherpenheuvel citizen who had previously been engaged in voluntary work with refugees as well. The Facebook group originally focused on gathering together a group of mobilized citizens who are willing to provide help, in various forms, to the people living in the centres: bringing in goods needed by the centres, for example, or providing drivers who could take asylum seekers to various appointments. Gradually, as more asylum seekers obtained a residence permit and opted to stay in the area, the Facebook group extended its activities to housing assistance, such as the search for available accommodation or the provision of help during the move. Nowadays, the Facebook group is accepted by more institutional organizations as a source of volunteers, but has not professionalized

itself and is still run by the same person. In Houthalen-Helchteren, another Facebook page was set up by a local citizen, in coordination with the reception centre, through which calls were made for volunteers and appeals for contributions of material goods such as shoes, clothes and toiletries were announced. Moreover, the Facebook page served as a platform for announcing open days, dining days and other events for the general public. The overarching goal of the Facebook page was to keep the discussion alive. Contrary to the page in Scherpenheuvel, the one in Houthalen-Helchteren is currently less active. Occasionally there are still appeals, made at the request of the reception centre.

In Namur, the important non-formal civil society organization named *Collectif Citoyens Solidaires* (CCSN) also makes use of Facebook. CCSN plays a key role in the case of Namur and holds a recognized position in the local socio-political landscape. Without exception, it was considered to be the main actor with regards to asylum seekers and refugees in Namur by all the research informants, including members of the local government, organizations and unaffiliated citizens. The collective was started at the end of 2015 by a group of citizens who wanted to gather and provide clothes for the Calais encampment. At the end of 2018, CCSN counted about 150 proactive members organizing or participating in activities involving asylum seekers, both inside and outside the local reception centre. Their Facebook group boasts over 4,000 members,[44] and serves as a platform to coordinate and communicate about activities, as well as to liaise with other civil society actors in Belgium. In spite of such participation, CCSN operates as a non-formal organization and has not gone through the processes of structuring and bureaucratization that are typical of activist networks (Pieck 2013). Rather, the collective has a loose structure headed by a small committee of members called *Orga*, including some of the founding members and the most active volunteers.

Conversely, the Citizen's Platform, whose activities are advanced via the use of various social media platforms and its own website,[45] has experienced a rapid process of institutionalization and professionalization of both its internal structure and humanitarian activities. This process was an attempt to respond to a high level of turnover among involved members, and to their overinvestment in the daily activities. One person was hired with "the intention […] that she stop babysitting, working in the bar and the Maximiliaan Park until 3am" (interview, spokesperson from the Citizen's Platform, 2 March 2018). Besides this internal factor, external reasons explain this process of institutionalization. First, the Platform received more and more responsibilities and funding (mainly from the Brussels-Capital Region and the City of Brussels), which gave them the opportunity to hire employees in strategic management positions. Second, the actors in the non-profit sector and in the political

[44] Members are selected exclusively from people who have participated in activities. Significantly, a request to join the group from the researcher who conducted fieldwork in Namur was refused by the group moderators.

[45] See: BxlRefugees, http://www.bxlrefugees.be/, accessed May 7 2019. Several groups connected with the Platform are active on Facebook, such as the one devoted to the volunteers. See: Facebook, *BXLVolunteers*, https://www.facebook.com/groups/BXLVolunteers/, accessed May 7, 2019.

domain that interacted and collaborated with the initiative expressed a need to see this informal movement become clearly identifiable as a formal and professional actor. The head of one of the NGOs working closely with the Citizen's Platform stressed this issue in the interview we conducted: "Accepting €600,000 is difficult to manage. […] They must become professional. When someone starts [saying]: 'Yes, but who are you? You should be a professional.' […] You have to be really pro to do what they did. Who is as efficient as them?" (interview, NGO director, 11 June 2018). Thirdly, the longer the humanitarian situation persists, the more the citizen initiative feels the need to reflect on improving internal functioning and on the formalization of its structure, in order to put in place "a proper organization of our agenda of solidarity" and to "clarify our objectives and improve our approach" (post on Facebook by an official member of the Platform, 18 February 2019). Paradoxically, the professionalization of these initiatives goes together with a call to institutions and political actors to take up their responsibility towards the reception of migrants, thus discharging the Platform from its purpose and tasks: "there is a desire to keep amateurism. It would be a pity if the citizens really became the hosting structure in Belgium. Through this scheme, you continue to be in a state of emergency all the time, it's unreal. We cannot perpetuate that" (interview, spokesperson from Citizen's Platform, 2 March 2018).

Conflicts between volunteers and centre operators in newly opened centres

In some other sites, the launching of new volunteering initiatives led to tensions between the centre management and volunteers, as it occurred in newly established reception centres, even though most of them stressed the importance of the volunteers in their daily operations. In Scherpenheuvel, for example, the centre was run by Caritas International, an organization that had no previous experience of running collective reception centres. Due to this lack of experience combined with the speed of the opening of the centre, the first weeks after its opening were marked by striving towards best practices. At the same time, a call for volunteers had received a huge response and the decision was made to conduct an intake interview with all of the interested people, leading to a situation where in principle one volunteer could be assigned to every individual living in the centre. Considering that the centre staff was still searching for strategies to run the centre effectively and that the group of volunteers outnumbered the staff, certain frictions occurred between the staff and the volunteers on the one hand, and among the volunteers themselves on the other. As a result, several volunteers distanced themselves from the (in their eyes) abundant centre rules that blocked their good intentions, and the previously mentioned Facebook group created for help appeals on behalf of the refugees inside (and later outside) the centre became a place where activities were organized outside the auspices of the centre staff. One volunteer described the situation as follows: "And then we had to sign a volunteer agreement involving all kinds of rules that we were never able to adhere to. It's difficult. A new reception centre means a lot of searching for what is possible and what is not possible, and whether it is safe and so on. At one point, we were only allowed to take the children anywhere if we took a staff employee with us. But they never had time, so that never happened" (interview, volunteer, 14 December 2018). The staff acknowledged the good intentions of the volunteers, but realized that those

intentions could be counterproductive, for example when they led to being "bonded with certain individuals or families", and thus they needed to "slow them down a bit" (interview, centre employee, Scherpenheuvel, 18 April 2018). In connection with this excessive enthusiasm, tensions arose between volunteers themselves, with reciprocal accusations of wanting to become a "missionary" and of competing to be the asylum seekers' "saviour". Conflicts of opinion may also emerge among volunteers, as was the case within the Tournai Refuge initiative, when they had to make a decision on whether or not they should also provide assistance to rejected asylum seekers: "once the first asylum application refusals were issued, in Tournai Refuge there were people like me who said we do not make a difference between people, and there were other volunteers who said we cannot take care of people whose asylum applications have been rejected" (interview, volunteer, Tournai, 28 July 2018).

In Scherpenheuvel, the lack of previous experience in running a reception centre and the lack of a professional framework and structural resources for the volunteers, combined with the acceptance of a high number of people interested in voluntary work, led to a skewed power balance. Indeed, several volunteers did not accept the reception centre's guidelines, resulting in power-seeking coming from both sides, which in turn caused conflictual situations. In Houthalen-Helchteren, the centre is run by the Red Cross, which conversely has long-term experience in handling reception and in the recruitment and training of volunteers through standard procedures, giving them specific guidelines to operate within in the reception infrastructures. Potential conflictual situations therefore rarely surfaced as the power balance was clear from the beginning. The existence of guidelines did not prevent the emergence of certain issues related to the rapid opening of the centre, though. With time, however, most disputes were settled.

A mass response from citizens to calls for volunteers and other forms of reception support (donations of impressive amounts of goods including clothes, furniture, toys and everyday objects) also characterized other locations in Wallonia, such as Namur, Arlon, Tournai and Sainte-Ode. Similarly to cases in Flanders, Namur, Tournai and Arlon in particular are also sites where the relationship and conflicts between volunteers, be they individuals or organizations, and the Red Cross management may be observed. Interestingly, the three cases are characterized by a different balance of power between the actors involved. Both in Tournai and Namur, the organizations Tournai Refuge and *Collectif Citoyens Solidaires* (CCSN) implemented activities in cooperation with – and in parallel to – the volunteers officially recruited by the Red Cross and the paid staff in the reception centre. Conversely, in Arlon, all volunteers were included within the Red Cross organizational structure, where the management took direct control over any activity implemented in the reception centre. Although conflicts have concerned similar issues in all three cases, the different structures resulted in different interaction dynamics and reactions from the actors involved. However, also in these cases, informants always described the role played by volunteers as invaluable from the outset, before reporting any conflictual situation. That said, under some specific conditions, the significant pro-reception mobilization of citizens in different localities in Belgium has emerged as having a potential negative impact on public opinion and the improvement of reception policies and practices.

In both Namur and Arlon, problems and conflicts concerned not only the relationship between the volunteers themselves and the asylum seekers, but also between them and the Red Cross management. Criticism addresses the paternalistic approach adopted by volunteers towards asylum seekers, a trend that is not new to specific field research (e.g. Barnett 2016). Most of the problems highlighted concern the fact that volunteers routinely tended to go beyond their duties, taking on the role of problem-solver and having very informal relationships with residents of the centres. Such an approach was indicated as having several implications, such as the fact that residents could experience a non-democratic access to the activities and advantages provided by volunteers: "There are always the same people doing all the activities. […] And they are those who have the strongest relationship with the Belgian people, they become friends" (interview, asylum seeker, 22 November 2018). Also, some residents could be accidentally overlooked by the Red Cross staff as a consequence of the development of personal relationships with the volunteers. An issue of appropriate distance is raised: "There are some [volunteers] who go very far with some residents. [...] There are many things they don't know, concerning deontology, many things to do and the right distance to keep" (interview, centre director, Namur, 16 May 2018). Another issue raised by interviewees concerned the lack of experience relevant to post-centre life among those residents who are excessively helped by volunteers and who, consequently, end up being unaware of bureaucratic procedures or not accustomed to daily practices: "[The residents] are helped too much sometimes. They don't know what to do when, and if, they get their asylum application accepted. I mean, they are people in need, but they have to learn what real life is for everybody" (interview, centre social worker, Namur, 16 May 2018).

In Arlon, the Red Cross management opted for a firmer approach to the management of volunteers. Interviewees among local volunteers remarked a gradual reinforcement of control over their role, and reported specific cases in which peers had been removed from their duties in the centre for disciplinary reasons. Such a trend was often perceived as authoritarian abuse towards humanitarian activity, or as a form of exploitation of the volunteers' work. Overall, this not only indicates dissent regarding the approach towards asylum seekers between mobilized citizens and institutional actors in charge of reception, but it also shows the difficulties faced by the latter in their efforts to provide a high standard of reception, relying on volunteer work due to the emergency situation and lack of resources: "if we have to rely on volunteer work, we need resources. I asked for a third assistant director to take care of that, to inform and manage people coming from outside" (interview, centre director, Arlon, 10 October 2018). Also in Houthalen-Helchteren, volunteers pointed out the difficult balance between simply performing their tasks and acting on the human instinct to go beyond their duties and help wherever they could. Although here too the volunteers have experienced a temporary restriction on their activities, they now feel very much appreciated and well supported. In Tournai, similarly to the other localities, a large number of volunteers offered their services at the opening of the Red Cross centre. However, while the director opted for an open-door policy at the centre's opening, conflicts rapidly arose between the Tournai Refuge volunteers and the Red Cross centre management. On the one hand, volunteers complained about the rigidity about

the operating rules imposed by the Red Cross members of staff: "We were citizens who had organized ourselves and that did not correspond to the Red Cross customs" (interview, volunteer, Tournai, 28 July 2018). On the other hand, the director of the centre complained that some volunteers went far beyond their duties and that this was counterproductive for the centre's work. Access to the centre was therefore restricted to volunteers, and after that the citizens' initiatives were held without cooperation from the Red Cross member staff.

Besides these problems related to the nature and limits of support practices towards asylum seekers, another important conflictual element in the relationship between local active citizens and the centres' management concerns the representation of such practices as well as of the global asylum issue in the public debate. In this sense, forms of control over the volunteers' activities also aim at preventing miscommunication or misrepresentation of the institutional actors in charge of reception, "because there are things that we, as the Red Cross, don't do, don't say in the public debate" (interview, centre director, Namur, 16 May 2018). The need is to distinguish between volunteers' and centre managers' positions in the public debate, also in order for the centres to eventually affirm their independence from local mobilization initiatives and the claims that they bring: "It also happened that volunteers […] went to the city council to speak, or spoke on television. And it looked like they wore the hat of the Red Cross. This is not acceptable, we do a lot in terms of communication, but we have a clear role and assignment, an objective" (interview, centre director, Arlon, 10 October 2018). The attitudes and opinions manifested at the local level, and in particular those expressed by the people supporting activities in reception centres, have emerged as not only pro-reception, but also more and more intensely critical of the Belgian federal government's approach to matters concerning asylum seekers, their reception and asylum procedure. For this reason, centre management organizations that were subsidiary to the federal government seemed to be afraid of discourses and representations in the public debate coming from these citizens.

In addition to the mobilization of individual citizens through volunteering and self-organized initiatives, existing civil society organizations are involved in some partnerships with the centres, and/or they participate in the local committees related to them. During the first months after the opening of the centre in Houthalen-Helchteren, many organizations regularly visited the reception centre to play games with the children, organize sports activities, knit with the women and so on. The organizations involved were very positive about these interactions for various reasons. The main reason can be framed within humanitarian concerns, since the organizations mention that they want to offer activities in order to make life in the centre more bearable. Besides this, the organizations aim to promote inclusive citizenship in which they stress the importance of active participation as a condition for integration into the neighbourhood. Civil society organizations also intervene in connection with non-structured reception initiatives, for example in Brussels some NGOs stepped in to provide translation, medical care and legal support in the form of information on asylum in Belgium. These NGOs do not have migrants as their sole concern, but are directed at disadvantaged people in general.

Although the cooperation between the centres and their civil society partners was initially very strong and positively perceived, the level of cooperation declined over time. Several associations stated that their offers have often been refused, causing the cooperation to gradually disappear. Civil society organizations attribute this problem to the strict rules imposed by the Red Cross, or to the difficulty of dealing with other activities than the management of the centre and of issues strictly related to the centre: "when we call, they say 'Yes, what are you actually going to do? Why are you interested? Why do you want to come?' So if we don't really need to be there, we postpone that, of course" (interview, organization supervisor, Houthalen-Helchteren, 17 January 2019).

Reasons for Mobilization: A Focus on Opinions

Beyond the contextual opportunities that enable mobilization to occur, as well as the collective (and debated) rationales and frames underlying it, individual motivations mobilize people to take a position concerning migration issues and, in particular, to undertake certain initiatives to support the everyday life and needs of migrants, whether within the overall action of institutions or associations, or individually.

From empathy and solidarity to a subversive will

Many of our research participants express feelings of empathy and "ideologies of compassion or solidarity" (Feischmid and Zakariás 2019: 72) towards vulnerable human beings, who are described as victims of the contemporary world's economic and political system as well as of the migration policies that are put in place to preserve it:[46] "They come because there is only misery where they live, they will be killed" (interview, member of the neighbourhood committee, Fraipont, 2 July 2018). In a context of "politicization of charity", where charity activities are linked to political attitudes (Feischmid and Zakariás 2019), volunteering can form an (anti) political act, motivated by the perception of widespread injustice of which migrants are often the object, notwithstanding their specific legal status. Vandevoordt and Verschraegen describe the humanitarian field as "the grey zone between politics and morality, or between the politicising and de-politicising effect of particular actions" and refer to "subversive humanitarianism", in which humanitarians go against the prevalent social order by providing humanitarian help, despite the government's resistance (2019). As Rosenberg argues, referring to Ong (2011 294–5), the main goals of political protest are not only to trigger a public debate, but also to mobilize people to support the cause (Rosenberg 2018). We see this subversive will in the words of many of our interviewees, who emphasize that their originally humanitarian actions have "a deeply political meaning" and constitute "a resistance to our everyday life" (educator connected with the VSP, field notes, Liège, 13 December 2018). This subversive will pushes people "to dare to go against […] [political] decisions that are inhumane" (interview, volunteer, Zeebrugge, 21 January 2019), therefore putting

[46] Heins and Unrau refer to a "structurally inhospitable world of militarized border controls and increasingly selective immigration policies tailored to the labour market needs of rich countries" (Heins and Unrau 2018: 229).

"migration policy […] at the heart of the debate" (newspaper interview coordinator, Citizen's Platform, 16 April 2018). In particular, the deportation policy for asylum seekers whose applications have failed is seen as inhumane and is protested against (Rosenberger 2018): "these people were in distress, post-traumatic shock, etc. And what do we do? We put them in prison. [...] It's really psychological torture and for me it is unacceptable. It's intolerable, unacceptable" (interview, member of an artistic association working with migrants, Liège, 8 February 2018). Volunteers' involvement in political action, as suggested by Martin Deleixhe (2018), depends on the fact that, even if humanitarian actors first anchor their action in morality and ethics, the meeting of this suffering "other" is likely to lead them to recognize him or her not only as a person in need but also as a subject of law: "when others complain that the cold mobilizes more than the migration policy, I say, 'It does not matter if it's the cold […] [that] pushed you to act, once you've done it, you are bitten" (interview, spokesman for the Platform, Brussels, 2 March 2018).

Giving and receiving through volunteering

In the field of subversive humanitarianism, the affective dimension and the emotional factor play a crucial role in fostering action: "as far as […] my interest in this audience [newcomers] [has come about], […] it was really love at first sight […], how come I had so much empathy, […] this human impulse towards this audience?" (interview, member of an artistic association working with migrants, Liège, 8 February 2018). The choice to undertake certain acts of mobilization concerning migration issues can also be quite casual for some people who either were already engaged in social action, or are at a specific time of life and for various personal reasons decide to become involved: "Yes, we both retired, and then the question was: what now? And then the crisis started, and then we actually thought 'We want to do something, we want to mean something in that.' […] So it was like, 'retirement…', and I had the feeling of 'Oh, what do I want to do? Who am I?', you know? Those identity things." (interview, volunteer, Houthalen-Helchteren, 9 January 2019). Volunteering here constitutes an opportunity to give a new orientation to one's life, as well as to satisfy a "moral narcissism" (Heins and Unrau 2018: 231) or to "have a nice story to tell to their friends" (member of the CCSN, field notes, Namur, 7 March 2018). Therefore, volunteering places the aid provider in a situation of reciprocal gain: "The VSP helps me personally in my life and brings me something that makes me feel useful […] Everyone gets something out of it" (interview, member of the VSP support committee, Liège, 23 February 2018). Some literature highlights the imbalanced power relationships established between volunteering people and migrants, which partly stem from the fact that the former are those whose give (help) and the latter are those who (only) receive (help), with no possibility of reciprocating the earned "gift".[47] On the other hand, some volunteers see their work as reciprocal, as they see gratitude as the 'gift in return': "I prefer to work for people who really need it and who

[47] Some scholars apply Mauss's theorization on the gift (1923) to the study of these dynamics. See for example: Harrell-Bond (2002) or Heins and Unrau (2018).

are happy when someone does something for them. I prefer working for those people than for spoiled brats" (interview, volunteer, Scherpenheuvel, 31 May 2018).

Humanitarian aid is traditionally conceptualized as tending to create hierarchies of power and relational asymmetry (Agier 2008: 14). However, reciprocity dynamics are also possible and allow for the construction of close and symmetrical relationships between migrants and volunteers. Vandevoordt and Verschraegen (2019) have highlighted how contemporary humanitarianism directed at refugees in Europe challenges some criticisms of humanitarian action because it combines horizontal and vertical relations established between aid providers and recipients. In that respect, migrants' history and culture often appear as a means of mutual contribution. Indeed, many hosts hold and convey expectations regarding what the meeting with this "other in need" passing through Belgium could give them. These expectations act as a normative pressure pushing migrants to share their stories and to provide volunteers with an intercultural life experience: "Sometimes they want to see how we act, if we are honest, kind, cooperative, […] to see how your culture is, behaving well. If you are respectful, tell them your story, when they come, they take you again. So they want to help you if you are a good person and respect them. They always ask us one question: 'why are you going to England?'" (interview, undocumented migrant, Brussels, 14 March 2019). These perceived expectations regarding the migrants' identities may ultimately put them in a paradoxical position where the need to express themselves is combined with the fear, built throughout their migratory journey, of displaying their real identity. This contradiction leads migrants to adopt discursive strategies and develop fictitious narratives. A volunteer expressed her disappointment when she discovered that the person she was hosting was concealing his true identity: "2–3 weeks ago, I learned via E. that O. was gone! Nice, but no news from him [...] I hope he is well and hope [to receive] a message one day [...] A few days ago, I learned from another volunteer that E. is not called E. everywhere, that his date of birth and his age vary according to the hosts as well as what he says" (Facebook post by a volunteer, 1 April 2018). In addition to this desire for intercultural encounters, a significant amount of volunteers become open to building deep and intimate relationships. This tendency is often noticeable in the volunteers' discourses, where wording related to love and parenthood is widely used to describe the relationships that they develop with migrants: "M. is in prison and the news is not good. T. is in the hospital and the news is not terrible. [...] We say we love each other. He calls me 'my mother'. I smile inside [...] So, I'm going to fill my house with new kids. I'm ready even if I'm a little scared. I'm a little afraid to start loving them too".[48] However, far from forming a consensus among the Platform volunteers, these expectations regarding the migrant's stories and intimate relationships are at the centre of many debates and also trigger opposition: "I am not the only one to be exasperated by the displays of tearful sentimentality. We do not help a refugee because he is 'a little guy', 'brilliant', 'brave' and 'friendly', in other words 'cute', as if to adopt a hamster. We do

[48] Anonymous volunteer, Perles d'accueil, *Ce soir, ma maison sera vide de ceux que j'aime* [Tonight, my house will be empty of those I love], 2019 (in French), http://www.perlesdaccueil.be/2019/01/18/2520/, accessed April 8, 2019.

it because he or she is a human being in distress" (message from a host on Facebook, 20 January 2019). Similarly, in Namur, criticism developed around the idea that many volunteers put their personal interest at the centre of their participation in support for asylum seekers. Commenting on the planned closure of the centre, for example, several members of the CCSN highlighted that for many volunteers the relationship with asylum seekers was articulated within a co-dependent dynamic: "[The centre] will close down by the end of the year, and this will be catastrophic for many members […] They're completely attached to the idea of having somebody depending on them. […] they need to have somebody who needs them" (member of the CCSN, field notes, Namur, 7 March 2018).

In all the aforementioned cases, despite the different paths and motivations that have led people to volunteer, there seems to be a pre-existing openness concerning the topic of migration, even if this has not necessarily led to a specific position on this issue in the past. What emerges as less probable, according to our research participants, is that people who have a negative view on migration issues change their mind and finally decide to mobilize in support of migrants: "the anti-[migration people] are very difficult to reach, there are anti-[s] who will never change, we can even forget them. [...] but it is also necessary to get out of 'the circle of the insiders' [*le cercle des initiés* in French], where one only tries to convince those who are already convinced, and to seek those whose beliefs lie in between [...], because there are some who seek to discover, who do not dare, but who would indeed dare if we hold our hand […]" (interview, centre director, Fraipont, 27 April 2018). Awareness-raising activities are seen as tools for reaching a broader range of people, among whom are "the decision-makers of tomorrow, […] the voters of tomorrow" (*Ibid*.).

The "us and them" prejudice

Racist statements or different forms of prejudice from people who may not be well informed about the issue of migration, but also paternalistic and infantilizing attitudes from people mobilized to support migrants, can be observed. As Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh write (2018: 2), "hospitality and hostility are closely interlinked, yet seemingly contradictory concepts and processes. Hospitality, it has been argued, is always conditional,[49] and includes within it the potential for hostility" (2018: 2). In fact, commitment and benevolence do not always imply a real questioning of one's own assumptions, and in particular, a concrete challenging of a widespread dichotomy between "us and them". This dichotomy is firstly deployed in terms of the essentialization of alleged cultural habits: "sometimes, when you're driving and you go up [towards Fraipont centre] by the train station, [the residents of the centre] call to you and they aggressively tell you 'take me' [for a lift]. [...] There are [also] times when I've said to myself, 'oh shit, it stinks in the store' […] But it depends on the waves [origins of the main flow of asylum seekers]" (interview, member of the neighbourhood committee, Fraipont, 2 July 2018). Similarly, a research participant in Brussels said: "It's their way of life that is not compatible with maintaining cleanliness.

[49] This differs from the theorization of unconditional hospitality proposed by Derrida (2000).

[...] There is incompatibility. As I told you, they do not respect the values of this country" (interview, Syndic CNN, Brussels, 24 April 2018). Second, this dichotomy is described as socio-political: "[Referring to undefined countries of origin of asylum seekers] I said jokingly 'I'll go and ask for asylum in your country', but I don't even know if it's possible there" (social worker, field notes, Liège, 3 October 2018). The us and them dichotomy also appears in discourses that establish divisions between people which are certainly related to their respective legal status, but which seem to go beyond it, as in the case of the distinction between "Belgians" and "undocumented migrants" (*sans-papiers*) in discourses and actions related to the VSP. Undocumented migrants "need" Belgians, in a kind of guest-host relation (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018) since "showing that they are well integrated and that they have Belgian friends" can help towards regularization (member of the support committee of the VSP, field notes, Liège, 4 December 2017).

The cultural citizenship motive

Based on the belief in cultural citizenship (and acculturation), some volunteers stress the difficulties that newcomers face in order to integrate in society, and want to actively contribute to assisting with this process: "People who are here and do not speak the language, that is a handicap. […] I always say, they have to integrate, they have to join the others. [Children] have to grow up in our society, join in with our mentality. […] they can live here and they can be like us" (interview, volunteer, Sint-Niklaas, 14 January 2019). Action based on this motivation stems from the conviction that institutional integration initiatives are not enough to combat the "cultural gap" perceived between local customs and those of migrants, and the belief that other social actions are needed.

Whether inspired by a humanitarian or political will, by moral (and potentially narcissistic) engagement, or by subtle cultural judgements and almost assimilationist views, all these opinions and motivations had a concrete effect in stimulating actions of mobilization. In the next section, we will analyze more deeply the possible negative reactions that may occur and trigger eventual mobilization directed against reception and/or asylum seekers. We would like to emphasize, however, that protest against a reception centre is not necessarily related to anti-immigrant views.

Mobilization Against Reception

A non-structured polarization

Differently from other cases in Europe – for example, Germany (Jäckle and König 2016), Austria (Haselbacher and Rosenberger 2018), Italy and France (Castelli Gattinara 2018) – some of which are presented and discussed in this book, mobilization against refugees and asylum seekers has had a relatively limited extent in Belgium. Besides specific factors that we will describe in this section, this may also be related to the fact that "Belgium is among the most restrictive countries in terms of preferences for asylum policies but did not face an increase in negative attitudes" (see p. 54 in this book). Small-scale public protests and other forms of opposition, however, occurred in several localities across the country. In particular, citizen complaints arose in those areas where temporary reception centres were opened at the end of 2015, following the

federal government's decision. Interestingly, the most visible and mediatized forms of protest, such as demonstrations, were organized by people coming from outside the local community, as was the case for example in Scherpenheuvel and Zeebrugge. For some residents, this provoked feelings of indignation, as they regarded this protest by people who would not be affected by the opening and presence of a reception centre as hypocritical. Protests of this kind could also often be linked to certain political parties or affiliations. As Haselbacher and Rosenberger (2018) point out in their study of protests against the opening of reception centres in Austria, the dominant actors in a local society protesting against the opening of a reception centre are institutional actors, such as mayors, who are mobilized by local citizens who remain rather passive in terms of taking action. In other words, in order for citizens to participate in collective protest against the opening of a reception centre, the involvement of political actors with significant resources is crucial as "these protagonists create the environment in which unorganized citizens are able to express their opposition" (Haselbacher and Rosenberger 2018: 257). In most of the localities we studied, however, the local government decided to take up their responsibility and accept the decision made by the federal government to open a reception centre in their municipality,[50] which might explain why protest remained largely unorganized and was in general mostly absent in the localities where we conducted fieldwork.[51]

Information provision and protest

One exception where actual mobilization against asylum seekers occurred is Scherpenheuvel, a locality where local protest became overt. This protest originated out of dissatisfaction with the lack of information in terms of the date of the centre's opening and the number of asylum seekers arriving. As Scherpenheuvel had no previous experience with collective reception centres and had a limited history of migration, feelings of fear of the 'unknown' could prevail as well, albeit latently. Local citizens were worried about whether they would still be able to walk safely on the street at night, for example, or about the reception centre's impact on their property's value. As one neighbour remarked, the centre was opened at a time of international media attention on safety issues regarding refugees in Europe. In light of these fears and the fact that some citizens believed the mayor was purposely withholding information (see above), the protest movement demanded a pre-opening meeting, which was subsequently organized. In the eyes of various actors involved, however, this meeting was organized too soon as no more information was available. The meeting resulted in a robust discussion between people for and against the centre, which gave some neighbours the impression that their concerns were not being taken

[50] As became apparent in a previous section of this chapter, Belgian local government bodies are not involved in the decision-making processes regarding the opening of asylum seeker centres.

[51] We would like to point out the differing political climates between the Belgian regions, as Wallonia and Brussels form on average a more welcoming environment for asylum seekers than Flanders, where (extreme) right-wing parties are increasingly gaining popularity. The political climate, then, has an impact on media representations and discourses on migrants, which in turn influences the public opinion.

seriously. Others, however, lauded the initiative and appreciated the focus on the roles of various actors involved. After the centre opened, the protest movement quickly ceased to exist. This can partly be explained by the lack of major disturbances and partly by conflicting interests within the movement: whereas most members demanded correct information on the centre, a few others used the movement "only to be present in the media. […] And that was actually not the others' intention. We also realized that those people [the asylum seekers] had to be helped, but that was not the point for us. We just wanted correct information" (interview, member of protest movement, Scherpenheuvel, 23 August 2018). The mayor's inability to respond adequately to the citizens' fears and questions shows that protest does not only arise when local political actors position themselves in opposition to the opening of a reception centre (as shown in Haselbacher and Rosenberger 2018), but that the information flow and the political actors' credibility should also be taken into account as decisive elements. In any case, this kind of mobilization has not generated recurrent action and is mostly non-structured, especially when compared to the wide network of actors and organizations supporting positive mobilization.

The pre-opening meetings

As illustrated above, much of the residents' criticism and complaints were caused by the fact that the federal government officially communicated the opening of reception centres at very short notice, generally a couple of weeks before the opening, and that, in some cases, direct contact with local authorities was only made a few days before the arrival of the first guests. Furthermore, information was often either lacking or incorrect, especially concerning the number of places for guests, the size and the planned duration of the centres. In the case of Scherpenheuvel, this led to the situation where the mayor was accused of withholding information from the local citizens, as it became apparent that some citizens (or other local actors) were better informed than the local government. As highlighted by Vincent Magnus, the mayor of Arlon, which hosted one of the largest post-2015 centres in a former military camp: "It was Colonel Eric Marotte [Provincial Commander of Belgian Luxembourg] who informed me of the fact that we were opening a centre for asylum seekers in Arlon. Not the Red Cross, not Fedasil, not the Ministry. [...] Then the Minister's Office contacted us one or two days before, and told us we would receive 450 people. […] The next day, we learnt from the newspapers […] that we would receive 900 people instead" (interview, mayor of Arlon, 19 November 2018). The lack of detailed information, such as the planned duration of the reception centre, was problematic, as information provision is of major importance in counteracting possible negative reactions among the local population. Indeed, a structured plan – consisting of immediate and transparent information provision, centre tours, and an available address in case of complaints – to respond to initial fears of the unknown has long proven to be successful (Meert et al. 2004). Only in one locality where we conducted fieldwork, namely Scherpenheuvel, did the lack of information lead to organized protest. In order to communicate details and answer citizens' enquiries, public pre-opening meetings were organized by local governments (once they knew about the opening), the police and Red Cross representatives in all the localities concerned, with the exception of

Houthalen-Helchteren[52] and of Fraipont.[53] Indeed, pre-opening meetings represent an ideal research object for our study, since when they occurred, they gathered a diverse set of attendees including key actors such as institutional representatives, civil society organizations and community representatives, but also ordinary citizens. Lacking or incorrect information caused a generalized feeling of exclusion from decision-making processes and fuelled negative reactions from some of the attendees at these meetings.

Negative reactions within pre-opening meetings were generated from two specific types of issue: the characteristics of the reception centre, and the qualitative profile of newcomer asylum seekers. The first kind of issues concerns the size of the reception centre and the number of accommodation places (including in relation to the number of residents in the area concerned), its proximity to urban areas or its level of integration into a neighbourhood, and the specific characteristics of its infrastructure. For example, the municipality of Sainte-Ode, a village of about 2,000 inhabitants in Wallonia, was assigned a reception centre with a capacity of up to 600 residents, established in the building of a disused country hospital. Despite being located in a rather isolated environment, the centre caused concerns among citizens regarding its size, as affirmed by the head of the municipality's Social Cohesion Plan: "The meeting was meant to reassure the people who were facing the unknown, because there had been a communication problem. In the beginning all they had said was that 500 people were coming, you can imagine how shocked the population was by foreseeing such big change happening here in so little time. […] they were worried about how to accommodate them all and the change this would have on their life in the village. People asked themselves if we had to give them school places... we only have four schools here. Same with the public services in the municipality" (interview, head of the Social Cohesion Plan, Sainte-Ode, 23 November 2018).

Other examples show how possible disputes may be related to contextual cohabitation and can be quickly resolved once the issues in question are dealt with through discussion among the parties involved. When the centre in Fraipont was opened at the end of 1999, there were no particular reactions concerning the arrival of migrants, partly because, according to some of our interviewees,[54] there was a diffuse sense of empathy towards people mainly coming from Kosovo and other conflict zones in the former Yugoslavia: "I still have tears in my eyes because it was so terrible to see all these people coming" (interview, member of the neighbourhood committee,

[52] The lack of a public pre-opening meeting in Houthalen-Helchteren can probably be explained by the fact that the site had already functioned as a reception centre for a previous period between 2010 and 2013. A neighbourhood meeting, including a tour of the centre, was organized by the Red Cross after the reopening of the centre.

[53] In this location, meetings were organized after the opening, including meetings of the centre support committee (*comité d'accompagnement*, in French) with neighbourhood residents, in particular when it was declared that the centre would become permanent (Gsir et al. 2004).

[54] *Le Soir*, "Kosovo: le drame touche aussi les Liégeois. Trooz: un centre pour les réfugiés. Réanimation d'un jumelage" [Kosovo: the drama also affects the people of Liège. Trooz: a center for refugees. Resuscitation of a twinning], 1999 (in French), https://www.lesoir.be/art/kosovo-le-drame-touche-aussi-les-Liègeois-trooz-un_t-19990408-Z0GLVZ.html, accessed February 28, 2019.

Fraipont, 2 July 2018). Moreover, in this case, complaints were mainly due to the "quantity of people" living in the centre[55] and to disturbances between neighbours: "it took a year or two of adaptation to the centre to be able to resolve the issues that came from [...] the large number of people welcomed. And so little by little it's done" (interview, local Police Chief, 15 June 2018).

The second kind of issues concerns the qualitative profile of newcomer asylum seekers. While the kind of negative reactions concerning the characteristics of the reception centre are not directly motivated by racism or xenophobia, the negative reactions focused on the profile of asylum seekers, including their age, gender, nationality and ethnicity, are much more explicit in this sense. Concerning these issues, lacking or incorrect information also increased the incidence of prejudicial, xenophobic and even racist stances. Interviewees systematically indicated cases of hierarchization of asylum seekers based on age and gender from the beginning. Reporting on the pre-opening meeting of the reception centre in the city of Namur, a police officer affirmed that: "One of the concerns, maybe the most important concern for us as well, for the police, was how many adult men we would have walking around. [...] it is different if you only have children and mothers, or families. Many were worried […] about seeing coaches loaded with big guys arrive in the city. […] they had no idea about who was coming" (interview, local Police Officer, Namur, 30 March 2018). In Houthalen-Helchteren, too, the neighbours of the reception centre stated that they would prefer the presence of families with young children to single men, and perceived women and children as less threatening.[56]

Ethnicity and country of origin also played a crucial role in the occurrence of negative reactions during pre-opening meetings in some cases. However, discursive representation and interaction around these matters took a specific form and followed specific dynamics in each of the contexts observed, leading to irregular processes of hierarchization of asylum seekers.[57] This is due to the fact that, as a form of public event involving institutional actors, pre-opening meetings are also crucial in shedding light on the interactions and power relations between individuals or groups with divergent opinions at a local level. Indeed, pre-opening meetings emerged as discursive settings

[55] In the past, the buildings had hosted children of Belgacom (Belgian telecommunications company) staff during summer camps. At its opening, almost all the available places were occupied. The mayor at that time also complained of not having been informed about the opening of the centre, but the "compassion argument", which was also apparent in the mediatization of the war in Kosovo and its effects, prevailed (Gsir et al. 2004).

[56] These observations are in line with the fact that the opinion on family reunification differs from that on the granting of refugee status, as analyzed in the quantitative chapter of this book: "The willingness to allow reunification with close family members appears larger than the support for the settlement of asylum seekers" (see p. 42 in this book).

[57] For example, contradictions emerge in relation to the fact that Muslim asylum seekers (men) are particularly "feared and blamed" (see p. 46 in this book), and at the same time in contemporary times "Middle Eastern asylum seekers are generally seen as more deserving than asylum seekers from other regions" (see p. 47 in this book), and they are also mostly Muslim. Further hierarchization may however determine the "preference" for Christian asylum seekers from Middle Eastern countries in war.

where participants could also be afraid to speak out freely, especially in those contexts where pro-refugee attitudes had particular relevance, where citizens' involvement in mobilization and support actions was particularly large, or where a specific philosophy of positive reception is a shared feature. A local Police Officer described a significant episode during the pre-opening meeting in Namur: "there were old gentlemen who wanted to express their concerns, and they got verbally attacked by other people, just because they did not use the right words. [...] OK, they might have referred to the people in the centre as "the blacks", but just because they didn't master the politically correct vocabulary, they were called racist and silenced" (interview, local Police Officer, Namur, 30 March 18). Reactions and forms of discursive control in the pre-opening meeting were also remarked in Arlon. A local politician, member of several community organizations, described this dynamic as "the consequence of such large-scale mobilization of volunteers and people who wanted to help, to welcome the refugees. I mean, if you are against the mainstream, or against refugees also, you find yourself in the minority here, and you might be criticized. This said, I think that there is a silent majority, however, that is not in favour. […] this is not based on experience, but only on prejudice, because these people have never had any contact with refugees" (interview, local politician, Arlon, 20 November 2018).

Pre-opening meetings, similarly to other public events related to the centres, functioned as a context in which politically engaged individuals or groups could take the floor and gain public attention, attempting to have an influence on citizens and local politicians. During a meeting held in Trooz, a former representative of the local People's Party (*Parti Populaire*)[58] took the floor to express his opinion about asylum seekers, after some of them who were living in the centre in Fraipont narrated their stories of displacement: "they did not all need us, but they came here so it was horrible [in their country]. I ask […] the surgeon [one of the asylum seekers], 'Sir, you are a surgeon […] Don't you think that when there is war at home and the bombs are hurting everyone you need a surgeon there?' […] He comes here but he does not practise medicine here" (interview, local politician, Trooz, 7 June 2018). This politician, based on alleged statistics concerning people living in the centre, also complained about the fact that they were almost all men "in their prime", questioning the fact that they were leaving their families behind and thus in danger. Also, he pointed out the alleged cultural and religious difference between the newcomers and previous immigration waves in the area when, "fifty years ago, [...] there were no [terrorist] attacks"; these former waves involved Italians, Spaniards and Poles who "kept a low profile. […] They worked and showed people that they had not come to take advantage of the system but to integrate into it. And today, […] we do not notice them anymore. It was easier with them, [because of] culture. […] for the most part, they are profoundly Catholic" (*ibid*.). During his speech, he proposed his political solution to deal with these issues: "it would be necessary to close the borders, at least temporarily. Close

[58] This politician afterwards joined a recently founded extreme-right party called Liberal Citizen Values (VLC), among whose aims is to "neutralize Islam". See: VLC – Valeurs Libérales Citoyennes, http://parti-vlc.be/, accessed February 28, 2019.

the borders and count. [...] And when we have counted well, […] we will see if we can mop it up [*éponger* in French]" (*ibid*.).

As reported by several other interviewees, individuals or small groups from far-right organizations sometimes made themselves visible at the meetings, although they were identified as a minority in the audience. The aims of these people's narratives are clearly electoral and political, even if no relevant results have been achieved in the localities in question.

Beyond Mobilization: the Impact of a Reception Centre on Local Communities

Moments of contact

Above we described the motivations and actions of mobilized people in favour of or against a reception centre, but the majority of community members are not mobilized at all. In this section, we will analyze the impact of the opening and/or presence of a reception centre on local communities. A main finding is that in general, there appears to be very little contact between the asylum seekers and the inhabitants of the localities concerned. Based on our research, we point out several reasons for this. First, those who come to the events organized by the reception centres are mainly people who are already positive towards asylum seekers and refugees. These kinds of activities will therefore not be able to build bridges between separate communities, but only to maintain contact with a number of active citizens. Interestingly, these initiatives are not mentioned by asylum seekers in the centres as a source of contact with the local population. It therefore seems that such events mainly serve the purpose of raising awareness among the local population instead of setting up structural contact between individuals inside and outside of the centre. Second, local residents indicate that they do not need contact. In this case, too, a division between "us" and "them" operates, albeit not denoting opposites who should be brought together, but rather describing groups that have little in common and can therefore live separately side by side: "They are not in our daily lives, nor in, yes, in the children's sports activities" (interview, neighbour, Houthalen-Helchteren, 22 January 2019); "they are actually on their own, they are not really in the community" (interview, neighbour, Houthalen-Helchteren, 17 January 2019).

Indeed, not only does the possibility of direct contact not necessarily lead to volunteering (as we have seen above), the same can be applied to participating in activities initiated by the centre. An example can be seen regarding the centre in Fraipont, mainly within the context of open-door initiatives, such as one held on 5 July 2018 and devoted to activities for children. The attendees came from a wider area than that immediately surrounding the centre, and the reasons why they came were diverse, ranging from a specific interest in the initiatives of the centre and in migration-related issues to an almost casual will to participate in one of the various activities that people came across while looking for something to do that day. As we see in this case, it was not the opportunity for direct contact with the centre's residents that triggered participation. The fact that asylum seekers are only in the reception centres for a short period of time is also cited as an argument for limiting contact. In Sint-Niklaas, for example, the reception centre is strongly involved in the

local community as they actively and structurally participate in activities organized by the neighbourhood committee. These initiatives are very well received by the neighbourhood, but locals consider them to be mainly beneficial for creating more benevolence towards the presence of the centre, realizing that by participating the centre staff show a willingness to actively contribute to the local society. Neighbours mention that these initiatives do not help them to become closer with the asylum seekers staying in the centre, as the asylum seekers participating in activities are different each time. Also in Houthalen-Helchteren, neighbours state that the asylum seekers do not stay long enough to establish meaningful contacts. Third, language is a significant barrier: "No, no, they don't speak our language so it is very hard to communicate with them. Sometimes there is someone who speaks a little English, but you can't start a conversation with them" (interview, neighbour, Houthalen-Helchteren, 17 January 2019). Additional hindering factors on the part of asylum seekers are uncertainty, fear and other similar concerns. This limited contact is perceived as a missed opportunity by active citizens and volunteers, as they note that among asylum seekers there are very talented people from whom we could learn a lot.

Neutral cohabitation?

In contrast with the more extreme opinions present in the public discourse on migration, but to a certain extent in line with the previous research (Gsir et al. 2004; Meert et al. 2004; Meireman et al. 2004). , which found that people living in the immediate neighbourhood of a reception centre develop moderately positive or neutral stances towards the reception centre over time, the public opinion among the neighbours included in our research appears to be fairly neutral. Respondents indicated that they are not bothered by the presence of the centre, nor interested in what is happening over there. Moreover, there is very little discussion of the subject. Habituation has ensured that it is not even an issue anymore, which may in part be related to the absence of disturbances: "In the long run we noticed that we felt quite safe over there [in the neighbourhood of the centre]. That it was not a problem. [...] It went much better than we had feared" (interview, neighbour, Scherpenheuvel, 23 August 2018). The same observation can be made in Fraipont, where after the issues of certain disturbances were settled, no specific negative opinions were reported, apart from occasional individual public statements, which will be discussed later. As has been mentioned in the previous research as a good practice regarding awareness-raising in the local neighbourhood (Meert et al. 2004), one factor that contributed to the lack of strong negative reactions in the long term were the initiatives taken by the centre staff to integrate the centre into the neighbourhood, as we described before: "In the beginning there were proposals that we could visit the centre, and then we got a tour with a couple of neighbours. And then we had some contact with the people [asylum seekers] themselves, and yeah, that was quite cool" (interview, neighbour, Scherpenheuvel, 19 December 2018). This neutral attitude, even if emerging after initial scepticism and fear, is also reflected in responses to the information provided about the reception centres. Although almost all respondents indicated that there is limited information provided by the city and by the operators of the reception centres, and that information is mainly provided by digital and print media (in the form of newsletters in the case of

the Red Cross centres, for example), this is no longer perceived as a problem. Where limited information initially fed the emergence of critical opinions, it is currently widely accepted. Opinions were adjusted through encounters with the target group and by the absence of negative experiences. Indeed, even the most common existing negative perceptions result less from negative experiences or incidents, but rather from the feeling that asylum seekers receive privileged treatment. The "advantages" such as free bus tickets and subsistence money are considered unfair by local residents: "We had to pay, fifty euros. And they, they arrive in the asylum centre, they get a ticket and that's it, they are on the bus for free" (interview, neighbour, Houthalen-Helchteren, 8 January 2019). Another interesting element is that despite the fairly neutral stance towards the centre on the part of most neighbours, as a result of habituation and the absence of negative experiences, most people mentioned a shared feeling of relief upon the announcement of the closure of several centres. However, these feelings went together with concerns about where to house the asylum seekers staying in the centre. In Scherpenheuvel, some volunteers grouped together in order to protest against the announced closure of the centre, but they were not backed by the majority of the local population. Differently, in Namur, mobilization against the closure of the reception centre was highly visible in the local context as the network of volunteers participating in reception activities gathered several times in the city centre and set up public protests.

The impact of the centre on local social ties

The effect that the opening of a reception centre can have on the local community is also evident in the strength of social ties. Our fieldwork shows a broad range of outcomes, from limited impact to severed ties between neighbours. In Scherpenheuvel in particular, the opening of the centre had a strong impact on the relationships between the residents of the streets surrounding the centre; it "has changed the street scene and life in Scherpenheuvel" (interview, neighbour, Scherpenheuvel, 8 August 2018). A minority of residents who strongly opposed the centre refused to accept neutral or positive opinions towards it, and they stepped down from the neighbourhood committee. Longstanding friendships ended as well due to differing opinions on the centre; as the following neighbour recalls, "you see people who have been friends for twenty years, but now do not talk to each other anymore because of different opinions on refugees" (*ibid*.). In Houthalen-Helchteren, some tension can also be seen in the neighbourhood, although people generally choose to ignore the topic when a difference of opinion on the centre becomes clear. In Sint-Niklaas, the site where a reception centre has been present since 2001, no impact on local social ties has been observed. In Fraipont, significantly, a small primary school located in the surroundings of the centre, where most of the neighbourhood children were enrolled, ended up closing after parents started complaining about the presence of relatively large numbers of asylum seeker children: "for a while, […] there were two refugees, it was okay. But once there were more [children from the reception centre], [the teacher] wasn't able to progress properly and that is why parents withdrew their children and the school closed" (interview, member of neighbourhood committee, Fraipont, 2 July 2018). However, reception centres may also provide opportunities for the local population

to gather, socialize and share opinions. In Namur in particular, an open-door shared breakfast is organized on alternate Saturday mornings by Red Cross volunteers and members of the CCSN. Although the majority of participants are among the network of actors who are already active in supporting and organizing activities with asylum seekers, first-timers regularly join in. Participation was indicated as important not only for stimulating contact and mutual understanding between migrants and non-migrants, but also as a way to "reinforce a sense of citizenship" and an "indispensable experience a real community must go through, to go out and see what happens a few steps from the door of your home" (field notes, Namur, 31 March 2018).

The difference in the impact of a centre on local social relationships can be connected to both contextual and centre-related elements. First, the composition of the neighbourhood plays a role. Scherpenheuvel had no significant history of migration and therefore was previously not familiar with a multicultural society. Moreover, citizens described Scherpenheuvel as a "village where everyone knows everyone". The bond between the local citizens was thus very strong. Houthalen-Helchteren is divided into Houthalen and Helchteren, and whereas Houthalen has had long-term experience with migrants, this is not the case for Helchteren. In Helchteren, a separation between locals born and raised in Helchteren on the one hand and outsiders on the other was already established before the arrival of asylum seekers. Interviewees among the first group mentioned strong social ties, whereas the second group emphasized the lack of contact between neighbours. Both groups commented on the fact that the second group is not commonly accepted by the community. In Sint-Niklaas, the neighbourhood surrounding the reception centre can be characterized by a long history of migration, making the neighbourhood one of the most multicultural in the city. The neighbourhood composition therefore had an influence on the visibility of the newcomers. Indeed, in Sint-Niklaas various neighbours mentioned that they could not see any difference between asylum seekers and other migrants living there, and as such the presence of the centre did not have an influence on the neighbourhood composition. In other localities, however, the locals were suddenly confronted with other cultures that they had had no experience with before. In Fraipont, no specific narrative emerged regarding historical migration in the neighbourhood where the centre is located, differently from the overall context of the Trooz municipality of which it is a part, where this multicultural element was raised. As a consequence, the "number" of newcomers – here children – with respect to the number of local residents – the pupils of the primary school – became a controversial issue.

A second element, then, refers to the location of the centre. In Scherpenheuvel, the reception centre is located in the middle of the city centre, making the asylum seekers a clearly visible part of the community. In Houthalen-Helchteren, although the neighbourhood composition is similar to Scherpenheuvel, the reception centre is located outside the city centre and neighbours thus mentioned that they rarely see the asylum seekers – apart from when they are waiting at the bus stop, or when they are in the grocery store near the reception centre. Similarly, the rural location of the centre in Sainte-Ode, and of the village itself, enabled relatively little interaction and visibility. In Sint-Niklaas, the reception centre is located in the middle of the city centre as well, but due to the multicultural character of the neighbourhood the reception centre has

never been strongly visible. In Fraipont, it being a small locality, interactions can be frequent, as is the case in Namur and Arlon. In these localities, although reception centres are located a few kilometres away from the urban area, asylum seekers are visible and considered part of the local social landscape by informants. Of course, this situation is fostered by the presence of active civil society groups.

A third factor that might explain the local impact is previous experience with a reception centre. As the centre in Houthalen-Helchteren had already been open for a previous period between 2010 and 2013, the centre is perhaps more familiar to neighbours and thus less threatening than in localities where there has not been such previous experience, making the centre less of an issue. A specific history of reception also shapes reactions to and the perception of reception centres in local social environments, and their potential impact on the strength of social ties within the local community. In Arlon, for example, respondents often commented on the role of the city and its citizens in the reception of refugees fleeing Kosovo in the late 1990s. Taking action in the contemporary migration scenario, accordingly, was represented as something embedded in the ethos of the local population, and as a way to reinforce its sense of place and belonging (field notes, Arlon, 11 October 2018).

In sum, a combination of contextual and centre-related factors may explain the impact of the opening or presence of a reception centre on local communities, and the scope of such impact may vary.

Migrants' Opinions and Action

On asylum procedure: immobility within mobility

Our research also allowed us to study the role of migrants as active actors within the analyzed dynamics, in which they equally take positions – through narratives and concrete actions – on a set of main topics. First of all, and this is strictly connected with preoccupations and priorities related to their legal status,[59] they develop their own opinions on the asylum procedure, in particular while they are still experiencing it or its effects. Many of the asylum seekers among our research participants showed themselves to be highly stressed by the ways in which the asylum rules concretely operate, and by the "institutional violence" of which the procedure consists (centre director, field notes, Fraipont, 8 May 2018).

First of all, temporality, and particularly the waiting time for a response to an asylum application, was often described as psychologically exhausting: "the fear of the negative, [...] it destroys your head. […] all the time in there, you do not think about anything else anymore" (asylum seeker from Walloon reception centre, field notes, Liège,[60] 10 October 2018). Despite the declared shortening of procedures, above all concerning those asylum seekers who come from "safe countries" and

[59] Martiniello and Rea (2014) highlight that the paths and status changes experienced by migrants result from a combination of structural opportunities and actors' own resources, and that the individuals' perceptions are influenced by the position of the involved actors in their migratory career.

[60] The participant observation of collective initiatives with asylum seekers aimed at recording their opinions on Belgium's asylum policies also targeted some training sessions held

whose applications may rapidly be rejected, or those who come from countries at war and who are likely to receive subsidiary protection, the duration of the application process is still perceived as long by many of our interviewees. Many of them have spent several months and sometimes years in reception centres, and this length of time is also due to the fact that the various appointments that the asylum seeker is given during the procedure are often postponed: for a trip to the "[immigration] Office, [...] we wake up at 5 a.m. to stay at the Office till 4 p.m. and then you leave without having seen anything [without meeting any officer]" (asylum seeker from Fraipont, field notes, Liège, 10 October 2018). The time management of the procedure is also questioned when asylum seekers who arrive later are invited first for their interview and obtain a decision sooner than others who have been in the centre for a longer time.

Among the steps of the procedure, the interview at the CGRS is the target of most of the opinions expressed by asylum seekers. Even if some narrate experiences of empathy during interviews, most asylum seekers and social workers recount "police" interview practices that are painful for individuals: "I have been on the road for three years [...], I know the months [of the trip] but I do not know the exact dates, it's not the date of my birthday! I did not know that once I arrived in Belgium I would be asked for the dates! I was fleeing, dates are for those who planned the trip" (asylum seeker from Fraipont, field notes, Liège, 10 October 2018). The questions and the ways in which they are asked are perceived as destabilizing asylum seekers, so that they "make mistakes" in reconstructing their story and are then accused of falsehoods: "such difficult questions! He [the CGRS officer] wants you to be nervous, he asks you questions in a strange way" (interview, former asylum seeker – asylum application rejected, Trooz, 18 June 2018). Some other asylum seekers also mentioned feeling that they were not offered the chance to tell their story, having the impression that the CGRS officers were not interested in their issues, and they contrasted the long waiting time during the procedure with the short time taken for the interview. The issue of translation is also perceived as problematic, because asylum seekers lose control over their words during the interview[61] and this is felt to be dangerous for the result of the procedure, considering the importance of giving the right answers – in terms of details and coherence of the narration – to the officers' questions: "the one translating during the first interview, he translated wrongly. […] He got mixed up. […] That's why [my application was rejected]" (interview, former asylum seeker – asylum application rejected, Trooz, 18 June 2018). The role of lawyers is also perceived as crucial in order to ensure a positive outcome of the asylum application. Several migrants' applications were rejected at first and then, after they changed their lawyer and submitted a new

at the Coordination of the Red Cross in Liège, attended by individuals coming from different reception centres, including that of Fraipont.

[61] This is not only due to the fact that asylum seekers may not understand what the translator says in French or Flemish, but also the fact that there may be misunderstandings between the translators and the asylum seekers themselves when they do not speak the very same dialect but only partly share a common language. This is quite common with the different languages of Arabic and African countries.

application,[62] their situation changed, without necessarily bringing new elements to the CGRS evaluation, but rather proposing a new approach.

All these elements show that the expression "asylum lottery", used to conceptualize the discordance of rates of refugee recognition between states (Türk and Dowd 2014: 281), can also be applied to the description of how asylum seekers experience their asylum procedure, the result of which depends on uncontrollable factors. Asylum seekers also question the government's assessment of "safe countries", as they fled those countries out of fear for their lives, and also mentioned the (in their eyes) illogical decisions taken. Although many are aware of rules[63] and of amendments to laws and procedures, most of our research participants experience difficulties in understanding what appears to be a system highly governed by arbitrariness, in which the human factor (including the approach taken by the actors in charge of implementing the asylum system) seems to be crucial to the outcome of their application (Türk and Dowd 2014: 281). Also concerning the regularization procedure, "The situation in Belgium, it is starting to get too complicated" (member of the VSP, field notes, Liège, 20 April 2018).

Experiencing this uncertainty generates psychological diseases that are often somatized, as we could observe while attending some sessions of the medical service held in the centres of Fraipont, Sainte-Ode and Namur, for example. In some of the observed consultations, asylum seekers complained about chest pain or difficulty breathing, even if a medical check did not identify any physical cause of these symptoms. Medical staff thus recognize these elements as symptoms of a psychological disorder, often "post-traumatic stress" but also "chronic stress" caused by "waiting" (interview, psychotherapist, Verviers, 31 August 2018; see also Kolela-Kabangu 2016). Individuals can be directed to internal psychological services or to other specialized organizations. The psychologists working in these services describe the harshness of migrants' life experiences, not least because the memory of traumatic past events is reactualized throughout the asylum procedure: "the length of the procedure leaves people a little idle, [...] in the centres, they do not really make plans, because they are stuck until they have the papers [...] It's a bit of a suspended time [*un temps arreté* in French] and it encourages ruminations, [...] it makes it hard to get away from what they've just experienced" (interview, psychotherapist, Verviers, 31 August 2018). Moreover, asylum seekers mentioned that everyone should have the chance to talk at least once to a psychologist, not only those with visible issues. Indeed, psychologists are in this case not so much regarded as professional care providers, but mostly as people they can talk to, who will listen to their stories. The need to be heard was strongly present in each place where we conducted fieldwork, and our listening

[62] Concerning the rules regulating the timeframe and conditions to comply with before one can submit a new asylum application after a negative decision, see article 57/6/2 of the law of 15 December 1980 on the access to the territory, residence, establishment and removal of foreigners.

[63] However, the Dublin regulation is one of the most cryptic rules for asylum seekers, as its functioning is far from being coherent in their eyes. See: European Commission, *Country responsible for asylum application (Dublin)*, no date, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants_en, accessed March 4, 2019.

during the individual interviews and focus groups was met with great gratitude – even though they realized we could not change their situation directly.

In fact, migrants experience conditions of immobility[64] even when they have physically moved from their country of origin. Immobility corresponds here to lengthy waiting, liminality and "stuckness" (Hage 2009), conditions that affect migrants' health and well-being. The ways in which social workers accompany asylum seekers throughout the procedure, seeing these critical aspects of their life experiences, can be an object of discussion – and assessment – among asylum seekers themselves, since "social workers should help you to better explain your story, it can be your story but you are not able to hold it" (asylum seeker from Fraipont, field notes, Liège, 10 October 2018). With some exceptions, assistants (centre staff) are appreciated to a great extent as the asylum seekers consider them powerless against the many rules imposed from above. They do, however, feel that the assistants adhere to the rules too strictly.

On the reception system and its actors

More broadly, we were able to gather a large amount of opinions of asylum seekers on the reception system itself and in particular on how life at the collective reception centres is experienced.[65] People highlight many negative aspects that are connected with the fact of sharing everyday life with other unknown people and of complying with rules that are imposed, as well as with procedures that are perceived as alienating: "it's hard to live in a centre, [...] all that you do is make appointments and ask questions. [...] it's like a modern prison, you are controlled. If you do not want to eat at 12… [...] you are obliged to go [eat], [...] you do not do what you want to do. You do what they impose on you, it's very complicated" (asylum seeker from Walloon centre, field notes, Liège, 10 October 2018). In some instances, contextual elements related to the centre strengthen the feeling of imprisonment. In Houthalen-Helchteren, the centre is located in a former army site which reminded several respondents of the war at home. The centre is also located quite far away from the town's centre and the buses go rather infrequently, which hinders their options to get out and get to know the 'real' Belgian society.

However, concerning life in the reception facilities, responses greatly vary from centre to centre. While reporting similar opinions on the establishment of routine daily activities, for example, residents in post-2015 Walloon centres express satisfaction with the general living conditions. Several interviewees even admitted to looking at life outside the centre with fear: "I know [life in the centre] is not like outside. We are known [here], not known outside. Here everybody can come and say hello, and help, give you a lift [...] I have a place to stay here. [...] Strange feeling, very strange. […] to be out of here means having a residence permit. But then you think: what will I do all alone?" (asylum seeker, field notes, Arlon, 22 November 2018). This feeling might be particularly common among children, partly because they create links with

[64] The issue of immobility is widely explored in contemporary social sciences literature. Among others on this issue, see: Carling (2002) and Salazar and Smart (2011).

[65] See on this issue: Gsir et al. (2012).

each other and they feel insecure about the idea of having to leave the centre for an unknown destination, even when this means that they have obtained the status of refugees; "[they] do not want to leave", says a volunteer helping children with homework in Fraipont (field notes, 17 October 2018). Opinions are thus sometimes ambivalent and in any case very complex, since they testify, on the one hand, to the need for appropriate implementation of the asylum procedure, including setting the conditions for accompanying individuals throughout it, and on the other hand, to the lack of room for autonomy. However, these opinions converge in demonstrating how, instead of being an empty "liminal status", the life experience of asylum seekers during their application procedure and (re)settlement is definitely significant, not only due to the emotional charge that characterizes it, but also because it is full of actions and meaning.[66] This – legal, psychological, social and economic[67] – liminal status is filled with individual and collective strategies put in place to survive and to adapt to often radically new social and material conditions. Moreover, through these strategies asylum seekers react to the system that operates to subordinate them.[68]

Several projects are implemented within the centre with the aim of involving asylum seekers in recreational, training or professional activities intended to occupy individuals and thus divert their attention from solely the asylum procedure, as well as to give them some opportunities for self-subsistence. Some activities are specifically devoted to women, such as two spaces organized in the centre of Fraipont with the help of a social worker and a volunteer, and managed by some asylum seekers: a nursery and a larger space for discussion. Women use these spaces to exchange stories about their life experiences and to share preoccupations about what they are experiencing during their resettlement, but also to express relief after good news: "[When the letter from CRGS arrived] we cried with joy!" (newly recognized refugee woman, field notes, Fraipont, 2 July 2018). The activities that focus on women only are indeed considered important, as several women reported they do not feel comfortable participating in activities for both men and women (for example, sport activities).

Other recurrent initiatives involving asylum seekers aim at integrating the asylum seekers into the community. In Houthalen-Helchteren and Fraipont, dining events let residents of the centre introduce their local cuisine to both other residents and neighbours of the centre. These kinds of initiatives reverse the guest–host relationship in which asylum seekers are entangled because of their situation of dependence on the state's hospitality (Vandevoordt 2017), and enable asylum seekers to challenge the representations and power dynamics at play: "sharing a meal [...] breaks down barriers and [people] learn to discover each other around something [food]" (interview, centre director, Fraipont, 27 April 2018). Research highlights the role of food as not only

[66] Among others on this issue, see: Michel Agier (2008).

[67] Unless they work (asylum seekers may request a work permit four months after their asylum application, if they have not yet received an answer; in collective reception centres, some tasks may also be remunerated, such as cleaning services or serving in the canteen), the weekly income received by asylum seekers, which is part of the material aid to which they are entitled as established by international regulations, amounts to around €7.

[68] This analytical framework refers to the theories of Michel Foucault, as well as of Didier Fassin, inspired by the French philosopher.

an essential element for bodily existence, but also as a social language central to – collective and individual – identity, and as a crucial means to define, perpetuate and change social relationships and power dynamics, including in the context of forced migration (Monsutti 2010). In the majority of fieldwork sites, the bad quality of the food was mentioned, as well as the impossibility of doing anything about it as the residents are only allowed to cook for themselves in rare cases,[69] and often do not have enough money to buy other food outside the centre. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, several asylum seekers act against the rules and use cooking plates in their rooms in order to be able to cook a small meal for themselves; or they take their meals to their rooms.

These activities and strategies constitute relevant spaces for migrants to express their opinions and feelings. Georgiadou highlights "the value of bringing to light and studying individual cases of refugees who are creatively trying to cope with the conditions of their life", since "creat[ing] analytical space around personal stories of forced migrants who inventively try to actualize their life plans" (Georgiadou 2013: 116) operates against mass and depersonalized images of refugees as subalterns (Feldman 1994, quoted in Malkki 1996: 388). Asylum seekers' initiatives challenge the political and legal marginalization that individuals may experience, since "asylum policies [...] restrict and inhibit individual potentialities" (Georgiadou 2013: 1320). In fact, many of them actively participate in several awareness-raising actions, for example by taking the floor at events to narrate their life experience. This contributes to a process of re-humanization of refugees that goes against the visual representations of refugees – in the media for example – that play "an essential, yet neglected, role in forming the stereotype of 'the refugee'" (Malkki 1995: 9). Individual narratives question standardized patterns of representation and universalized visual tropes that produce a visual dehumanization of refugees or an equally disempowering victimization of them (Bleiker et al. 2013; Szörényi 2006; Wright 2002). Interpersonal encounters are aimed at questioning these representations and at triggering new, informed and diverse ones: "There are individuals behind [television images of refugees], in flesh and bone before them, [...] shaking hands, talking about their personal history, [...] this speaks [...] [to people] much more than if I had to give a presentation on the topic 'asylum and migration'" (interview, centre director, Fraipont, 27 April 2018). The aim of narrating migrants' individual stories is to restore migrants' individuality and agency: "The point is to show people that we are not here to eat and sleep, but we move and we head out of the water. We have qualifications. [...] It's to show what's going on from the inside, from the other side. [...] What we really are and what we do" (VSP member, field notes, Liège, 22 November 2017).

[69] The centre of Sainte-Ode, for example, does not rely on an external catering service. Every week residents are given cheques for buying food outside the centre, which they can prepare in a shared kitchen. Other centres also have a communal kitchen that can be used by residents to cook their own meals. In some cases, shared kitchens are mainly used to organize the initiatives discussed above.

Migrants' agency between constraints and autonomy

Migrants' mobilization towards this aim of re-humanization and other concerns takes diverse forms (for example, artistic and audio-visual productions) that create spaces for expression and political participation (see Skartveit and Goodnow 2010). Collaboration with a network of local social actors seems essential to the organization of these awareness-raising activities, and migrants often underline this factor: "one finger cannot pick something up from the floor alone, you need two" (member of the VSP speaking about the support committee, field notes, Liège, 22 November 2017). However, at some points the relationship established between migrants and volunteers may create expectations that operate as a normative pressure on migrants, for example urging them to adopt certain behaviours and to share their experiences and plans in the intercultural encounter that is established. These kinds of interpersonal dynamics trigger among migrants the need to obtain some distance and "emancipate" themselves from others' help, since "help is needed, but help must lead to liberation. Aid cannot be permanent, help must lead to doing without help" (interview, former undocumented migrant, Liège, 31 January 2019). Therefore, autonomous awareness-raising initiatives become a means to 'take things into your own hands'" (undocumented migrant from Brussels, field notes, Liège, 20 April 2018), as well as to act, for example, "without the intermediary of the Red Cross" and "to go towards people and not always the reverse" (asylum seeker,[70] field notes, Fraipont, 8 May 2018). These initiatives are also seen as a means to react to possible forms of "neo-colonialism" and "domination" of migrants' actions (in the words of one of our research participants), as well as to forms of politicization and instrumentalization of migrants intended to reach other goals than the improvement of their life conditions and the establishment of solid opportunities for participation.

Even if further reflection is needed to assess whether the migrants' initiatives described in this chapter bring about effective change, we find it important to account for them. The spaces of action that are created for and by migrants often still seem to be kept at the margins of the sites where political decisions are taken, thus perpetuating exclusion or producing questionable forms of inclusion (see for example De Genova 2013). However, these spaces are not entirely – or not at all – apolitical, but rather they represent "'urban interstices' or the spaces in between legality and illegality, visibility and invisibility and formality and informality that allow unrecognized actors to simultaneously stay 'out of sight' and 'be seen'"; within these spaces, "liminal politics" is enacted by "precarious actors […] who do not have a 'place' within the symbolic distribution of places, [and who in this way] create space for citizenship" (Swerts 2017: 380). These spaces, then, testify to the specific "spatiality and situatedness of political membership" (Sigona 2015). The citizenship produced within them is "a cultural process of 'subjectification', in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations" (Ong 2013: 79). As Bell Hooks argues, it is necessary to draw "a definite distinction between that marginality

[70] Co-founder of the asylum seekers' group V.E.P. – *Vivons ensemble sur une même planète* (Let's live together on the same planet), whose actions have "anti-racist and anti-prejudice" aims (field notes, Fraipont, May 8, 2018).

which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility" (Hooks 1990: 153).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have shed light on the relationship between migrants – including asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants – and local Belgian communities, following the increased arrival of asylum seekers and the accompanying opening of new reception centres that began in 2015. We studied various forms of mobilization around reception centres and non-institutional places where migrants gathered, aiming for more insight into the frames of mobilization and the underlying motives that provoke action. We also focused on the impact of a reception centre and/or of the presence of asylum seekers on the local community, doing so by studying general opinions on their presence and the impact on social cohesion. Finally, we took into account the experiences of migrants themselves, mainly with regard to their perception of the Belgian asylum procedure and of Belgian society. In order to study these issues, we conducted qualitative fieldwork in twelve localities spread across the entire country: six in Wallonia, two in Brussels and four in Flanders. One of the localities in each region was a centre that had already opened before 2015 and was part of the previous BELSPO research on perceptions and attitudes towards migrants. In every locality we conducted semi-structured interviews with a variety of actors, such as the local population, political actors and civil society organizations. We also had contact with migrants themselves, by means of collective interviews or participant observation.

Concerning mobilization with the aim of providing aid to migrants, we can distinguish three prominent collective frames of mobilization, emerging in relation to contextual factors. First, we identified the humanitarian rationale in Zeebrugge and Brussels. Both locations are marked by the presence of migrants who have not (yet) applied for asylum in Belgium and who are not staying in a reception centre, which explains the presence of the humanitarian impulse to respond to basic human needs. This approach, however, goes hand in hand with both implicit and explicit political protest that makes the humanitarianism subversive. Indeed, a second rationale that shapes actions of mobilization targets the institutional system of reception and the policies concerning migration. The implicit or explicit political stance present in humanitarian movements may also lead them, as has been the case in Brussels, to "professionalize" and develop into an official platform. A third rationale present in our fieldwork and also stemming from initial humanitarian concerns is the motive of promoting inclusive citizenship, as we could observe in Liège. Contrary to Zeebrugge and Brussels, the people residing in Liège are mainly undocumented migrants who have been living in Belgium for a long time. The political objective emerging here should be seen as a continuation of the city's history, which is marked by struggles that go beyond migration issues and shape themselves as "transversal", that is, developed in terms of class membership and socio-economic inequality.

Volunteers in reception centres mainly adhered to humanitarian concerns triggered by the images in the media in most cases. Interestingly, however, we can speak of a certain 'momentum' of humanitarian action as the number of volunteers active in

reception centres declined strongly following the initial steep increase. The specific reasons for stopping the voluntary work vary, but generally come down to a perceived lack of moral and emotional benefits for the volunteers themselves. In addition, providing humanitarian relief to the asylum seekers is less of an issue when they are residing in a reception centre where their basic needs are met. In some instances, however, volunteers remained active and took on a political role in order to achieve inclusive citizenship for those residing in a reception centre. Throughout this process, volunteers (or civil society organizations as a whole) may experience a difficult relationship with the centre staff and management, and tensions or disagreements can emerge. The form and extent of these tensions depended on the inner power balances. Moreover, tensions were strongest in centres managed by actors that did not have previous experience in the domain and where guidelines for volunteers were lacking, but where there were a high number of accepted volunteers. Another conflictual element is the presence of volunteers in the public debate on asylum, where their political positioning – criticizing the federal government's policies – may be seen as representative of the organizations running the centres, which have to stay neutral.

This frame analysis also shows that the types of mobilization studied are directly connected to the profiles of migrants as well as the priorities and demands related to their trajectories, status and projects. Indeed, we highlighted that this fact can generate tensions among mobilized people who may not necessarily wish to support some migrants whose profile they consider, for one reason or another, undeserving of their help. Even though, as we have seen, humanitarian and political frames overlap, there are indeed perceived differences between mobilizing to respond to the basic needs of visibly vulnerable human beings and taking an overt political position to call for the regularization of undocumented migrants who have been residing illegally in the country for many years. Moreover, because the timeframe of the approach and action may differ in the two cases, this may generate different forms of engagement.

Besides these frames of mobilization and collective dynamics, we also studied the specific individual motives that lead volunteers to become actively engaged with asylum seekers. These motives include feelings of empathy and solidarity with the asylum seekers (combined with a manifest or latent subversive will), and the moral and emotional benefits that volunteering has for the volunteers themselves. In addition, cultural citizenship functions as a motivation for several volunteers who wish to contribute to the integration process of the newcomers.

Whereas mobilization with the goal of supporting migrants was widespread and in most cases rather organized, mobilization against the reception of asylum seekers turned out to be rather limited and unstructured. We believe that this fact may be explained by the lack of protest from political actors with significant resources, as most local politicians accepted the decision made by the federal government to open a reception centre. However, instances of disagreement may be directed at the lack of communication and information coming from the local government. Indeed, the short-notice communication strategy employed by the federal government took local communities by surprise, although detailed information provision is considered to be of major importance in counteracting possible negative reactions from the local population. In most of the communities where we conducted fieldwork, the local

government took measures and organized pre-opening meetings to inform the local population and give them an opportunity to share their concerns. As these meetings were public and involved political actors, however, they emerged as discursive settings where attendees could be reluctant to speak their mind, especially in those contexts where pro-refugee attitudes had particular relevance, where citizens' involvement in mobilization and support actions was particularly large, or where a specific philosophy of positive reception was a shared feature. Another issue with the meetings was the presence of people related to (mainly extreme right-wing) political organizations that used these occasions for electoral purposes.

Concerning the impact of a reception centre on the local community, an interesting finding is that neighbours of the centre are rarely involved as volunteers. For various reasons, many locals do not have close contact with the asylum seekers but live alongside the centre in a neutral manner, while people who come to events organized by reception centres are markedly positive towards asylum seekers and refugees. However, local communities may be affected by the opening of a reception centre in ways and with effects that depend on contextual factors (such as the strength of local ties and previous experience with multiculturalism).

A final focus of our research was migrants' opinions on both the asylum procedure (as part of broader politics surrounding migration) and the reception system and its actors. We found that asylum seekers perceive the long waiting time until their application has been dealt with as psychologically (and potentially also physically) exhausting, a feeling that is often strengthened by the (in their eyes) arbitrary asylum procedure, the result of which depends on uncontrollable factors. Life in the centre, even if opinions vary strongly, is also considered difficult in terms of sharing everyday life with unfamiliar people and the need to comply with alienating rules and procedures that limit the asylum seekers' freedom. Despite their constant feelings of insecurity regarding the asylum procedure, asylum seekers try to shape their lives actively instead of "being lived". In or outside of the centres, migrants develop strategies to cope with everyday constraints on their lives and also actively participate in a process of re-humanization of refugees by taking the floor at events to narrate their life experience, going against standardized patterns of representation. Even though the results of these types of activities cannot be measured, these spaces in between legality and illegality, visibility and invisibility, and formality and informality enable migrants to become political actors as well.

Throughout this chapter, we have highlighted the complex forms that interactions between migrants and the local environments in which they live. In doing so, we have shed light on the variety of factors influencing the initiatives and opinions of a set of social actors that operate in composite networks and within multiple (interpersonal, political and socio-cultural) dynamics. Similarly to past research, we have underlined the role of contextual elements and representations in shaping the interactions between migrants and the local population, and more precisely the engagement of the latter with the former. Equally, we have shown how motivation and opportunity need to be present in order to trigger concrete action. The reception crisis of 2015 constituted a temporal occasion that (re)activated the will to mobilize, including in previously opened centres, even if solidarity actions may be seen, to some extent,

as in continuity with those carried out in the past. While throughout this analysis some recurrences and patterns have emerged, the rich material that we studied in this chapter shows that such complexity cannot be reduced to simple causal explanations, nor to generalized statements. Indeed, the multiplicity of the analyzed experiences brings nuances to these potential recurrences and patterns. Through this approach, we have endeavoured to contribute not only to existing literature on the interactions between newcomers and local populations, but also – mainly – to a developing recent literature on solidarity movements that have arisen around migrants in Europe, which aims at making visible, beyond the mainstream representations of these initiatives, the heterogeneous issues that they involve. Within the development of this mobilization, individual actors, including migrants, play a crucial role, in which their actions and opinions – including those that target these very same initiatives – enable them to take part in the local and wider political debate on migration.

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Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations

Andrea REA
Marco MARTINIELLO
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