

Cornelia Sletbak

Paradoxes in the Stricter Asylum Policies and Tighter Border Controls in Europe:

Observations from a Refugee Camp in Greece

Master's thesis in Globalisation and Sustainable Development

Supervisor: Marianne Garvik

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Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Social Work



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Abstract

The “refugee crisis” of 2015 caused an immense pressure on Europe's migration and asylum policies as the existing system proved to be unprepared to address the scale of displacement. The unprecedented influx of refugees fleeing war- torn and politically unstable regions led European states to pursue individual policy responses characterized by border closures and enforcement measures. These measures remain today and are considered to be hostile towards refugees as these policies are aimed at deterring arrivals from crossing the borders. Despite the tightening of border controls, refugees continue to arrive in Europe, although not at the same scale as 2015. In recent years European states have increasingly entered into agreements with so- called “safe third countries”, emphasizing externalization policies to a greater extent than previously.

Using a qualitative research approach based on data collected from semi-participatory observation, and various relevant reports and studies, this thesis aims at examining the (un)intended consequences of asylum policies and tightening border control, with a focus on Greece as a case study. The study focuses on the evolving implications of tightening border controls, spanning from the refugee crisis of 2015 to the present day, incorporating examples from the refugee crisis as well as insights from a field study from Greece conducted in 2023. Alongside relevant previous studies, the analysis of the thesis draws upon the theoretical frameworks of securitisation theory, migration systems, aspirations - capabilities approach and integration theories. The research explores the interplay between structural constraints and individual agency within the context of migration. The findings of the study reveal nuanced insights into the lived realities of refugees in Greece. Moreover, the findings confirms that the implementation of stricter asylum policies and tightening of border control has led refugees to seek new, alternative routes and employ different strategies to navigate into Europe, leading to often more dangerous scenarios. The significance of migration agency, linkages, networks and intermediaries becomes apparent in demonstrating how refugees are able to cross the Mediterranean Sea, land borders, endure various reception centres and integrate into the host societies. The findings from first hand observations in Greece ultimately underscores the importance of acknowledging refugees as active agents within the migration processes.

Sammendrag

Flyktningkrisen i 2015 førte til et betydelig press på Europas migrasjon – og asylpolitikk. Da strømmen av flyktningene ankom grensene til Europa, viste det seg at det eksisterende systemet var for dårlig utstyrt til å håndtere omfanget av menneskers desperasjon etter behov for hjelp etter å ha flyktet fra krig og politisk ustabile land og regioner. Dette førte til at flere Europeiske land begynte å innføre individuelle politiske tiltak som streng håndheving av asylpolitikk, innvandringsregler og grensestenging. Siden flyktningkrisen har flere Europeiske land innført strengere tiltak for å stoppe ankomster av flyktninger. Det politiske bilde i Europa kan sies å være preget av «flyktning-fiendtlighet». Til tross for økt grensek kontroll fortsetter flyktninger å ankomme grensene til Europa, men ikke i samme antall som i 2015. Politikk med sikte på å hindre asylsøkere og flyktninger fra å nå grensene, og avtaler med såkalte «trygge tredjeland» har blitt den nye normalen når det gjelder migrasjon – og asylpolitikk i Europa.

Denne oppgaven har tatt i bruk en kvalitativ forskningstilnærming basert på data innsamlet fra deltagende observasjon og ulike relevante rapporter og studier som sekundærdata. Oppgaven tar sikte på å undersøke de (u)tilsiktete konsekvensene av innstrammende asylpolitikk og grensek kontroll, med fokus på Hellas som casestudie. Oppgaven setter søkelys på implikasjonene av strammere grensek kontroll og strekker seg fra flyktningkrisen i 2015 til i dag, og inkluderer eksempler fra flyktningkrisen samt innsikt fra feltarbeidet som ble gjennomført i Hellas i 2023. I tillegg til tidligere studier, baserer analysen i oppgaven seg på teori basert på sekuritisering, migrasjonssystemer og nettverk, individuell handlingskraft, aspirasjoner – evne tilnærming og integreringsteorier. Oppgaven utforsker samspillet mellom strukturelle begrensninger og individuell handlingskraft innenfor migrasjonskonteksten. Funnene i studien avslører innsikt i de faktiske realitetene til flyktingene. Funnene avslører blant annet at implementeringen av strengere grensek kontroll har ført til at flyktninger søker nye, alternative ruter og bruker ofte forskjellige strategier for å navigere seg i Europa. Dette har ført til farligere scenarier for flyktingene. Betydningen av handlingskraft, migrasjonsforbindelser, nettverk og mellomledd blir tydelig når funnene viser hvordan flyktingene er i stand til å krysse Middelhavet, landegrensener, oppholde seg i ulike mottakssentre og integrere seg i mottakslandene. Funnene fra studiet understreker viktigheten av å anerkjenne flyktingene som aktive individer i migrasjonsprosessen.

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List of Abbreviations

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

EU: European Union

ECRE: The European Council on Refugees and Exiles

FRONTEX: European Border and Coast Guard Agency

IOM: International Organization for Migration

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Migration is not a new phenomenon, however in the last decade, migration has become one of the most disputed issues in European politics (Hansen & Pettersson, 2022, p. 117). Nearly a decade has passed since the 2015 “refugee crisis” where Europe witnessed an unprecedented influx of refugees arriving at its borders. As a response to the “refugee crisis” of 2015-2016, several European states closed their borders and implemented stricter asylum policies and migration management strategies. The political pressure to reduce the number of arrivals, was argued to have tested mainstream political parties across Europe, which faced a rapidly growing challenge from populist groups advocating radical responses (Funk, Namara, Pardo & Rose, 2017, p 2). Since 2016, refugees and asylum seekers are continuously arriving to frontline states such as Italy and Greece, seeking protection. According to the Operational Data Portal (ODP, 2024) of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 270,180 arrived at the Mediterranean borders of Europe by sea and land in 2023, marking this as the highest number of arrivals since the refugee crisis. This number includes to mention a few, Ukrainian civilians fleeing Russia’s war of aggression, hundred thousand refugees fleeing Nagorno - Karabakh and the vast number of refugees arriving in Lampedusa, Cyprus and the Greek islands. Images of overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean Sea, overcrowded refugee camps, and people behind fences and walls have come to constitute a powerful picture of the refugee situation today. The flow of refugees arriving to Europe has led governments to resort to measures that control and “manage” the situation, which has been referred to by several scholars as securitisation of migration (Triandafyllidou & Dimitriadi, 2014; Long, 2014; Hansen & Pettersson, 2022).

Europe is currently pursuing a political agenda where border walls, fences and safe third-countries are included in the policies and the strategies of border control and migration management. Externalisation of border control has been established an important policy tool of the European Union (EU) (Hansen & Pettersson, 2021, p.117). The political landscape of Europe has shifted in recent years, becoming more hostile and closed off, and as a result, member states are cutting deals with other states, especially North African and Middle Eastern nations to hold back the flow of asylum-seekers. The UK- Rwanda agreement and Italy-

Albania agreement are testimonies of the externalisation and deterrence measures that are increasing in the migration policies today. Additionally, tougher border controls are implemented to regulate and manage the arrivals of refugees. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum which was signed in December 2023 is meant to be the new hope for Europe (European Commission, 2024c) however most of its attention is focused on regulating and managing the arrivals of migrants, which will most likely add more pressure on the frontline states. A paradox emerges as European states deal with the complexities of border control and migration management; despite stricter politics and control, the influx of refugees continues to grow.

1.1 Research objective, thesis statement and research questions

Against this backdrop of tightening political landscapes and an influx of refugees, the efficiency of Europe's migration policies is questioned. Are stricter border controls redirecting migration flows, or are they amplifying the risks faced by those seeking refuge? The purpose of this research study is to understand the relationship between migration and asylum policies in Europe and refugee's agency throughout the migratory stages. The thesis sheds light on the challenges that come with stricter border control and migration management in Europe. This objective highlights the significance of this thesis in relation to the Master Programme of Globalization and Sustainable Development. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), migration is a highly relevant topic as it is linked to broader global transformations occurring around the world, related to technological, geopolitical, and environmental change (IOM 2021).

This study aims to investigate the paradox of tightening border controls and continued refugee arrivals. The main research question guiding this study is: **What are the (un)intended consequences of stricter migration and asylum policies in Europe?**

The research question is supported by these sub-questions, including:

- How are tighter border controls in Europe impacting refugee's agency?
- How does migration networks and intermediaries impact and facilitate the trajectories of refugees?
- How are hostile attitudes in host societies influencing the integration of refugees in Europe?

To achieve an understanding of the broad scope of Europe's migration policies, this study focuses on a selection of agreements and policies that impact refugee flows in Europe. The study explores the lived experiences of refugee's journey from arrival, reception and integration or continued movement while analysing the consequences of stricter policies and border control on refugee flows in Europe. This study aims to shed light on the complicated interplay between policy and reality drawing in some relevant theories, which include securitisation theory, migration networks, agency theory, aspirations – capabilities theory and integration theories. Rooted in a qualitative approach, the study is based on data collected from semi-participatory observation in a refugee camp in Greece, where I volunteered for five weeks, supplemented by secondary data retrieved from existing literature, statistics, policy documents and electronic media.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters, including the current introductory chapter. This chapter constitutes of a general introduction of the study, presenting the research objective and research questions. Chapter two presents a background of the study, providing information about the refugee crisis and Greece as a frontline state. The chapter presents some key policies and contemporary regulations and agreements to provide context for the analysis. The next chapter, chapter three, introduces the theoretical framework I employed to discuss the research questions. This chapter also includes previous research in connection to the objective of this study. The research methodology is presented in chapter four, which introduces the data collection methods and application of the qualitative research approach. Here I justify why this approach has been applied. The chapter also presents techniques applied on how the data was generated and analysed. Equally important, the methodology chapter mentions the ethical considerations of the study, as well as the reflexivity, positionality, and limitations of the study. Chapters five, six and seven presents the analysis of the primary data collected from semi-participant observation in Greece combined with secondary data. The chapters are divided based on the main migratory trajectory from arrival, reception, and integration or future movements. The first chapter of the analysis explores the journey to Europe and what challenges the refugees face when crossing the borders either by sea or on land. The trajectories of refugees are often hindered by border closures at this section of their journey, highlighting the importance of using one's capabilities to continue the movement. Furthermore, this chapter presents how hostile attitudes play a role in the journey.

The second section of the analysis examines the reception conditions and asylum process in Greece, specifically focusing on the importance of intermediaries. The discussion in this chapter is primarily based on the first-hand observations I made during the fieldwork in Greece. The last chapter of the analysis takes the previous factors into account when the refugees decide whether to integrate into the host society or continue their movement. I conclude by summarising the study and its main findings, and I provide some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

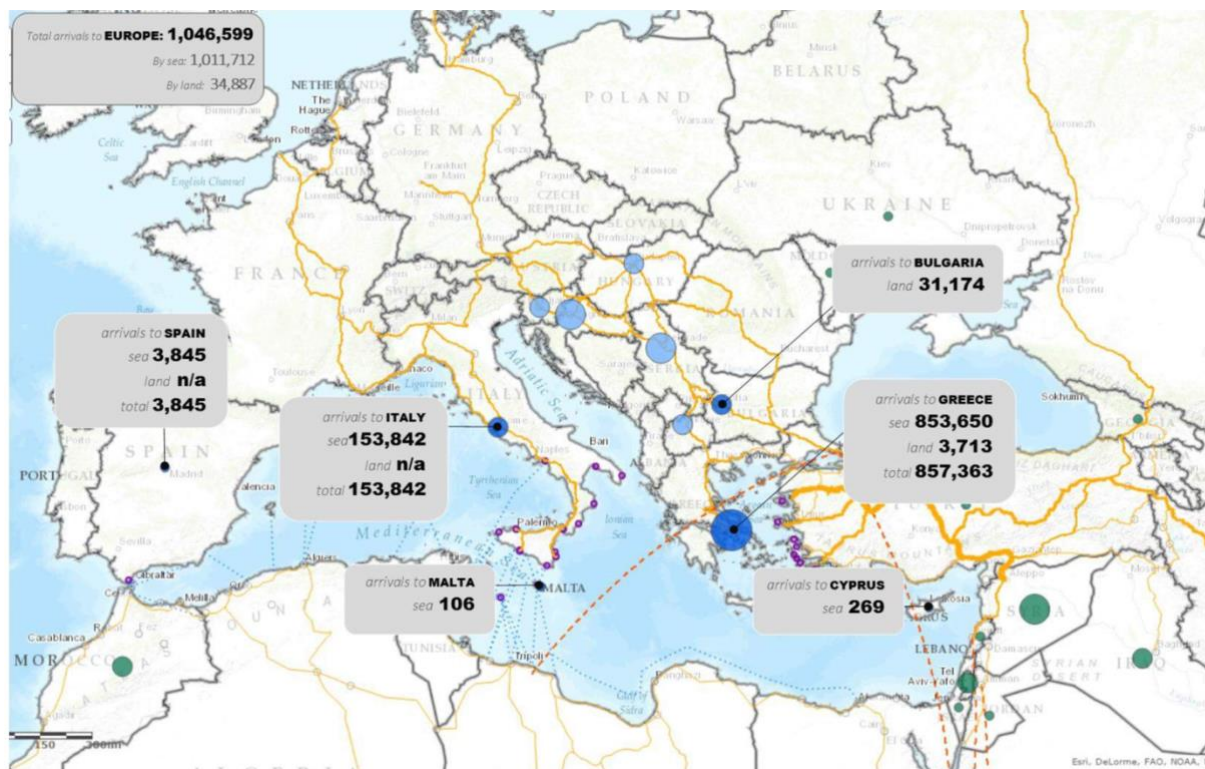
Background

This section includes the background and context for this study, with a particular focus on the refugee crisis in Greece as a case study. The importance of accurate labels and understanding of migration categories will also be presented in this chapter. The European asylum policies consist of vast and elaborate laws, and due to the limited space and scope of this study, this section will examine a selection of central legal frameworks governing refugees and asylum seekers. A few contemporary regulations and agreements that are currently under discussion and have the potential for significant consequences if implemented will also be outlined.

2.1 Refugee crisis and Greece as a frontline state

More than 911,000 refugees and migrants arrived on European shores in 2015 (Spindler, 2015) marking the year of the “refugee crisis” in Europe. The term refugee crisis is used to describe the movement of large groups of displaced people seeking safety in other countries fleeing their homes under extremely difficult conditions due to conflicts, persecution, wars, or natural disasters (Kalogeraki, 2022, p.91). This unprecedented movement of refugees and asylum seekers seeking safety in European countries pressured the capacity of reception systems in European countries, causing humanitarian challenges and debates over asylum policies and border control. A defining moment of the crisis was the image of a young boy's body washed up on a beach. Following this incident, the head of the UN Refugee Agency emphasized that efforts needed to be made to resolve the refugee crisis (Spindler, 2015). Several scholars have argued that this crisis reshaped the political landscape of Europe (Kousis, Chatzidaki & Kafetsios, 2022; Papatzani, Hatziprokopiou, Vlastou-Dimopoulou & Siotou, 2022). The influx of refugees underscored the limitations of frameworks and policies managing migration in Europe. Europe was divided by the refugee crisis based on the state's positionings, where certain states had the critical role as transit (such as Greece, Italy, or Spain) and others as destination countries (such as Germany, Sweden, or Austria) (Kalogeraki, 2022, p.92). Countries such as Italy, Greece and Spain, experienced significant challenges of the influx of refugees due to their border locations. These countries were later regarded as frontline states.

Figure 1: Migrant flows in Europe in 2015



Source: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/situation_reports/file/Mixed-Flows-Mediterranean-and-Beyond-Compilation-Overview-2015.pdf

Accessed: 18th of May, 2024

This study is primarily based on data collected from my fieldwork conducted in Greece. To obtain substantial information regarding the refugee situation in Greece, this study has used the findings from Kousis, Chatzidaki and Kafetsios (2022) in their book on “Challenging Mobilities in and to the EU during Times of Crises: The Case of Greece”. The choice of Greece as the focal point for this study arises from its position at the front of European border, making the country particularly exposed to the refugee flows coming from Africa and the Middle East/Central Asia. The country's extensive coastline and proximity to conflict-ridden regions have made it a natural destination for individuals seeking safety and asylum. Although Greece perceived to be a transit country (Kalegoraki, 2022, p.92) and not a final destination for most refugees, figure 1 illustrates that 857,363 migrants arrived in Greece in 2015 (IOM, 2015, p. 5). Greece is often the first country of access for the refugees arriving in Europe, causing the responsibility of the refugee crisis to land mostly on the frontline state. Even though the crisis was referred to as a common European dilemma, that affected all European countries, it was clear that the burden of the arrival of refugees fell mainly on the frontline

states. In addition to dealing with the influx of refugees in 2015, Greece was also suffering major consequences after the economic crisis of 2008, that heavily shaped the country and its politics (Kousis et al., 2022, p.1). The challenges that Greece have had to face with both the economic crisis and refugee crisis and still receiving refugees makes this country a compelling case study.

Paschou, Zoukakis & Kousis (2022, p.144) points out that the political stress was intense in Greece in 2015 and 2016 due to the strong asymmetry between the needs of the incoming migratory population and the scarce available resources and political preparedness of the country, which continued facing the impacts of the 2008 economic crisis. The consequences of the economic crisis in 2008 resulted in increased unemployment rates and decreased income. The combined effects of this crisis caused many Greeks to emigrate the country (Pratsinakis, 2022, p.28). This emigration consisted of mostly the younger generation, and the higher educated population, causing the country to experience the phenomena of brain drain. Additionally, from the late 1990s onwards, Greece assumed the role of the EU's external border by intensifying surveillance efforts at the Greek-Turkish borders and implementing restrictions on departures via air or sea (Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022, p.206). The early 2000s positioned Greece as one of the major frontline states of the EU. Transit migration was being established because of specific EU regimes, shaping the reception systems and mobility governance in Greece (Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022, p.202). The reception infrastructure was limited to very special detention facilities for newly arrived migrants. These detention centres were located at the Greek-Turkish borders. Therefore, at the start of 2000, Greece's reception system was made up of numerous different detention sites that were set up anywhere such as in regular police cells or at police or border guard stations, as well as in yards and other improvised facilities adapted for this purpose (Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022, p.207). Between 2010 and 2014, varied measures were taken to transform informal reception practices into an institutional system of governance for channelling migrant mobility. Greece became the object of severe criticism for its non-existent asylum system, arbitrary detentions, and inhuman reception conditions for migrants (Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022, p.209). In 2020 the reception conditions in mainland camps were characterised by overcrowding, deprivation, and segregated areas (Papatzani et al., 2022, p. 4391).

The refugee crisis of 2015 led to chaos on the shores of Greek islands as large numbers of people arrived needing assistance and humanitarian aid. As mentioned, Greece was still

deeply affected by the economic and financial crisis and the strict measures imposed by the EU. Additionally, high unemployment rates and social unrest meant that the country was unprepared to cope with the responding to the arrivals (Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon & Sigona, 2018, p. 25). Greece became one of the major entry points by sea since a high number of refugees entered its territory en route to the destination countries e.g. wealthier European countries. By the end of 2015, the total number of registered refugee arrivals in Greece reached the record figure of 821,000 with most of the flow being directed towards the islands bordering Turkey (IOM, 2015; Kalogeraki, 2022, p.92). Directing refugees to Turkey was an element of the EU-Turkey statement that emerged as a solution to prevent departures of refugees towards Greece, and readmitting refugees to Turkey, however this was criticised for its implications for refugee rights (Dimitriadi, 2018, p.190). The statement aimed to readmitting refugees to sort and categorise newly arrived migrants on Greek territory to return them to Turkey (Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022, p.212). A key component of the statement was that all new irregular migrants crossing to the Greek islands as of 20 March 2016, could be returned to Turkey following an individual examination of their asylum application. Until a decision is reached, applicants are restricted from leaving the islands, and are accommodated in reception centres, also known as hotspots (Dimitriadi, 2022, p.226). The hotspot approach, also known as the hotspot scheme, aimed at institutionalising and standardising practices designed back in 2011 when initial reception emerged. Furthermore, the closure of the Western Balkan route in March 2016 also intensified Greece's challenges, effectively trapping thousands of migrants within its borders (Dimitriadi, 2018, p.183). The large influx of arrivals as well as the trapped refugees waiting for their asylum decisions took its toll on the Greek government, causing the government to not be able to manage the situation. This led international organisations and NGOs to provide reception facilities and services because the state-led emergency provisions were insufficient (Crawley et al., 2018, p.27). To a certain degree, this is still the case in Greece and will be further discussed in the analysis chapters.

2.2 Who is a refugee?

To grasp the complexities of stricter migration policies and their impacts on refugee agency, it is necessary to understand the importance of different categories and labels of migration. Refugees are often portrayed as a vulnerable group and throughout this study this is carefully considered, as the labels we use in migration discourse carry distinct meanings and repercussions. De Haas, Castles and Miller (2020, p.21) highlight the importance of

categories as tools for understanding migration, cautioning against the uncritical adoption of legal and policy terms. IOM defines a migrant simply as "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence" (IOM, n.d). Refugees are defined by the 1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, henceforth Refugee Convention, as individuals who are entitled to seek refuge across international borders due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. They are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their home country (UNHCR, 1951, p.3). It is important to note that the 1951 definition does not include all types of refugees e.g. climate refugees, and is primarily a definition for European refugees, however this definition has been revised and includes a broader category of refugees today (de Haas et al., 2020, p.32). Refugees and asylum-seekers are distinguished by the fact that every refugee was once an asylum-seeker, but not all asylum-seekers will be granted refugee status (UNHCR, n.d). UNHCR categorises asylum-seekers as individuals seeking international protection under international law while awaiting the determination of their refugee status. Over time, many refugees integrate into their host communities, engaging in work, establishing businesses, and reuniting with family members (de Haas et al., 2020, p.32), therefore evolving beyond their initial refugee status and acquiring new identities and categories of migration. In this study, I use the terms refugee and asylum seeker interchangeably, given the situation. When referring to the refugees in the camp, I refer to them as residents.

Migration for the purpose of seeking asylum is a recognized right safeguarded by international law. Therefore, terms like "illegal asylum seekers," often employed in political and media discourse, cannot be applied to those seeking asylum. Narratives depicting refugees arriving in Europe as "illegal" underscore the significance of migration categories. De Haas et al. (2020, p.33) argues that while actions can be deemed illegal, people cannot. Moreover, migration statuses are not static. Migrants often find themselves in between the status of legal and illegal, with their statuses fluctuating over time. Hence, terms like "irregular" and "unauthorised" migration are preferred over "illegal," particularly concerning refugees and asylum-seekers who may resort to dangerous routes facilitated by smugglers and human traffickers.

2.3 Asylum policies and regulations: The Refugee Convention, Schengen & Dublin

Amidst these challenges, it is crucial to understand the legal frameworks shaping Greece's and Europe's approach to refugee management to address the evolving dynamics of the refugee influx. Migration policies can be defined as laws, regulations, and measures that states implement with the objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of migration (de Haas et al., 2020, p.248). In principle, immigration policies are uniform statements agreed upon by member states on what to do or not do in terms of laws, regulations, decisions, or orders, relating to the selection, admission, settlement, and deportation of non-EU citizens (Bjerre, Helbling, Römer & Zobel. 2015 p.559). At the heart of Europe's asylum policies lies the 1951 Refugee Convention, which provides the internationally recognized definition of a refugee and outlines the legal protection, rights, and assistance a refugee is entitled to receive (UNHCR, 1951). UNHCR carries out these procedures of protecting refugees through this convention. Subsequently, the principle of non-refoulement, is a key component to the Refugee Convention. The principle prohibits states to return refugees to countries or territories in which their lives or freedom may be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion laying the foundation for humanitarian protection and assistance (UNHCR, 1951). This principle is multi-faced, and its scope and application vary from context. Those states that have signed the Refugee Convention have a legal obligation under international human rights law to uphold the principle of non-refoulement, including to ensure that a range of practical and human rights-based protection mechanisms are in place. The Refugee Convention secures the ethical obligations that states have, while also recognizing that this convention only protects those who meet the criteria for a refugee status. This underlines why labels are important because they have legal implications.

Building upon this legal framework, the Schengen Agreement of 1985 stands as the biggest achievements of the European integration process (European Council, 2020). In 1985 France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands signed the Schengen Agreement (de Haas et al., 2020, p. 241). The Schengen Agreement resulted to the abolition of border controls between participating countries allowing the free movement of people, goods, and services within the area of Schengen. This agreement encompasses 26 European countries, including most EU member states, and some non-EU member states, such as Norway. With this agreement, citizens in this area can move freely internally without passport controls

(European Union law, 2000). Subsequently, the establishment of the Schengen free mobility zone, also created the need to create external border controls and visa rules towards third-country nationals (de Haas et al., 2020, p.241). In principle this agreement states that Europe is a borderless area, yet, during influx of refugees arriving in Europe several countries closed their borders. This makes discussions about policies in this area more complex as extensive use of border control has become a normal practice today. This underscores the complex interplay between internal mobility and external security. Lastly, another important framework is the Dublin Regulation, which assigns responsibility processing asylum applications among EU member states based on the principle of first entry (ECRE, 2006, p.3). Asylum-seekers who move to other countries after being registered, can be returned to the country where the asylum application was first registered. This regulation has faced criticism for placing excessive burdens on frontline countries and worsening differences in asylum outcomes. As Greece faced the burdens of the arrivals of refugees in 2015 and 2016, Germany suspended the Dublin Regulation for all Syrians for a short time (Dimitriadi, 2022, p.226). This illustrates that there are loopholes and alternative options within established regulations and policies. The dynamic nature of governance further underlines the difficulties of keeping track of the different policies and changes.

2.4 Externalisation policies

To manage the influx of refugees arriving in Europe, governments have developed policies focusing on the externalisation of border control and asylum processing, i.e., their placement outside national borders. These policies aim at deterring irregular border crossings through the containment of people in the territory of third countries. Externalization policies typically involve increased cooperation with foreign authorities responsible for controlling borders and managing migration. A highly relevant example of an externalisation policy is the UK-Rwanda Agreement. On April 13, 2022, UK announced that they have implemented a five-year plan with Rwanda to send future asylum seekers and illegal refugees arriving to UK to Rwanda (BBC, 2024). This is an example of the externalisation policies that characterise the geopolitical picture in Europe today. Denmark has also announced that they will be sending asylum seekers to Rwanda. These countries have yet to deport anyone from this group, however the implementation of this migration policy has raised some concerns from human rights organisations. UK has initiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UK and Rwanda for the provision of an asylum partnership arrangement. Asylum seekers arriving

in the UK are planned to be sent to Rwanda, to have their claims processed there. If successful, they could be granted refugee status and allowed to stay. If not, they could apply to settle in Rwanda on other grounds or seek asylum in another safe third country (BBC, 2024). No asylum seeker would be able to apply to return to the UK. In March 2024, the government said it would offer failed asylum seekers up to 3000 euro to move to Rwanda under a new voluntary scheme. Although this goes against the non-refoulement agreement, the UK is no longer a part of the EU, which further complicates the understanding of which policies UK must follow. Nevertheless, UK is obliged to follow certain laws concerning migration and asylum as well as human rights laws. In November 2023, the UK supreme court ruled unanimously that the Rwanda Scheme was unlawful. The court said genuine refugees would be at risk of being return to their home countries, where they could face harm (BBC, 2024). The UK government therefore signed a new migration treaty with Rwanda where the Home Secretary said it guarantees that anyone sent to Rwanda would not be at risk of being returned to their home country (BBC, 2024). Ultimately claiming that Rwanda is a safe third country. The government of UK claims that this agreement will strengthen shared international commitments on the protection of refugees and migrants.

Another agreement which is currently in the process is the one between Italy - Albania on 6 November 2023, Prime Ministers of Italy and Albania announced the signing of an agreement to establish two centres in Albania for the reception of people rescued at sea by Italian ships, including people seeking protection. This has been widely criticised by human rights groups, which argue that such agreement goes against the rights of refugees and asylum seekers (Amnesty, 2024a). The agreement was endorsed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen reflecting Europe's shift to stricter asylum policies. According to the terms of the agreement, the two centres will have the capacity to accommodate jointly up to 3000 people at any given time. The agreement is said to be part of Italy's President, Meloni's efforts to share the burden of migration with other European countries (Euronews, 2024). This highlights the ongoing debate within the EU regarding responsibility- sharing and solidarity in managing refugee flows. The agreement states that refugees would be held in these centres while their asylum applications are processed through an accelerated procedure and/ or while their repatriation is arranged (Amnesty, 2024a).

Although the agreement might not reach its intended purpose in migration management, the implementation will have a negative impact on various human rights. It also gives an

indication to which direction European migration policies are headed, as more countries are signing similar agreements. The refugees picked up within Italy's territorial waters, or by rescue ships operated by non-governmental organisations, would retain their right under international and EU law to apply for asylum in Italy and have their claims processed in Albania (Euronews, 2024). This highlights one of the human rights violations where refugees have the right to access fair and efficient asylum procedures. The agreement with Albania pursues the extraterritorial processing of asylum claims, with the intent of creating a deterrent to sea crossings.

2.5 The Pact on Migration and Asylum

Another significant development in Europe's migration and asylum policies, is the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, hereinafter referred to as the Pact. This Pact has emerged as a bold initiative aiming to reform Europe's migration governance framework. The European Parliament adopted the Pact in April of this year (European Commission, 2024c), signalling Europe's commitment to tackle the migration and asylum challenges. The Pact covers four pillars representing different policy areas, these are: secure external borders, fast and efficient procedures, effective system of solidarity and responsibility and embedding migration in international partnerships (European Commission, 2024c). The commissioner remarked that the Pact will "protect people, protect our borders and manage migration" (European Commission, 2024a). Protecting the borders and manage migration is emphasised throughout the Pact, highlighting that it is a common asylum system which builds on previous regulations and reforms. The Pact claims to replace the current Dublin Regulation by introducing the obligation to apply for protection in the Member State of first entry. This is similar to the Dublin Regulation, however now with the Pact, shorter deadlines are in place and only basic needs will be provided for (European Commission, 2024b).

The introduction of the Pact has received reactions from politicians, scholars, and humanitarian organizations, looking at the potential implications of the Pact in Europe (Neidhardt, 2024; Amnesty 2024b). Amnesty International's (2024b) Head of the European Institutions Office and Director of Advocacy has criticised the Pact stating that it will set back European asylum law for decades to come. The Pact focuses on protecting the external borders of Europe, therefore shifting the responsibility of refugee protection and border control to countries outside of EU, such as the deals presented above (Amnesty, 2024b). In a

discussion paper Neidhardt (2024) also highlights concerns about a shift towards member states' decision-making and the risk of moving away from centralized EU management. He further argues, along with other scholars that the Pact might push many EU states to outsource their migration management to third countries (Neidhardt, 2024, p.4). Outsourcing migration management to third countries can create challenges, as some of the third countries have been criticised for treating migrants badly. With the Pact member states will receive financial contributions for actions in relation to third countries. The European Commission (2024a) claims the Pact is designed to manage and normalise migration for the long term. However, as the Pact has not yet been put into action, it is difficult to say how it will play out.

This chapter has provided an overview of the refugee crisis, Greece and the key policies, regulations and agreements influencing migration governance in Europe. Previous research in Greece has pointed out the challenges that the country has faced when dealing with both the financial crisis of 2008, as well as the refugee crisis of 2015. As the country deals with the challenges of arrival and reception of refugees, agreements and regulations are implemented in Europe aiming to manage the migration situation. Combining the background chapter of this study with theoretical framework, which will now be presented, provides the necessary information to analyse the research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical framework and previous research

This chapter presents relevant theoretical frameworks as well as previous research forming as a guideline towards discussing the (un)intended consequences of asylum policies and border control in Europe. Following the data collection, I allocated sufficient time and effort in searching through a vast amount of literature to establish relevant theories and previous research for my thesis.

3.1 Securitisation and border closures

Domestic politics, bilateral and regional relationships, and national security policies of states around the world are increasingly affected by international migration (de Haas et al., 2020, p.10). Securitisation is a concept that has gained scholarly attention within the discourse of migration studies in recent years. The theory of securitisation offers critical insight into the securitisation of migration discourse and its implications for policy formulation and implementation. The theory of securitisation – elaborated by Buzan and Wæver and subsequently to become known as the Copenhagen School – argues that issues are constructed as security threats through discursive practices, thereby justifying extraordinary measures beyond normal political processes. Buzan, Wæver & Wilde (1998, p. 29) argues that securitisation is to be viewed as negative, because it signals a failure to deal with issues as normal politics. The securitisation of migration creates a climate of fear which politicians use to their political advantage, thus creating asylum policies and regulations to keep the threat away. It is further argued that securitisation is not just about doing security measures, but more about the securitisation discourse and understanding how threats are created and how they lead to emergency measures being accepted (Massari, 2021, p. 31). This highlights the mass psychological dimensions of securitisations according to de Haas et al (2020. p. 233) distracting the public of challenges in the society by blaming the migrants.

Correspondingly, one of the researchers that have investigated the consequences of securitisation is Long (2014). In her work on “Imagined threats, manufactured crises, and “real” emergencies”, she argues that border closing in the face of mass refugee influx can be understood as an act of securitisation (Long, 2014, p.160). It is argued that refugee flows have been recognised as threats to international peace and security since the end of the Cold War

(Long, 2014, p.160; de Haas et al., 2020, p. 10). This illustration of refugees as threats, creates the acceptance and permission among states to tighten their asylum policies and close the borders to stop the movement of the “threat”. In the case of Northern Iraq, Long (2014, p.168) argues that the physical enforcement of the border closure was followed by humanitarian crisis as the securitised measures obstructed the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This is also illustrated with the Balkan corridor where 50 000 people were stranded in Greece (Valenta, Lønning, Jakobsen & Zuparic - Iljic, 2019, p.i168). The politics of tightening borders and increasing regulations and laws, encaptures the length states are willing to go to create the illusion of safety. It is often argued that it is the states that create this securitisation of migration, however Massari (2021) provides a different angle on this discussion, describing how humanitarian organisations can also be a part of this visualisation of securitisation. She argues that the securitisation theory is useful because it can explain the different dimension of the securitisation process, thus illustrating that humanitarian actions can also give a representation or visualisation of securitisation (Massari, 2021, p. 43). For example, when humanitarian actors portray themselves as key actors in managing people’s movements, Massari (2021, p.104) argues that there is an assumption that this movement needs to be controlled and thus contributing to the narrative of security. More importantly, related to this study, securitisation theory underscores the impact of securitized narratives on migrants’ experiences, rights, and agency, as they navigate increasingly militarised borders and restrictive asylum regimes. (de Haas et al., 2020, p.232). To explain how migrants navigate these borders, theories on migration systems, linkages and networks will be useful.

3.2 Migration systems, linkages, and networks

Migration systems theory looks at how migration is naturally linked to other forms of exchange, such as flows of goods, ideas, and money; and how this changes the initial conditions under which migration takes place, both in origin and destination societies (de Haas et al., 2020, p.68). Bakewell’s (2014, p.310) adaptation of the theory on migration systems can provide insight into how policies of governments can influence how the dynamics of the interacting elements change in relation to the migration system on a global scale. The key insight of migration systems theory is that one form of exchange between countries or places, such as trade, is likely to engender other forms of exchange, such as people, in both directions (de Haas et al., 2020, p.68). Subsequently, Fawcett (1989) described what he referred to as migration systems, in which he includes the linkages between places

and important elements that are dependent on the people in the system such as the communication between migrants. He classifies linkages into four categories: state- to state relations, mass culture connections, family and personal networks and migrant agency activities. Regarding migrant agency, Fawcett (1989, p.676) explains that the agency linkages are design to influence migration behaviour. This provides an understanding of how migrant agency is also important in the migration systems. In the four linkages he presents, he argues for example that family relationships have an enduring impact on migration. Policies, rules and even norms may change, but obligations among family members are of an abiding nature (Fawcett, 1989, p.678). Furthermore, he connects the different linkages to each other, examining the distinctive features of the categories in connection with the other categories. He argues that an important function of the framework is identifying interactions that may be critical to understanding the dynamics of migration flows (Fawcett, 1989, p.679). This perspective underscores how the interplay of networks and linkages influences the direction, volume, and sustainability of global migration flows.

Migration network theory explains how migrants create and maintain social ties with other migrants and with family and friends back home, and this can lead to the emergence of social networks (de Haas et al., 2020, p.65). Migration networks are interpersonal connections linking migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in both origin and destination areas (de Haas et al., 2020, p.65). Migrant networks are a form of location – specific social capital that people draw upon to gain access to resources elsewhere. Location – specific social capital speaks to social capital that is connected to location, for example family members in other countries in Europe. Social capital consists of access to social networks and membership in groups such as family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours, fellow students, and voluntary organisations (de Haas et al., 2020, p.65). Membership in a group provides its members with a sense of belonging and support, and this can be beneficial in several aspects of life (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey, 2006, p.110). Social capital thus provides power because these networks can be mobilised if one wishes to achieve something. Dimitriadi (2018, p.42) emphasises that social networks provide information about potential destinations, nonetheless this does not imply that social networks are beneficial in every circumstance or used by every migrant.

In addition to migrant networks, intermediaries can also be an element in the migration system. Once a migratory movement is established, a variety of needs for special services

arise (de Haas et al., 2020, p.66). Intermediaries have close and multidimensional relationships with the state and with migrants, as well as with other types of flows, such as of capital, goods, services and knowledge. Agunias (2009, p.23) argue that intermediaries are powerful agents in facilitating migration. On a practical level, intermediaries conduct a wide variety of different activities aimed at facilitating migration, including helping broker visas, arranging birth certificates and passports, booking transportation, guiding, finding jobs and/ or accommodation, connecting migrants to healthcare and medical tests and providing training (Agunias, 2009). Researchers have often used the concept of migration industry when referring to such meso-level structures that go beyond migrant networks. Humanitarian organisations, housing agents, employers, smugglers and immigration lawyers are examples of intermediaries in the migration industry who have a strong interest in the continuation of migration (de Haas et al., 2020, p.66). The other side of tougher immigration regulations is that it is now far harder for many migrants to travel through regular channels. Many are refugees reliant on travelling through irregular means to reach a place of safety or a place where they can earn a living. This is where smugglers often play a role in facilitating the continuation of the journey. Consequently, for migrants not able to access a visa, intermediaries are essential in helping to navigate often militarised borders. At the same time, because of militarised borders, migrant's journeys have become successively more dangerous which again necessitates the assistance of intermediaries (Crawley et al., 2018). De Haas et al. (2020, p.66) note that some of these actors are formally - and legally - constituted businesses (for instance, agencies) and others are in informal economies (for instance smugglers) with each type facilitating either regular or irregular migration. Agunias (2009) argues that intermediaries can be empowering for migrants because legitimate intermediaries build migrants' capabilities and expand their range of choice by providing information and extending critical services in many stages of migration and in places of origin, transit and destination which is the very essence of human development.

3.3 Agency and aspirations -capabilities model

This moves us to the next set of theories emphasising the importance of agency and individual's capabilities to pursue their chosen paths. The aspirations - capabilities approach is argued to achieve a more meaningful understanding of migration processes (de Haas, 2021, p.2). For this study it is useful because it can help explain the migration trajectories of refugees and how this may change during their experience with European migration policies.

Aspirations are the goals individuals have in life, usually related to the pursuit of "the good life" (de Haas, 2021, p.15). Capabilities refer to the abilities individuals possess and can be linked to freedom. Amartya Sen defined human capability as people's ability to lead a valuable life and enhance their material opportunities (Sen, 1999). Freedom is associated with individuals' ability to use their capabilities to achieve something. By exercising their freedom, individuals can enhance their well-being. De Haas (2021, p.22) uses this understanding of freedom to redefine human mobility as people's freedom to choose to migrate or to not migrate. Despite Sen not developing the concept of capabilities to explain migration, it is argued that the capabilities approach can be used to analyse migration, as it helps us understand the dimensions of the aspiration-capability model (de Haas, 2021, p.31). In this model it is argued that the aspirations individuals have, will influence the capabilities and vice versa. Figure 2 illustrates how the aspiration-capability model creates individual mobility types. Voluntary mobility refers to individuals that have both high aspirations and high capability to migrate. Refugees are referred to as involuntary mobile because although they may not aspire to migrate, they are forced, requiring them to have a certain level of capabilities to flee. Moreover, in situations of violent conflict, economic crisis, environmental degradation, or natural disaster, where individuals do aspire to leave the situation (despite being forced), they can be involuntary immobile if their capabilities are low. De Haas (2021, p. 22) argues that if people feel deprived of the capability to move, the feeling of being trapped might fuel migration aspirations and might alter the mobility. An individual's ability to do so speaks to their agency.

Figure 2: Aspirations - capabilities - derived individual mobility types

		Migration capabilities	
		Low	High
Migration aspirations (intrinsic and/or instrumental)	High	Involuntary immobility ^a (feeling 'trapped')	Voluntary mobility (most forms of migration)
	Low	Acquiescent immobility ^b	Voluntary immobility and involuntary mobility (e.g. refugees, 'soft deportation') ^c

Source: de Haas, H. (2021). *A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework*.

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Papatzani et al. (2022) conducted a study on the reception and protection system drawing on 51 qualitative interviews in Greece close to where I conducted my fieldwork. In their study

they show the different movements and mobilities of asylum seekers in Greece, responding to migration policies. Their study explores the figurations of displacement related to the impact of governance regimes on the livelihoods and mobility of displaced people in Greece. They use the concept of social relations relational perspective of space (Papatzani et al., 2022, p.4384). Additionally, their study aligns with de Haas (2021) connection of mobilities and aspirations and capabilities as they connect the mobilities to the displaced people's survival practices and life aspiration (Papatzani et al., 2022, p.4386). In several examples they show the structural constraints of policies hindering the mobility for asylum seeker, causing them to have low capabilities and high aspirations, e.g. involuntary immobility. They further illustrate how asylum seekers are able to continue their movements despite the policies, pointing to migration systems and networks. By applying aspirations - capabilities to their findings, this illustrates the agency of asylum seekers and their ability to use their freedoms to continue their trajectories. They connect mobility with the chance to exercise agency, discussing the different translocal mobilities. Papatzani et al. (2022, p.4387) argue that the system in Greece is determined by specific sets of displacing, marginalising, and immobilising forces, deriving from the intermingling of protection and reception with a highly fluid legal framework.

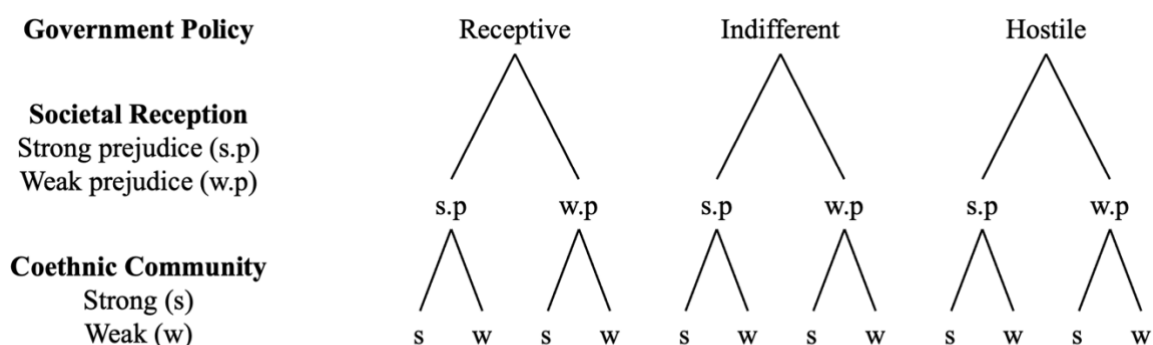
Human agency can be defined as people's capacity to make their own choices and to impose these choices on the world (de Haas et al., 2020, p. 29). Emirbayer & Mische (1998, p. 1012) argue that actors are always living simultaneously in the past, future, and present, and adjusting the various temporalities of their empirical existence to one another (and to their empirical circumstances) in more or less imaginative or reflective ways. They continuously engage patterns and repertoires from their past, project hypothetical pathways forward in time, and adjust their actions to the exigencies of emerging situations. Although their understanding of agency was not meant specifically for refugees, one can still use it for this purpose. Refugee's actions are influenced by the way they understand their own relationship to the past, present and future. This can help with the understanding of how individuals might contribute to the creation of a migration system. If the action of a refugee is influenced by the past, they will most likely try to recreate this, whilst those who have future related agency, can use this to create new lives, breaking the connection to the past. Furthermore, human agency can be understood as the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). In the context of migration this refers to refugees using their agency in relation to their aspirations to move, the outcome depends on their capabilities to use this aspiration depending on the structural environments. This will be

different with each potential migrant as they can have different agencies, aspirations, and capabilities. The theory also says that having capabilities can make people more likely to move, drawing on “the capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2004). For example, if an asylum seeker is granted refugee status and workers permit, the refugee has higher capabilities and therefore this may affect the aspiration to move from the rural town where the refugee camp is, to the capital of the host society. The next step would then be to integrate into the society.

3.4 Integration theories

The asylum process does not end once the asylum seeker has arrived at the reception centres. Their journey often continues in navigating the challenges of integration policies and social norms of host societies. Migration policies and regulations extends to the processes of integration within the host societies. The integration theories presented in this study provide a framework to understand the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion experienced by migrants. There is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated. It is understood as a process rather than an identifiable endpoint and can be therefore described as a process of gradual incorporation of individuals in receiving society (Ager & Strang, 2008, p.167; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, p.871). The theory on assimilation by Portes and Zhou (1993) can be a useful tool in this study when discussing (un)intended consequences of stricter European migration policies and how hostile attitudes in host societies impact the integration of refugees. According to their theory, known patterns of migrant integration depends on three different structural elements and how these elements interact. The first element is the host governments policies towards immigrants, whether the policies are hostile, indifferent, or generous to immigrants and refugees. The second is the society’s attitudes and prejudices about immigrants. The third is whether the immigrant’s community is strong or weak in the host country. They also mention that individual characteristics is of significance as well. Using Portes and Zhou’s (1993) framework, this study can look at the integration of refugees in Greece, based on the policies imposed, societies attitudes and the immigrant’s community. Additionally, the model can give an indication to whether an asylum seeker chooses to integrate into the host society or continue their movement. For example, if the government policy is hostile, the social reception has a strong prejudice and the coethnic community is weak, there is not much keeping the refugee in said society.

Figure 3: Simplified model: Modes of incorporation



Source: simplified model of Portes & Zhou (1993, p.84)

Drawing on empirical evidence from second generation immigrants, Portes and Zhou (1993) emphasize how societies attitudes impact integration. Another study that draws on attitudes is Erdal's & Oeppen's (2013) study on the balancing of transnationalism and migrant integration. They highlight that both integration and transnationalism are a part of ongoing social processes that can change with time. This aligns with migration systems, highlighting that elements and dynamics change with time and space. Erdal & Oeppen (2013, p.875) argue that migrant integration and transnationalism are both about interactions and negotiations between migrants and non-migrants, individuals, groups, and societies, and both are multifaceted. I find this approach relevant to my study as migration and asylum policies in Europe are multifaceted, encompassing migrants and non-migrants, groups, and individuals. Furthermore, the last theory that is relevant for this study are the ten core domains presented by Ager and Strang (2008) that contribute to the integration and reception of immigrants and refugees. They categorise these ten domains into four categories: markers and means, social connectors, facilitators, and foundation. The domains cover sectors of employment, housing, education, and health; citizenship and rights; social connection within and between groups in the community and linguistic and cultural competences (Ager & Strang, 2008, 185). Drawing on the empirical data from my fieldwork, this theoretical framework can be used when discussing the integration of refugees in Greece. I will mainly use the domains of markers and means as well as language knowledge. A combination of these theories will provide a contextual framework for the analysis. The next chapter will give a detailed description of the methodological approach of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodology employed in gathering data for this study. This thesis adopts a qualitative methodology as it seeks to explore and understand the subjective meanings and responses of individuals. Introducing the importance of qualitative methodology, this chapter starts by explaining why I chose this research approach as well as presenting the study design employed. I then outline how data was collected and analysed. This encompasses both primary and secondary data, including semi-participatory observation and analysis of existing academic literature, documents, newspapers, and official websites from organisations. Lastly, I address the ethical considerations, reflexivity, and limitations of this study.

4.1 Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was most relevant for reflecting the main objective of my study, which is to explore how asylum policies affect the agency of refugees. Qualitative approaches offer the richness and depth necessary to unpack the multifaceted dimensions of human experiences and interactions (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021, p.98). Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the social structures and individual's experiences in past or present contexts (Cope & Hay, 2021, p. 4). A qualitative methodology balances between individual humans and their experiences on one hand and the analysis of structures and processes on the other hand. This aligns with the objective of this study and proves why a qualitative research approach fits with this study. To explore the experiences of refugees, I chose to conduct a short fieldwork in a refugee camp in Greece as my case study. It is important to note that case study is more of an approach or methodology than a method because there are important philosophical assumptions about the nature of research that support the value of case research (Baxter, 2021, p.110). Case studies are often considered equivalent to field research, participant observation, ethnographic research, or even qualitative research (Baxter, 2021, p.110). I used semi-participatory observation to gather all relevant primary data and analysed textual contributions as secondary data. Given the sensitive nature

of refugees, I utilized this combination of qualitative research methods in fulfilling the objectives of this study.

4.2 Study design and research setting

As researchers (Cope & Hay, 2021, p.3) explain that we formulate questions driven by curiosity and concern. I was driven primarily out of curiosity of wanting to understand the trajectories of refugees. My study design relied on the fieldwork I was conducting, and therefore I structured my study design around this. My plan for the study was to observe in a refugee camp, trusting that the observations made from the fieldwork would transform into research questions as Stratford and Bradshaw (2021, p.96) explains, underlining that research comes from ideas and experiences. As my plan was to gain a deeper understanding of the refugee situation in Europe today, the sampling process relied mostly on accessing a refugee camp in Europe. Acquiring access to a refugee camp required time and work, highlighting Cook's (2005, p.169) argument that wanting to study a particular community does not easily translate into being able to study it because this access must be negotiated through various gatekeepers who can control this. I attempted at gaining access to different refugee camp by applying to several humanitarian organisations. These attempts proved to be unsuccessful as some of the organisations were working primarily with facilitating social integration for refugees outside of refugee camps. After a few attempts I found an NGO in Greece working with refugees inside a refugee camp. In terms of sampling, my research project could be labelled under purposive sampling. Stratford and Bradshaw (2021, p.100) argues that in purposive sampling, you decide for what purpose you want informants. My purpose was to access a refugee camp in Europe; therefore, my only requirement was to find a refugee camp operating at the borders of Europe. Furthermore, I can classify my sampling as opportunistic as I was flexible and did not have a specific camp that I wanted to observe in. Although this sampling is viewed as the lowest level of dependability (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021, p.100), I chose the refugee camp out of what was accessible. My findings are from residents in a specific camp in Greece, acknowledging that my data will not be generalizable to all refugee populations and situations in Europe.

Prior to arriving in the refugee camp, I made the decision to not conduct interviews as this group is vulnerable and by only observing and participating where appropriate I could avoid some of the ethical challenges from interviewing. The specific ethical considerations will be

discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The primary fieldwork for this study took place in a refugee camp located in Greece over a period of five weeks from August to September 2023. To gain access to a refugee camp I became a volunteer, working from 10.00 – 18.00 Monday – Friday. The process of becoming a volunteer required following the guidelines that the NGO had set up. I applied online, conducted an interview and online training over the course of four weeks. After going through the required steps demanded by the Greek government and the NGO to be a volunteer in the camp (training, approval of papers, code of conduct certificate from the police) I was granted access to the camp. As a volunteer within the camp, I engaged in a variety of activities aimed at supporting the residents and contributing to the operation of the camp. These activities ranged from assisting with the distribution of essential supplies such as food, water, and clothing to facilitating the educational programs for adults. My main role was as an English teacher for the residents in the camp. I had four different levels of courses at different times throughout the week. The interactions I had with the students in the classroom quickly became one of the main sources of my observations.

4.3 Data collection: Primary (semi-participatory observation) and Secondary (textual)

Given the sensitive nature surrounding refugees, I use a combination of qualitative approaches to fulfil the objectives of this study. The combination of observations and secondary data allowed me to fact check some of my observations with previous research to make sure that my data was transferable. Transferability concerns the degree to which findings apply to other cases of the phenomena in question (Baxter, 2021, p.121). Although all individuals' experiences are different and cannot be compared, it is still argued that individuals often migrate together, underlining whilst they still have their own interpretations of the experience, they are still enduring the same actions and witnessing most of the same events. Therefore, by cross checking with previous research conducted mainly in Greece, and Europe, I was left with a bigger set of data than if I were to only rely on my own findings from observations. Additionally, the secondary data had quotes from interviews, which I did not have since I did not conduct interviews. This allowed me to connect the interviews from previous research with my observations to obtain a better understanding of my fieldnotes. Combining observations with secondary data highlights the credibility of the study as I was able to make sense of the primary data by resorting to secondary data.

4.3.1 primary data

Arriving at the research site, I was introduced to the residents who were attending my English lessons. It did not take long time before they asked me who I was and where I was from. This made me aware of my role as an observer, as well as participating the operations of the camp. Cook (2005) classifies roles in observation into four categories namely, overt, (providing a full explanation of the intention), covert (concealing your purpose) and secondly what degree the research should be participatory or purely observational. I chose to take the role of a covert participant, which is someone who does not tell the people that they are living and/or working with that this involvement is for research purposes (Cook, 2005, p.175). However, my role was not secret for everyone. The camp coordinator knew that I was observing for my research study. Most of the staff also knew that I was a student observing the refugee camp to gain a better understanding for my research. The residents in my class also knew that I was a student from Norway eager to write about the challenges of refugees in Europe. It wasn't possible to inform all the residents in the camp, simply because I didn't meet all the residents. Especially when new arrivals would come in regularly, it was not possible to tell everyone. First and foremost, I was a volunteer, working for the NGO in the camp and this is what the residents in the camp identified me as. The residents in the camp are informed about the thorough process the NGO conducts when accepting volunteers, keeping the safety of the residents a top priority. I was aware of my role in the camp, and trust was therefore an important aspect of the research. As Watson (2021, p.127) argues, without trust, it is difficult to continue working in an area with a particular group of people.

Cook (2005, p.174) explains that participatory observation can be used as a tool to enquire what constitutes a community's everyday activities. Once this is established, the research will form itself. I employed this idea when starting this journey, and I found it necessary to begin my research with participatory observation as it helped me navigate my study and I gained a better understanding of what I was researching. I used this opportunity as a valuable tool to have a deeper insight into the workings of a refugee camp. Observation as a qualitative approach means that researchers watch social and environmental phenomena, take notes on these phenomena, and record their own experiences, and to varying degrees, participate in the workings of daily life (Watson, 2021, p. 125). I have chosen to define my participation in the refugee camp as semi-participation because I was participating as a volunteer and not a refugee. I could never fully experience what the residents experience and this is not my

intention either. My participation was constrained by my volunteer role as I was never fully participating in everything that the residents were doing. When my workday ended, I went home with the other the international volunteers and came back the next day, often met by refugees and/or camp staff informing us what happened whilst we were away. Despite my role as a volunteer was restricting at times, it also allowed me to be able to connect with the residents and gain as much of an understanding of the environment and their experiences. Participating and observing in the refugee camp allowed me to witness the everyday rhythms and routines of the people inside the camp. Although I was only in the camp for five weeks, I developed relationships with other volunteers, camp staff and residents that contributed to my understanding and knowledge of the system. Researchers write accounts on how these relationships developed and what was learned from them (Cook, 2005, p.167).

Observing and participating as a volunteer proved to be a difficult task in the beginning of the fieldwork. I had to work on how to combine my role as a researcher and a volunteer, finding ways to write my fieldnotes and take time to reflect on what I was observing. Like all methods, the skill of observing is built with practice (Watson, 2021, p.138). It was challenging at first to write down my observations, as the first days were days filled with a lot of impressions. This is also reflected in my notes, where the first two - three days the fieldnotes consisted of many pages. As I settled into my role and the “everyday life” became a routine, I was able to focus on the new developments that took place. Marshall & Rossman (2011, p.139) define this as the structured recording and noting of occurrences, behaviour, and objects in a social milieu. In addition to being the English teacher and helping with other camp activities, I was also socialising with the residents, playing cards and backgammon as well as encountering them in the town eating ice cream, drinking coffee etc. To maintain a comprehensive and systematic approach to data collection, I developed a focused purpose for what I was observing, to not write about everything. As days turned to weeks, I found a way to both observe and write fieldnotes throughout the day, and then completing these notes at the end of the day. There are many ways of writing fieldnotes, for each observation fieldnote you want to set the scene, keeping in mind that the setting is not merely about location, but indicative of power relationships (Watson,2021, p.139-140). I applied this to my fieldnotes, keeping in mind to set the scene, as well as writing my thoughts on the side of the observations. I also employed Watson’s suggestion to write down particular quotes that people say because this is an essential piece of data. I stored my fieldnotes in a private

notebook which I had in my vest¹ during the workday, and in the evening I had it stored in a locked place. Once I rewrote my notes on my computer after the fieldwork, I ensured that no identifiable data was in my observations and stored this in a password protected file.

4.3.2 Secondary data

To add to the observations, I obtained secondary textual data from existing literature, websites, and news articles. Johnson and Turner (2003) define secondary data as data that is collected by researchers other than the one currently using it and typically for different purposes than the current researcher. These included academic literature connected to refugee studies, official documents related to refugee policies and regulations, news articles covering events and developments within the camp and broader refugee issues, and information sourced from official websites of relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations. The selection of secondary sources was guided by relevancy ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the migration landscape in Europe. I employed the snowball method (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2021, p.100) in my collection of secondary data, finding studies based on what other scholars had used. I allocated enough time searching for appropriate information and I was critical to my sources. The study of Papatzani et al. (2022) was recommended to me by the camp manager and this proved to be of great value in my research as I used this to find other similar articles. I found it necessary to combine my observations with secondary literature, to ensure that my observations were supported by factual and authoritative information. I cross-references the data I acquired in the refugee camp with documents and previous research to enhance the accuracy of my findings. As I did not interview, I found it valuable to use existing research from other researcher who had interviewed refugees for similar studies as mine to ensure transferability. As mentioned in the introduction there is a vast field of research done in this sector and I used this to my advantage whilst still certain that my observations would add valuable insights.

4.4 Data analysis

Chapters five, six and seven analyses the research objective and questions formulated in my study by use of primary data collected from the observations made as well as secondary data from documents. The analysis of the data collected in this study was analysed based on the

¹ Vest: The uniform that every volunteer had to wear, signalling that we were staff.

research objective and questions. The formal stage of the analysis began with rewriting my fieldnotes. When I was in the camp, I wrote memos in my field diary to capture what I overheard, observed, and participated in. Memos serve as reminders or to draw connections between multiple referenced items (Cope, 2021, p.356). Whilst rewriting my notes, I kept in mind that it is not always easy to immediately determine the most important topics and the appropriate level of details. I found it wise to organise my notes chronologically, dividing my observations with the personal reflections of what had happened. This was helpful because I was able to revisit my thought process at the time of the observations and recognize what the observation was in comparison to the personal reflection. Thereafter, I repeatedly went over my observations and fact checked dates and events to confirm that the information retrieved and noted down was relevant to the main objective of the study and the research question.

When coding my data I used descriptive codes noting obvious patterns from my findings as this fit with my project designed to be inductive. This means that the relevant theories are established from the data collected. In my fieldnotes I used memos which helped sort and categorise my data and inspire the creation of additional analytical memos in which I discovered patterns that I had not noticed in the beginning. Watson (2021, p.141) argues that the researcher needs to anticipate the use of the fieldnotes and have a plan for their analysis. After the first week of my fieldwork, I had created a plan for my analysis as I had observed events that described the different stages of the migratory journeys of the residents. Although my fieldwork was short, I was left with a lot of data as one day in the field felt like one week back home (field reflections, 2023). I wrote in my field diary every day, in addition to writing direct quotes and memos in camp, illustrating that I was left with five weeks of a lot of data. The purpose of coding is data reduction, which was much needed in my case, helping me handle my data by categorising different themes and labels. (Cope, 2021, p.359). I used coding to organise my data to help me make the most of my data (Cope, 2021, p. 362). It was during this stage that my study began to come to life.

Table 1: Categorisation and coding

	Policies	Migration linkages/ Intermediaries	Agency	Observations
Category 1	Border Control	Forest fires: smuggling	Forest fires: difficult to cross border. Make a choice. Different routes.	“We need clothes and soap” (Direct quote)
Category 2	Asylum process Reception conditions	Camp population divided by nationalities. Community NGO presence in camp	English class Checking the board ²	“Things take time”. (Direct quote) Checking the board
Category 3	Integration policies	NGO providing services. Family reunification	Language courses Continued movement or settle down?	“I have my papers and I got a job” (direct quote)

Prepared by Sletbak, C. (2024)

Qualitative analysis seeks to make sense of the data produced through categorisation and connection (Cope, 2021, p.362). To make sense of my data through the categorisations, I used three categories for my findings. These categories were the three stages of arrival, reception and integration in Europe which later became the main titles for my analysis chapters. Additionally, I sorted and my codes according to the three categories. Here I found examples that fit similar descriptions and labels which resulted in 12 codes categorised by the three stages of the journey as well as four labels to describe the findings. Cope and Hay (2021, p.3) emphasise that we attempt to communicate our findings in compelling ways, and my coding and categorisations illustrate that these themes that emerged from my findings became relevantly dominant for my analysis and made it easier to structure my thesis.

² The camp had a notice board where information was posted. Additionally, this was also the place where the numbers of the asylum applications were posted.

4.5 Reflexivity, Positionality and Ethical Issues

Being reflexive requires that researchers understand that they are active participants in the research process and that their positionality are part of the production of knowledge (Catungal & Dowling, 2021, p.25). As I participated in the refugee camp as a volunteer, I was conscious about my role and how my actions would impact what I was observing. To identify what I was observing as data and what I was thinking as a researcher and individual, writing my thoughts and feelings in a research diary became a tool in my data process (Catungal & Dowling, 2021, p.125). Whilst writing my fieldnotes in my fieldwork diary, I also wrote in my research diary. As I had never been in a refugee camp before, I felt it was necessary to reflect on what I was experiencing, the joy of playing card games with the residents for example, but also the challenges and difficulties that sometimes arose. By being reflexive throughout the research process, I achieved greater transparency as my motives and thoughts were clear, I was aware how this could influence the analysis and conclusions (Watson, 2021, p.129). In participant observation one must reflect on their status as an outsider or insider relative to the research context. I was an outsider in the refugee camp, I had a role of “teacher” and volunteer, and this influenced the power dynamics in the social interactions and relationships. Nevertheless, I was mindful of this, ensuring that there was a level of trust between the residents, camp staff and myself.

Because the data from participant observations derive from a researcher’s observation, reflection on positionality is required for a rigorous research process (Watson, 2021, p.127). This does not only refer to the role I had in the camp, but it also refers to the social and ideological placement of the researcher and how this influences the research project and participants in it (Watson, 2021, p.127). I am a firm believer that seeking refuge is a human right and that refugees should be treated with respect. My position is further illustrated with my role as a volunteer, working in the refugee camp providing humanitarian services. This will naturally impact the research, as I advocate for the rights of refugees. Nevertheless, when I was conducting my fieldwork, I also observed how policies and regulations are in place to ultimately protect the refugees. This also plays a role in my positionality as I was made aware of the importance of these policies. I am aware that my position as a woman also impacted the observations I had when I had English lessons only for women, allowing the women to engage in the lesson with a female teacher. Furthermore, I reflected on my positionality when the residents in the camp would thank the volunteers or asking if I wanted to play games with

them. It signalled a level of trust, highlighting that my reflexivity had created transparency and trust with the research participants. Another important factor of being aware and managing my role is related to the emotional labour that goes into doing participant observation (Watson, 2021, p.138). I had to set clear boundaries to keep my research rigorous, yet I was still empathetic when observing and listening to the stories of the residents. Having empathy reflects the respect for one's differences and similarities (Watson, 2021, p.139).

Prior to arriving to Greece, my knowledge of refugee camps was largely derived from scholarly literature and media, partially shaping my expectations and assumptions. However, once I was inside the camp, observing the everyday workings of the camp and partially engaging in the lives of the refugees, the difference between what I had read and watched compared to the realities became clear. I obtained a different view on refugee camps after my fieldwork. This aligns with Donge's (2006, 183) argument that observation is an important tool to correct preconceived ideas of researchers. Although it is essential to correct preconceived ideas, it is also important to recognize that bias is always present in the social world of research because researchers are themselves social beings with distinct positionalities and worldviews (Cope & Hay, 2021, p.11). Rather than seeing it as a disadvantage, I recognised that my positionality has played a role in my research. I reflected on my roles and utilized this in the research process. Watson (2021, p.129) argues that this allows the researcher to reflect on the ethics of the research agenda and establish a strong subjectivity.

Watson (2021) argues that there are some key ethical questions one needs to think about when conducting a participatory observational study. Given the sensitive nature of the research setting and the involvement of a vulnerable group, particular attention was paid to ethical considerations throughout the research study. In order to be a volunteer I had to complete a course "ethics in the humanitarian field", which prepared me for the ethical challenges and issues that can occur in these settings. I strived to constantly be aware of the ethical aspects throughout the fieldwork, as well as during the process of analysing the data after the fieldwork. As a volunteer I upheld the rules that the NGO and camp had. One of these rules were to not pressure the residents into sharing details, it was up to them to choose to share information. By not conducting interviews, I took a choice based on ethical considerations, and in hindsight this worked as I respected the privacy of the residents. I was committed to maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, and the residents knew that the volunteers had

certain rules to abide, one of which being respectful of their anonymity. As a researcher, I also upheld the principles of confidentiality and anonymity of the refugees throughout the study. I made sure my fieldnotes were kept in a safe place and present the findings in such a manner that ensures the anonymity of participants. Any identifiable information obtained during observation or interactions has been handled with caution to protect the privacy and dignity of the individuals involved. Although I had not sought consent from every resident in the camp, I was careful not to use sensitive observations in my research study.

4.6 Limitations

It's important to acknowledge the limitations in this study. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity and minimize bias, the subjective nature of observation (Watson, 2021, p.129) and the potential for interpretation bias must be recognized. Although this can limit the study, it is important to note that situated knowledge is present in research (Cope & Hay, 2021, p.11). One of the limitations in this study is the choice of methodological approach. Choosing to not conduct interviews limits the data that was collected during the fieldwork. With interviews I could have received more detailed information about what I was observing. I was aware of this being a limitation and ensured to ask the camp staff if I had questions regarding what I saw. Despite that I did not interview, I was still engaging with the residents. However, it was challenging at times to talk to the residents as there were language barriers, and they did not always go into detail when describing a situation. As I was not allowed to ask for information, it was up to the residents to choose whether they wanted to share their stories with me. The connections I made with the students gave me a deeper understanding of the trajectories of the refugees. Additionally, the reliance on secondary sources introduces the possibility of information bias inherent in the selected sources. Challenges such as maintaining confidentiality and negotiating power dynamics were carefully navigated to soften potential harm to vulnerable populations. By keeping the refugee camp, residents, and NGO anonymous, it effects the transferability of the study, as another researcher will not know which refugee camp to conduct the semi- participatory observations. As the residents in the camp were from different nationalities, their experiences can be similar to other refugees in other camps in Greece. Combining my observations with previous research can strengthen the confirmability of my study as it highlights the similarities between the findings.

Another limitation is that it was only a five-week fieldwork. Systematic observation of behaviour takes time. An image is gradually built up of what is happening in a particular social setting on the basis of continued observation. This limits the study as I was only in the refugee camp for a short period of time. As my workday ended at 18.00, I never observed how the camp dynamics changed once the volunteers and day staff were not present. I was also not in the camp on weekends, which can be a limitation. However, this was time I used to reflect on situations, read previous research and rewrite my fieldnotes. I also used this time to connect with the other volunteers and share observations and reflections. My fieldwork was also only conducted in the refugee camp, which limits my observations to some extent. I was able to witness how the policies worked once the refugees received their resident papers, however, I did not follow them out the refugee camp, limiting my data. Donge (2006, p.181) points out that general concepts are formulated as they emerge from the observations, and my observations did generate certain data during the short fieldwork. In sum, despite the limitations, all my observations and the conversations I have had have been under controlled situations. This is the lived experiences of many people and I want to treat their dignity with respect. I have chosen not to write a chapter dedicated to results in this study, as Watson (2021, p.141) underlines that this being vigilant about the politics of representation. Instead, I combine my observations with previous research, secondary data and theoretical framework in my analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis: navigating policies and border controls en route to Europe

Category 1

The next three chapters capture the empirical parts of this thesis with each chapter providing answers to the research question(s) as set out in the introductory chapter. Each chapter addresses a distinct feature of the multifaceted refugee journey, categorised into three realms: the journey to Europe, arrival and reception within refugee camps, and the subsequent settlement or continuation of the journey into Europe. The analysis is in relation to the primary data collected from semi-participatory observation carried out in the study and subsequently linked to relevant previous studies conducted by scholars in the migration field. The analysis in this chapter is based on examining the first category of my findings, namely the journey to Europe, with a goal of finding out how border controls and enforcement shape the dangerous migratory routes across land and sea.

I begin this chapter by reviewing the implementation of border regulations and asylum policies that affect the journey to Europe, here I will also present some discussions of presumptions of the consequences of the New Pact on Migration. I proceed by looking at the challenges in different routes taken by migrants to Europe, namely the Mediterranean Sea and different variations of the Balkan route. I end the chapter with the kinds of perceptions and attitudes the Greek society hold towards refugees and asylum seekers drawing on empirical evidence to illustrate the difficulties and uncertainties migrants face on their journey to Europe.

5.1 Journey to Europe: asylum policies and migration agency

“My country is not safe. Always bombing [continue in Arabic]. I leave my country”
(Fieldnotes, 2023).

For many of the residents in the refugee camp in Greece, their stories consisted of leaving their countries due to war and feeling unsafe. Fleeing a country speaks to the capabilities and aspirations of an individual pointing towards their agency and “freedom” of actions (de Haas, 2021, p.20). Although refugees are forced migrants, they still have the aspirations to move. War, prosecution, fear, and hope for a better life are some factors that increase the aspirations

to move and seek safety in Europe. Economic, social, and cultural capital are other factors that increase the capabilities for asylum seekers to reach Europe (de Haas, 2021, p.26). Border control, enforcement, and strict asylum policies on the other hand, are factors that can hinder the capabilities of asylum seeker to seek asylum. Scholars point out that most of the policies serves as barriers aiming to deter, delay and redirect migration trajectories (Dimitriadi, 2022; Triandafyllidou & Dimitriadi, 2014). Access to information plays a crucial role in navigating these barriers. I observed that most residents in the refugee camp had a phone, or access to a phone and free WIFI though the community centre in the camp. When I asked one of the residents what he was doing on his phone he replied, *“I read news [uses google translate] so I am ready”* (Fieldnotes, 2023). The phone becomes what connects the residents to the rest of the world both in relation to the news and their networks. The statement from the resident with the phone implies that refugees and asylum seekers are informed on current political events in Europe, changes in policies or implementation of new regulations and utilises this information to decide their movements. This aligns with Parsanoglou’s (2022, p.248) findings where a representative of an NGO had stated that: *“Everyone has a mobile phone, with internet access; they read the same things I more or less read. I think that they do have basic information”*.

Having access to this basic information can in some cases impact decisions and alter the choice of movement. Reading the news about the Italy-Albania agreement might make refugees try to avoid Italy as the first country of arrival. Or, receiving information that a specific border has increased their border controls, might impact the direction of the journey for the refugees. Here, the refugees use their capabilities, e.g. access to information, with their aspirations to move by choosing different routes and arriving to another frontline state, such as Greece. Amnesty (2024b) points out that the measures that The Pact claims to help frontline states with the burden of receiving refugees, are directed to protect the borders, which leads to states being able to pay to strengthen external borders, or fund countries outside the EU to prevent people from reaching Europe. Additionally, the pact has also been criticised implying that the pact will almost certainly cause more people to be put into de facto detention at EU borders, including families with children and people in vulnerable situations (Niedhardt, 2024). These measures impact the trajectories of refugees as they make it more uncertain and difficult for a refugee to know what will happen. To respond to the uncertainties and challenges that policies may offer, actors generate alternative responses based on their evolving purposes (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p.994). Utilising the

information, they access through their phone either via news or their networks, refugees will find alternative paths since returning to the origin country is often not an option. Moreover, these irregular pathways are a product of the tightening border controls which make refugees choose dangerous routes (Triandafyllidou & Dimitriadi, 2014, p.159).

One of the residents informed me that his sister in Amsterdam guided him on the phone on which routes to take and what to say to the border guards. He further implied that he managed to come to the refugee camp with the help from other refugees he met on his journey, and with the help from his sister (Fieldnotes, 2023).

In line with Fawcett's (1989) theory on network linkages, the above observation illustrates that despite tightening of border control, refugees use their networks, and capabilities to their advantage, navigating their trajectory into Europe. He argues that family relationships have an enduring impact on migration. Policies and rules may change, but obligations among family members are of abiding nature (Fawcett, 1989, p. 678). This highlights that even though the tightening of European borders that we are witnessing today, as well as changing magnitude of asylum policies, there are certain factors that remain consistent and will not be affected by the changes - namely the social, personal relationships migrants have. The networks facilitate opportunities and heightens their capabilities by for example receiving guidance from family members already in Europe, as the resident described. My findings revealed that most of the residents did what they needed to reach Europe, regardless of the policies and border controls. De Haas (2021, p.29) argues that even though human agency is limited by structural constraints, such as access to resources, time and policy constraints, most migrants and their families exercise some level of agency in making migration decisions and organising and paying for their journeys.

According to the most recent data published by Frontex, the European Union's agency for border control, the Central Mediterranean and Balkan Routes are the two most active routes taken by migrants and refugees to enter the Europe (Frontex, 2023).

I looked at a map with the students, helping them with practicing the pronunciation of the capital cities in English. Some students began identifying places they had visited, whilst others pointed to their origin countries. The students also traced which cities and countries they crossed on their journey before arriving in Greece. Among the nine

students, I observed diverse migration paths that varied from travel by sea, car, and foot (Fieldnotes, 2023).

The observation above illustrates that the asylum seekers take different routes and modes of transportation. The routes on crossing the Mediterranean Sea and land both have their own challenges, and this will now be discussed.

5.2 Challenges at the Mediterranean Sea

I encountered a family of recent arrivals from the refugee camp in Lesvos, who had been relocated to the camp due to capacity constraints on Lesvos. Upon their arrival, their immediate request was for soap and clothing. With assistance from a translator, I learned that they had arrived in Lesvos with only the clothes on their bodies. The father [presumably] was asking for additional clothing for the two children accompanying him (Fieldnotes, 2023).

I documented in my fieldnotes that this family appeared tired and emotionally distressed. It was evident that these people had gone through several obstacles to be able to come to the camp. I was later informed by the camp manager that this family had been rescued at sea (Fieldnotes, 2023). This can be supplemented with the data from Crawley et al. (2018, p.112), where they reveal that the journey over the sea is almost always frightening and difficult. Interviews with refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea underlined that “seeing the sea and no land was a terrifying experience” (Crawley et al., 2018, p.114). Applying aspirations-capabilities theory, we can explore how refugees use their capabilities to navigate this route. The findings from Crawley et al. (2018, p.112) reveal that refugees with money, used this to their advantage to pay for advantages such as avoiding travelling at night, fewer passengers and in more secure boats. This illustrates the ways asylum seekers use their capabilities, paying smugglers to facilitate a safe journey. Although smugglers are presumed to be illegal (de Haas et al., 2020, p.66) they are used to mitigate risks, which proves to be successful sometimes, and other times not (Crawley et al., 2018, p.112). Furthermore, Emirbayer & Mische (1998, p.994) explain that choices and decisions are made in face of uncertainty and conflicts, and the intention of the choice does not match with the desire. Crawley et al. (2018, p.114) illustrates this with an example of a refugee who travelled with a boat which got lost at sea. With no food or water, the passengers had to wait to be rescued. Subsequently their

findings revealed that the refugees were able to contact a man for help, emphasising the importance of refugees using their capabilities and networks throughout their journey to Europe.

Refugees encounter several barriers such as illegal pushbacks, unsafe waters, and technical issues with the boats on their journeys to Europe. All these factors contribute to making this journey dangerous, impacting the mental health of the refugees. The Norwegian Refugee Council refers to the Mediterranean Sea as the deadliest route in the world (NRC, 2024). Last year, at least 575 people died taking the central Mediterranean route. IOM says the real number is considerably higher (Tondo, 2021). 2024 has started with more shipwrecks, distress alerts and pushbacks en route to Greece. (ECRE, 2024b). These examples illustrate how this route hinders refugees' freedoms of movement and limit their ability to pursue their aspirations for safety and better opportunities (de Haas, 2021, p. 27). In addition to facing technical issues with boats, refugees can also experience illegal pushbacks hindering and delaying their arrival to frontline states. Aegean Boat Report is an organisation that documents and reports on the journeys of refugees and what challenges they face. A recent post documented illegal pushbacks from Greek coastguards of a boat carrying 72 people (Olsen, 2024). Valenta et al. (2018, p.1166) highlight that border patrols, pushbacks, movement detectors, radars and other military-technological devices are used as parts of deterrence strategies. It is argued in the securitisation theory that issues are constructed as security threats through discursive practices, thereby justifying extraordinary measures beyond normal political processes (Massari, 2021, p. 31). Furthermore, the theory underscores the impact of securitised narratives on migrants' experiences, rights, and agency, as they navigate increasingly militarised borders and restrictive asylum regimes (Buzan et al.,1998).

Amnesty (2024b) argues that illegal pushbacks is likely to increase if the New Pact is adopted unchanged. This is because the responsibility will continue to lie with the frontline states as the Dublin regulation states that the first country of entry is the one responsible for assessing the asylum claim (ECRE, 2006, p.3). The European Court of Human Rights has condemned the Greek authorities' treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in multiple cases (ECRE, 2024a). Reports reveal inhumane and 'gross' practices directed towards migrants and asylum seekers and instances of illegal pushbacks (ECRE, 2024a; Olsen, 2024). These measures can be argued as unintended consequences of asylum policies, as the New Pact does not have an aim at increasing pushbacks, it is rather the consequences of its implementation that will lead

to pushbacks. There are several evidence that show that Greek coast guards practice illegal pushbacks, altering the direction of boats, causing them to end up in Turkey or further in the sea (Olsen, 2024). This barrier will impact the capabilities of refugees, as they are stranded in a boat, not being able to do anything about the strategy of pushbacks, leaving their fates to be in the hands of the coast guards or other search and rescue boats.

5.3 On land: border closures and climate disasters

An alternative route to Europe is the Western Balkan route, as well as crossing the borders from Turkey to Greece. This land-based journey exposes asylum seekers to challenges, ranging from shifting border policies, environmental disturbances, and encounters with hostile attitudes from local populations. The narrative of one of the residents in the camp highlights the significance differences of route selections for asylum seekers. One of the students remarked whilst looking at the map:

“I chose this path because it was too hard to take the other route when I was pregnant and had a small baby with me”. We were looking at the map whilst she traced her finger showing the path (Fieldnotes, 2023).

This decision aligns with de Haas (2021) theory on capabilities and aspirations, as it reflects the woman's consideration of her condition and starting point. Her choice to prioritize a land-based route stemmed from the need to be close to a hospital on land in case of emergency, highlighting how personal circumstances influence migration decisions. Navigating the Balkan route exposes asylum seekers to a multitude of factors, both facilitating and hindering their journeys. Refugees must possess knowledge of border controls, arrange plans with facilitators for safe passage, and strategize responses to border closures. Moreover, there are individuals who chooses paths irrespective of regulations and policies. The unpredictability of border policies and regulations can shape refugees' aspirations, influencing their perceptions of mobility and access to safety. Additionally, migration systems theory suggests that the geographical positioning of countries influences route preferences, reflecting the complex interplay of structural factors in migration dynamics. The positioning of borders, networks, and geopolitical alliances can either facilitate or impede refugees' movement, shaping their aspirations and opportunities for mobility (de Haas, 2021, p17).

5.3.1 Border closures

The closure of the Balkan route in 2016 (Kousis et al., 2022, p.12) caused a state of limbo for many asylum seekers, underscoring the profound impact of border policies on agency and well-being. Asylum-seekers were directed to temporary accommodation sites, many of which were former military facilities (Moschopoulos, 2023, p.131). The closure of borders significantly affects the agency of refugees, as aspirations and capabilities to move are hindered by this major obstacle. Although individuals have the capabilities to continue their movement in terms of networks and money, border closures will act as barriers, making the refugees “stuck” at the borders. With the closure of the Balkan route, many refugees became stranded, waiting for opportunities to continue their paused trajectories (Tramountanis, 2022, p.274). The journey is paused as refugees wait for decisions to be made on their behalf, e.g. states deciding whether to open the border or keeping it closed. An additional challenge of border closures is the limited access to essential services. Healthcare, education, and sanitation facilities are examples of these services. This aligns with the findings from Long’s (2014) study, where she emphasises that border closures also restrict the access to humanitarian aid, ultimately creating humanitarian emergencies (Long, 2014, p.168). The lack of access to medical services during their journey and while awaiting border openings impacts further movement. Even when borders reopen, individuals may be too ill to continue their journey.

Long (2014, p.160) argues that border closures are a response to crisis. Not only does the border closures and tightening of border controls have a direct impact on the trajectory of the asylum seekers, but it also inflicts fear and distress when coming face to face with guards, weapons, guard dogs etc. The intensification of border control and securitisation has caused apprehension amongst refugees. Asylum seekers crossing borders are aware of the border controls and the equipment that are used by the border guards to “protect” the borders. Some of these deterrents are motion detectors, sound detectors, alarms and noises made to frighten the refugees. Despite these securitisation measures, refugees’ resort to extreme measures to cross borders, driven by the determination to reach their desired destinations.

A staff member shared a story with me today of a family that drugged their baby with sleeping pills to prevent he baby from making noise and alerting border guards when they were crossing the borders to arrive to safety (Fieldnotes, 2023).

This illustrates what extents the asylum seekers are willing to go through to reach their desired destinations and reflects the resilience of migrant agency. Such extreme measures are examples of the unintended consequences of border control. De Haas (2021, p.19) highlights that border walls and migration barriers may paradoxically heighten migrants' determination to cross into safer territories. To resort to extreme measures and strategies to cross borders will most likely cause psychosocial distress. Despite policy constraints hindering their capabilities, migrants leverage social networks and collective agency to navigate border restrictions and pursue their aspirations for mobility.

5.3.2 Forest fires and smuggling

Another important factor that impacts the journey for asylum seekers is the varied climate conditions that emerge, complicating the passage to Europe. While weather conditions are beyond the control of migration and asylum policies, they nonetheless have considerable influence, potentially preventing or facilitating border crossings, often avoiding detection by border guards and government officials. A refugee that Crawley et al. (2018, p.121) interviewed, claimed that upon arrival in Greece they had to walk for four hours before reaching the refugee camp. Depending on when a refugee moves, they can be exposed to a range of climate extremes. During my time in Greece in August and September 2023 the temperatures ranged from 25 to 37 degrees Celsius.

After work, I drove to the grocery store. I needed to switch on the air conditioning because of the heat. There is no shade near the camp because of the absence of trees so the car had been exposed to the sun all day. During the drive, I observed several of the residents walking towards the nearest town, many of them struggling with the heat, especially those without bicycles. Observing this made me think of the endurance of the refugees, having to purchase groceries despite the discomforting heat. It's probably even worse in the winter with the cold temperatures and snow. (Fieldnotes, 2023).

This reflection can give an indication of the climatic challenges that refugees face on their journeys. During the time of my fieldwork, Greece suffered extreme forest fires that had an impact on the local society as well as the refugees travelling through these areas. As refugees

often have to walk to reach refugee camps or government offices, they have minimal shelter available. As some of the refugees in Greece were seeking shelter in the forests, the forest fires affected their mobilities. There were also instances of refugees found dead as they were seeking refuge in the forest (The Guardian, 2023). Despite the dangerous nature of the forest fires, this climate disaster presented an opportunity for some refugees to cross borders undetected by the government. My findings reveal that during the peak of the forest fires, camp staff were informed that many migrants exploited this situation to cross the borders unnoticed, bypassing potential screening and processing in Greece. This aligns with the capabilities - aspiration framework where de Haas (2021, p.19) argues that the very deprivation of mobility freedom or the expectation of the future tightening of migration regimes may actually encourage non-migrants to get moving before it is too late and for migrants to cancel return plans out of fear of not being able to migrate again.

With security guards and government officials preoccupied by the fires, smugglers and migrants used this opportunity to continue the journey further into Northern Europe. The camp manager noted in a staff meeting that this disaster provided smugglers with a prime opportunity to exploit asylum seekers who were desperate to cross the border, as the heightened chaos and distraction offered cover for their activities. Several residents informed me that in different stages of their journeys, they relied on smugglers to navigate border controls and enter countries (Fieldnotes, 2023). Crawley et al. (2018, p.79) argued that the informants in their study regarded using smugglers as a necessity rather than a choice. Moreover, they argue that increased border and immigration controls together with the closure of legal migration routes fuels the need for smugglers (Crawley et al., 2018, p.79). If one is to add climate disasters such as the one described above, the need for smugglers become even stronger.

According to information shared by the camp manager, the police estimated approximately 900 refugees arriving in Greece through the northern borders during the forest fires. This figure did not correspond with the numbers reported by the camps. Speculations arose in the staff meeting that the refugees not arriving in Greece were likely to continue their journey towards countries like Germany and the UK, depending on where they have social connections (Fieldnotes, 2023).

Fawcett (1989) explains that migrants will use their linkages as motivation to get to their intended destination, hoping to be reunited with their families. Using smugglers to cross borders can be the only means of facilitating this reunification. This speaks to their abilities to use their capabilities and networks to their advantage. The networks and linkages refugees have been a part of their past lives and experiences and sometimes their only connections to their origin countries. These past experiences are what Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 989) argue to create motivation and goals. If we look at this argument from another angle, the past experiences that refugees endured during their journey can act as a motivation for them to use the forest fires situation as an opportunity to continue their movements because they have experienced that their movements can be paused by other factors. This ultimately underscores that the tightening of border controls, and policies are for the most parts only fuelling their desires and actions to use their capabilities and networks to continue their journey.

5.3.3 “Migration hunters”: hostile attitudes disrupting the journey

The strict border controls and asylum policies do not only affect refugees’ trajectories, but they can also impact the attitudes of the local population. The policies implemented by politicians, are often a reflection of the perceptions within the society. The physical barriers, heightened security presence, and media portrayal of refugees not only impact the journeys of refugees but also instil fear among local populations, leading them to believe that strict policies are necessary to keep out perceived threats (Massari, 2021; Long, 2014). Drawing on securitisation theory, this study analyses how asylum policies and border control measures contribute to the securitisation of migration, framing refugees as threats to national security rather than individuals seeking protection (Buzan et al., 1998). In the absence of a real threat, politicians are tempted to manufacture an imaginary threat. As long as the public believes this, migration fear can be an effective political strategy. The example of the forest fires illustrates the implications of securitisation discourses. The forest fires had a negative effect on the local communities in Greece, resulting in a widespread displacement and economic loss (Euronews, 2023; The Guardian, 2023). This resulted in the local society questioning how the fires started and who were to blame. When a Greek politician accused refugees on social media platforms for starting the fires (Amnesty 2023; *information from camp manager*), this led to refugees being unjustly blamed for the fires. According to the camp manager this scapegoating of refugees fuelled an increase of hostile attitudes towards refugees among the right-wing public in Greece.

The first week of my fieldwork the volunteers and staff in the refugee camp were informed that there had been an increase of hostile attitudes towards migrants and refugees, and we were advised not to gather in large groups and actively show that we were working in a refugee camp outside of work (Fieldnotes, 2023).

Moreover, hostile attitudes were further documented when a video surfaced depicting a Greek civilian who captured 25 refugees in his van, blindfolded them and urged others to “*punish those responsible for the fires*”. Comments on the video were of like-minded people like the man, who encouraged him to hurt the refugees (Euronews, 2023b). Not only is this a breach in many human rights, but it also resulted in tensions and instilled fear among the residents in the camp. Future paths of action are argued to be reshaped in response to fear for what lies ahead (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p.971). This event of violent actions and mistreatment of refugees can negatively shape their journeys as their fear of something to happen takes over their aspirations to continue their movements. This fear additionally connects to the theoretical frameworks of securitisation (Buzan et al., 1998), only it is the refugees who are left with the fear of being victims of hostile attitudes from host societies due to their fear caused by politicians and policies directed at controlling the arrivals of refugees.

The findings in this category have illustrated that despite facing barriers such as border control and strict asylum policies, asylum seekers use their economic, social and cultural capabilities to navigate their journeys to Europe. One example highlights the significance of access to information, as refugees use smartphones and networks to make informed decisions about their movements. Illegal pushbacks, climate conditions and hostile attitudes underscore how various factors intersect to shape migration trajectories and strategies used by asylum seekers. Throughout the chapter, the different observations and examples have explored the interplay between agency and structural constraints of migration enforcement.

CHAPTER SIX

Analysis: dynamics of reception

Category 2

While the previous chapter explored the pathway to Europe, this chapter examines what happens when the refugees and asylum seekers arrive to the reception centres. Although migration and asylum policies have a greater impact on the journey towards Europe, the policies administering the reception of refugees will also have an impact on the trajectories (Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022). This category of my findings will mainly try to answer the question asked in the introduction related to how migration intermediaries can facilitate the capabilities of moving for refugees. Agency theory and aspiration - capability theory will be used to analyse and discuss the findings from the refugee camp in Greece.

6.1 Paths to protection: asylum policies and the process

Mantanika and Arapoglou (2022, p.201) argues that the process of reception is essential to understanding the journey of asylum seekers and refugees. Drawing from my fieldwork experience, I found that this process was bureaucratic, characterized by considerable time consumption, resulting in prolonged waiting for refugees. *"In this camp, things take a long time,"* remarked a resident, highlighting the continuing agony of awaiting asylum status (Fieldnotes, 2023).

During my interactions with the residents in the camp, I was informed that some had been waiting two years for their status and residence permit. Despite my fieldwork only lasting for five weeks, it was still enough time for me to observe that this process heightened uncertainty among the residents. This uncertainty not only imposed a psychological burden, but from what I observed, it also constrained their agency, forcing them to wait for answers. This impacts their capabilities to continue their journey because they lack the freedom to pursue their aspirations or rebuild their lives. A lack of freedom of movement impacts life aspirations as it is seen as an essential aspect of an individual's overall well-being and sense of fulfilment (de Haas, 2021, p.19; Sen, 1999). Another important aspect to be mentioned is the exclusion or neglect of certain groups. In the Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 1951) it outlines specific criteria for excluding people from refugee protection if there are serious reasons for

considering that they have committed a crime against humanity. Without receiving proper information, men from Afghanistan have been subjected to an additional interview regarding the exclusion clause, prolonging their waiting time for a decision and negatively impacting their mental health and that of their family (Fenix, 2024). The uncertainty and prolonged waiting impact the action of asylum seekers (Dimitriadi, 2018, p.82) as they are restricted in their movements waiting for interviews or answers for example. This can also impact the mental health of asylum seekers and their families. Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression are likely to occur as the refugees have gone through stressful situations, traumatic experiences and prolonged waiting time, all factors contributing to the challenges of their journeys (Dimitriadi, 2018; Kousis et al., 2022 & Crawley et al., 2018).

“Everyday I check the board to see if my number is there” (Fieldnotes, 2023). This quote from one of the residents showcased the reality of most of the residents in the camp. The board with the numbers was a board in the centre in where the numbers belong to each resident waiting for their asylum status. Checking this board, looking for your number, was a part of the routines for most of the residents in the camp. Throughout the week, new numbers are hung up, and there was always a big line of men checking to see if their number was on there. I asked the class to explain their daily routines, in order to practice different verbs and constructing sentences. It was during this exercise that a couple of the residents shared their worries about their uncertain futures, having to check this board for their number every day to then determine their next steps. This practice can have a negative impact in the long- run, especially for those who had been waiting in the camp for two years. Being referred to as a number on a board, remembering this number and looking for this number can result to the residents losing a sense of self (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p 974). The reliance on numbered boards to track asylum application progress reflects the dehumanizing effects of administrative processes, potentially wiping residents' sense of agency and aspiration. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) argue that we conceptualise the self thoroughly relational, insinuating that our self is viewed from the past, present and future. If referred to as a “number on a wall” whilst waiting for the asylum process to take its course, this can affect the picture of self in the future. Although this is not a policy, it is still a custom in the asylum process that has consequences.

The implementation and reality of policies vary. For example, applicants for international protection are granted the right to employment after six months from the date they submit

their application. However, while I was conducting my fieldwork, the camp manager informed me that this has been shortened to one month, to enable more individuals to access employment opportunities (Fieldnotes, 2023). With access to employment, individuals are able to make an earning, that can help facilitate future activities. It also enables the sense of freedom, that the individual is able to leave the refugee camp to work. This freedom acts as an enabler to the aspirations to improve the situation (de Haas, 2021). Nevertheless, Tramountanis (2022, p.275) points out that bureaucratic hurdles, such as obtaining social security and registration numbers for opening bank accounts to receive salaries, create barriers to employment access. Without the ability to work, most of the residents were simply spending their days waiting for decisions made on their behalf and attending activities that were organized within the camp. Once again, this can fuel a feeling of being trapped, or at least not being able to do anything, which can again spark the aspiration to get out (de Haas, 2021, p.24). Though, this is not possible because the asylum seekers depend on receiving their resident's permit. They can leave the camp without it, but this imposes greater challenges. These observations align with the conclusions of Papatzani et al. (2022, p. 4383), who illustrate how the reception and protection system in Greece produced numerous mobility restrictions due to the multifaceted labyrinth of the policies. On the other hand, feeling deprived of the capability to move can also have a reverse effect and enhance the migration aspirations. The EU-Turkey agreement resulted in many examples of this.

6.1.1: EU-Turkey deal and hotspots

One of policies which emerged as a response to the influx of refugees was the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement in March 2016. As mentioned in chapter two, all new irregular migrants crossing to the Greek islands could be returned to Turkey based on the safe third country *rule* (IOM, 2015; Kalogeraki, 2022, p.92). This agreement was implemented as a means to try to control the influx of refugees arriving in Greece, sharing the burden for the frontline states such as Greece (Dimitriadi, 2018) The vast scale of migrant mobility during 2015-2016 and the border policies which forced that mobility into limited and remote pathways - in Greece's case, via the islands of the Northeast Aegean - created a hybrid situation in relation to the reception system on those islands. The different stakeholders providing first reception in the field were largely still in formation when they suddenly had to start dealing with very large numbers of border crossers (Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022, p.210). In 2016, Law 4375 introduced the hotspot scheme, directing newly arrived individuals

to Reception and Identification Centres for processing. The hotspot approach, while not a policy or practice, is argued by Mantanika and Arapoglou (2022, p.211) to have influenced policies, practices, and local geographies, particularly in frontline member states like Greece and Italy. From arrival and registration to the asylum interview and decision, the prolonged stay in the hotspots is marked by material deprivation, overcrowding, inadequate provisions, and services that threaten human dignity in such first reception spaces (Papatzani et al., 2022, p.4390).

In an interview presented in Parsanoglou's (2022, p.248) study, a representative of an organisation informed that "*if you go to Greece, you are stuck*". Despite the border closure, challenges persisted, highlighting the agency of asylum seekers in navigating new alternatives and pathways (Papatzani et al., 2022). Although the closure of the Balkan route and the EU-Turkey agreement decreased the number of arrivals of refugees to Greece, there were still refugees that were able to cross the border and continue their movements. This can be exemplified from Papatzani et al (2022, p. 4393) where one of the participants had arrived in Greece in February 2016, one month before the EU-Turkey Statement. He thus avoided geographical restriction on the islands and only stayed in a hotspot for four days. After staying for a few days in Athens, he, and his companions, bought a ticket to Eidomeni at the Macedonian border. However, only Syrians and Iraqis were allowed to cross by the time they got there, as the route had been closed for other nationalities. They then returned to Athens and went to another camp, where they stayed for about two years until it was closed. This example illustrates the migratory agency of asylum seekers, illustrating that even after they arrive to a reception country, they are still on the move. This migratory agency underscores the persistent movement of refugees even after arrival in reception countries, contributing to the fluidity of migration dynamics.

6.2 Reception conditions

The regulations dictating the rights of asylum seekers within reception centres or refugee camps in Greece are influenced by EU laws, as well as directives from the European Commission and decisions from the European Court (Woollard, Lield, Test, Wagner, Frelak, Geddes & Westerby, 2023). In a study requested by the LIBE committee of the European Parliament the reception conditions are processed and present among other factors, implementation gaps and enforcement in reception centres (Woollard et al., 2023, p.125). The

study concludes by addressing recommendations to certain actors in reception centres, however as observed in the camp, these recommendations may remain unattainable as long as delays persist in the asylum processes and new arrivals continue to populate the camp.

The residents in the camp are housed in caravans, typically accommodating six individuals, with families grouped together and single residents separated by gender and nationality. Now, because of overcrowding in the camp, it is forcing up to eight people to share a single caravan, blurring these distinctions and complicating management effort. The vice minister inspected the camp yesterday. He commented that it was one of the most well organised camps in Greece. But I have seen how the capacity of the facilities are starting to strain with the increasing arrivals. In a staff meeting, the camp manager informed us that the camp did not have enough blankets for everyone (Fieldnotes, 2023).

Within five weeks, the population had increased from approximately 1000 to 1300 individuals, leading to shortages in supplies and deteriorating living conditions. I observed that the lack of services provided in the camp was impacting the refugees as they were often voicing their frustrations to the volunteers in the community centre. Inadequate reception conditions can create barriers to refugees' agency, limiting their access to essential services, education, and employment opportunities (Papatzani et al., 2022; Mantanika & Arapoglou, 2022, p.207). These factors are important for the capabilities of the refugees. If the capabilities decrease as well as the aspirations, as the conditions can serve as a demotivation, the refugees can risk not using their freedom, as they are neither using their freedom of movement, nor using their freedom of choice to stay (de Haas, 2021, p.20). Another factor that plays in is the placement and functioning of the refugee camp. Refugees are allowed to come and go as they please, yet they are assigned cards which they need to use to access through the security fences. Subsequently, the camp was surrounded by a concrete wall and manned by security personnel (Fieldnotes, 2023). This isolated the residents from essential services and the broader community, exacerbating their sense of confinement. The location of the reception centres may have a strong influence on the accessibility of relevant services (e.g. health services, legal aid or services related to the different instances of the asylum procedure). Ager and Strang (2008) argue that the location of housing and access to essential services will play a role in the integration and assimilation of refugees into the society. I observed that this also played a role on the residents' choices of whether they wanted to

continue their movement to other towns/countries or settle down. The policies considering reception conditions are therefore important enablers to what the future movements of the refugees will be.

Furthermore, observations from my fieldwork revealed a dynamic interplay of tensions and adaptations within the camp. As new arrivals, mainly from Somalia and Sudan, mingled with existing residents from Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the camp's social dynamics shifted.

I have noticed that the usual group that spends time in the community centre are no longer there, and that the community centre is filled with new arrivals. It seems that the new arrivals are not being accepted in the camp by the rest of the residents. There has especially been some tension in camp because some people that have waited for a long time still haven't received their answers (Fieldnotes, 2023).

This correlates with Crawley's study where it is illustrated that others felt that people of nationalities were being favoured during the process of grouping and categorising people (Crawley et al., 2018, p.119). Tensions continued as residents awaited answers to their asylum claims, leading to sporadic fights and disagreements.

In the weekend there has been some small fights and disagreements between the groups in the camp and someone had thrown a rock through the window of one of the caravans (Fieldnotes, 2023).

Tensions have also been observed security staff in the camp and residents. Crawley et al. (2018, p.119) presents an example in their study where there were cases of irregularities with police officers who were accused of beating people. The incidents in the camp that I observed were never this violent, however there were several times where residents would comment that they did not want to open the door when they heard a knock because they were afraid it was the camp security (Fieldnotes, 2023). There was an incident in the camp where the security guards had moved personal belongings of a resident because he wasn't in camp for a week, and he didn't inform the staff. When he came back to his room, someone new was in his bed and all his stuff was gone. This resulted in a loud discussion between a group of residents and the staff security (Fieldnotes, 2023). Events such as this will most likely lead to the resident choosing to continue his journey. In addition to the tensions within the camp, there

were increased incidents of far- right violence towards migrants contributing to the tensions. In 2019, a new conservative government was elected on a platform which promised increased restrictions on refugees, including limiting the right to asylum and stricter border controls (Moschopoulos, 2023, p.143). The strict policies implemented foster these hostile attitudes that will have an impact on the agency of a refugee.

6.2.1 Intermediaries

In the context of assisting refugees on their journey, NGOs in Greece serve as critical intermediaries, facilitating refugees' capabilities and aspirations through a multifaceted approach. These organizations not only provide essential services like shelter, food, and healthcare but also act as conduits for information dissemination, offering guidance on safe migration routes, legal rights, and cultural norms in destination countries (Agunias, 2009). While waiting for answer on asylum process, refugees should have access to a place to stay and food. However, once they have received their positive asylum decisions, they are no longer on the food programme delivered by the government (Fieldnotes, 2023).

The NGO in the refugee camp provided food support for those who had received their asylum decisions. Once a week we would deliver food to those who did not receive food from the food programme. We also provided the residents with clothes and sanitary products as this was not provided in the camp (Fieldnotes, 2023).

The refugees and asylum seekers rely on the NGOs and intermediaries as they get their affairs in order. By equipping refugees with accurate information, NGOs empower them to make informed decisions and navigate unfamiliar territories with confidence. I observed how much the NGO I volunteered with assisted the residents. For example, if the residents needed to photocopy papers or I.D. they needed to come to the community centre, as the camp did not provide one for the residents (Fieldnotes, 2023). By serving as intermediaries and implementing these strategies, NGOs can play a transformative role in facilitating refugees' capabilities and aspirations, empowering them to navigate their journey. Moreover, NGOs play a pivotal role in skill development and education, offering vocational training, language classes, and educational programs to enhance refugees' capabilities and increase their chances of successful resettlement. By investing in refugees' education and skill development, these

organizations pave the way for refugees to contribute meaningfully to their host communities while pursuing their aspirations for a better future.

Mantanika and Arapoglou (2022, p.204) argue that reception is a system of governance and therefore reception must be seen in relation to mechanisms of migration management and the invalidation of migrant's mobility and settlement that happen through the different relabelling processes that characterise these mechanisms. The findings and examples presented in this chapter illustrate in different ways how migration and asylum policies, along with reception conditions, have influence on the agency of refugees, either constraining or enabling their ability to further their movement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Analysis: integration and navigating new futures

Category 3: Settlement in host country/ return or continued journey

Throughout this study, the observations made in the refugee camp in Northern Greece have explored the journey to Europe and reception conditions. Analysing my findings, a recurring theme emerged among the residents: their aspirations and plan for life beyond the camp. Some of the residents expressed their ambitions of reaching Amsterdam or Germany, while others sought for guidance on integration in the society. Their remarks shed light on the final category of this analysis: the upcoming phase of their journey, whether it be settlement, continued movement or return. The migration and asylum policies and securitisation of migration will be important in this step as well, as it influences their prospects for integration into society. This last chapter in the analysis is mainly underpinned by Ager and Strang's (2008) theory on integration as well as Portes and Zhou (1993). The aim of the chapter is to discuss how the asylum policies and enforcement has an effect on the integration prospects of a refugee's trajectory.

7.1 Integration dynamics: hostile attitudes & challenges in the host country

The reception conditions and hostile attitudes experienced by individuals upon arrival and during their stay in host societies often influence the decisions of asylum seekers and refugees regarding their next steps. During the last week of my fieldwork, I observed a change in the dynamics in the camp, where many of residents received their asylum papers and approval of refugee status or settlement plans. This resulted in a lot of activity in the camp, with residents needing to photocopy important documents and attend appointments in Athens to finalise paperwork and decisions.

Despite the stress of organising everything, witnessing individuals who had spent over two years in the camp receive positive decisions and start the next phase of their journey was powerful (Fieldnotes, 2023).

Officially, in the Greek system once residents receive their papers, they are supposed to leave the camp at once (Fieldnotes, 2023). However, in the camp I was in, they were allowed to stay 4-5 days while they get their travel arrangements and living situations in order.

One student informed me that he would not attend class on Friday because he was going to Athens to get his final papers for his residence permit, as he received a positive result from his asylum application. He also informed me that he managed to get a job and was excited to take his family out of the camp and start their new life. "I will use the English and Greek I learn here [in the camp, provided by the NGO] for my new job and life" (Fieldnotes, 2023).

The encounter described above, illustrates how this man used the language lessons as a means to enhance his capabilities to get a job. Using the language lessons to his advantage signals the agency of the resident, while choosing to use this in a new job in the host society illustrates the freedom of movement. Although many residents expressed that they would like to continue to move, this man used his freedom to choose to settle down. This aligns with de Haas (2021) theory on capabilities and aspiration, knowing the host country's language can further increase the aspiration and capabilities to migrate. In this case, the man is migrating out of the refugee camp and integrating into the host society. Upon receiving positive asylum decisions, refugees gain rights including a three-year residence permit and the ability to travel within the EU for up to 90 days every six months. Those opting to settle in Greece have access to rights such as employment, education, and healthcare, similar to Greek citizens. Integration begins once refugees transition from the camp to society, a process influenced by various parameters outlined by Ager and Strang (2008). According to these scholars, access to means, such as housing, health, education, and employment, are key areas for fulfilling social integration. It also involves the development of social bridges, bonds, and links. In addition, social integration is facilitated by developing the linguistic and cultural knowledge of the host society, as well as ensuring a sense of security and stability. Finally, the attainment of citizenship plays a decisive role in fulfilling social integration (Kourachanis, 2018, p.3). Using the case described above, the refugee's ability to speak and understand some Greek, is facilitating his social integration, as well as employment. With employment he increases his economic capital, which can help pay rent for housing, paying for groceries etc. While the conditions theoretically support social integration, bureaucratic barriers and hostile attitudes hinder access to resources and support and thus hinders integration (Ager & Strang, 2008).

The integration will also be affected of how the host society receives the immigrants and refugees. Portes and Zhou's (1993, p. 84) theory on assimilation can be a useful tool here.

They argue that the integration depends on three different factors and how these factors interact. The first factor is whether the host government's policies are hostile, indifferent or generous to immigrants and refugees. The second is if the attitudes of the host governments citizens have strong or weak prejudice. The third is whether the immigrant community is strong or weak in the host country. Implementing tighter border controls and practicing illegal pushbacks can speak to the government's policies being hostile towards refugees. On the other hand, Greece has been one of the countries in Europe who has accepted and received a vast number of refugees, speaking to the generosity as well (Papataxiarchis, 2022, p. 173). Despite there being a few examples of hospitality in the Greek reception of refugees, a new conservative government was elected on a platform which promised increased restrictions on refugees, including limiting the right to asylum and stricter border controls (Moschopoulos, 2023, p.143). This again speaks to the first domain which proves that the host government's, in this case Greece's policies are hostile. As mentioned previously in this study, the stricter policies and border controls that European member states are imposing to try to control and manage the influx of refugees and migrants into Europe, does not only have an effect on the influx of people coming into the countries, but it also impacts the attitudes of host societies (de Haas, et al., 2020, p.233). Particularly in the face of increased right-wing attitudes towards refugees as described with the example of the video taken by a Greek civilian. Such attitudes, fuelled by security concerns and securitisation measures at borders, pose significant barriers to refugee integration. This event can be said to illustrate a strong prejudice among the civilians in the host government, thus underlining that securitisation measures can have an impact on the integration of refugees in host societies. The last factor of integration according to Portes & Zhou (1993) is whether the immigrant community is strong or weak. Papatzani's (2022) study illustrate that many refugees and asylum seekers end up moving around Greece, which can possibility indicate that there is a community of immigrants in Greece. My findings on the other hand indicated that most of the residents wanted to continue their journey.

7.1.1 Intermediaries

Moschopoulos (2023, p.129) argue that refugees in Greece are unable to be self-reliant owing to their lack of Greek language skills, the situation of Greece's labour market, and the lack of a proper integration plan which would allow refugees to transition from the support they receive as asylum-seekers to living independently. As observed in the camp, all the assistance the refugees received were from the various NGOs and programmes offering housing and

cash assistance. Continuing the discussion from the previous chapter, the role of the intermediaries will also impact refugees' ability to integrate into the society. On one side, it is beneficent that the refugees receive the services and help they require to build a life, the problem occurs if the refugees are dependent on the assistant and not able to achieve to integrate in the society on its own. Nonetheless, once the refugee leaves the camp, facilitation is most likely needed. Additionally, as previous scholars point out, Greece does not follow up once the refugees have received their asylum status (Kourachanis, 2018). This will impact the refugees' capabilities to navigate through the systems of the host society, especially if doing so alone without help from any NGOs. Not only does this speak to the integration of the refugees, but it also speaks to refugee's agency and practical judgements of the individual to navigate the challenges (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 998). Nonetheless, receiving support to live in Greece is presumed to be a necessity. To receive housing support from the HELIOS programme, refugees need to have generally found their own apartment and paid for the deposit and first rent themselves, which most refugees are unable to do in Greece – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Moschopoulos, 2023, p.153). These factors can contribute to the individuals wanting to continue their journey further into Europe. I observed several residents planning to continue their journey, hoping to reach other countries in Europe, such as Germany and the Netherlands. One of the residents asked me: “Can you tell me if I can go to Germany with my asylum papers” (Fieldnotes, 2023). Not only does this illustrate what role the intermediaries have for refugees, helping them find information and guide them, it also underlines that this resident, along with others, wanted to continue their movements from Greece.

7.2 Continued movements

“I want to practise German so I can go to Germany” (Fieldnotes, 2023).

There were many residents in the camp speaking German. I was informed that their goal was to reach Germany, and therefore they wanted to practise the language. For them, staying in Greece was not an option. This speaks to the agency of the refugees where they can exercise their freedom of choice, doing something for themselves that will benefit them in the long run, e.g. learning German instead of Greek when their plan is to continue their journey towards Germany. There are different reasons why they would want to do this, sometimes it is an individual choice, but in most cases, it is due to family reunification and or because their networks have suggested this and can facilitate their journey. The ways in which people

understand their own relationship to the past, future, and present make a difference to their actions; changing conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structural context profoundly influence how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as more or less responsive to human imagination, purpose, and effort (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973).

This aligns with the Crawley et al. (2018, p.123) study where none of those who were interviewed in Greece considered Greece to be a country in which they would stay. The respondents regarded Greece as a stopping point on their way to other parts of Europe. The decision to continue their movement was influenced, to a large extent, by the difficult economic conditions but also by concerns about racism and violence, including at the hands of far-right organisations and vigilante groups. This contrasted with the very positive humanitarian response that people often experienced on arrival, especially in some, although not all, of the Greek islands (Crawley et al., 2018, p.124). Suppose a refugee with a positive asylum status, who has a residence permit in the host society, does not feel safe in said society. In that case, this can lead to further movement, which again leads to an intensification of the “challenge” that member states perceive refugees to be. This is an endless cycle of negative impacts. This also illustrates that throughout the migration process, migrants often acquire more than label or category of migration. In this case they start out as refugees and asylum seekers, then they might start moving based on where they find employment, adding to their label. In the Greek case, where the refugees can travel once they receive their residence permit, many of the residents told me their plan was to travel. For some, their plan was to try to obtain a residence permit in Germany.

There were a few residents who informed me that they had been to both Norway and Germany, but there were “issues with their papers” so they had to go back to Greece (Fieldnotes, 2023).

This illustrates the impact of the asylum policies that are in place in Europe. Leaving Greece and overstaying in another country can potentially subject the refugees to the risk being sent back through the Dublin Regulation. Being sent back through the Dublin regulation did not, however necessarily represent the end of the road. For some it simply means that they would need to start their journeys again. This provides a clear illustration of the failings of Europe’s policy response and the flawed assumptions on which it was based (Crawley et al., 2018,

p.127-128). Here, the refugees can be viewed as “irregular”. Hansen & Pettersson (2022, p. 126) argue that the “risk of overstaying” is mainly seen as a practical problem that increases the burden on border officials according to Frontex reports that they analyse in their study. Continuing their movements and journeys can in worst case scenario lead to the refugees being resettled to third countries or returned to their country of origin.

7.3 Choices and consequences: resettlement or return

The recent UK-Rwanda deal and the Italy-Albania agreement are examples of the cotemporary migration and asylum policies that we are seeing in Europe. These policies are resettling refugees to third countries for their asylum processes. These arrangements pose significant challenges to the journeys of refugee, as well as it also impacts their agency and capabilities to have freedom of movement (de Haas, 2021). By relocating refugees away from their familiar environments and support networks, these agreements disrupt the social networks crucial for their well-being and integration. If more than 300 people are sent to Rwanda, the UK would pay a one-off sum of £120m to help boost the country's economy, with further payments of £20,000 per individual relocated (BBC, 2024). Similar agreements, such as the EU-Turkey deal, further exemplifies the challenges of this externalisation policy. In the EU-Turkey deal, asylum seekers arriving in Greece were returned to Turkey, where their asylum claims were processed. However, concerns were raised regarding Turkey's ability to provide necessary protection and access to asylum procedures, raising questions about the EU's compliance with its obligations under international law. The hotspots policy and the EU-Turkey Statement have posed severe limitations on asylum-seeker transit (Kousis et al., 2022, p. 13). Furthermore, resettlement to third countries may hinder refugees' access to legal representation, support services, and community integration opportunities. Without familiar networks and resources, refugees may face additional barriers in navigating the asylum process and accessing their rights. This is particularly evident in cases where refugees are resettled to countries with weak asylum systems or limited infrastructure to support their integration. Although this is just speculations at the time, as none of the asylum seekers have been sent to either Rwanda nor Albania, it is still a concerning trend that needs to be recognised that it will pose challenges for the journeys of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe.

While in theory the conditions are in place for a smooth integration of beneficiaries and applicants of international protection in the Greek society, the findings presented in this chapter illustrate that in practice there are significant administrative and bureaucratic barriers that hinder their access to these resources.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the journey to Europe from arrival to reception and finally to either integration or further movements. The aim of the study is to analyse the (un)intended consequences of stricter migration and asylum policies in Europe. As this field is constantly changing, and regulations are being implemented and adopted continuously, it is difficult to provide a conclusion to the research question. This final chapter summarises the findings, providing a conclusion to the findings presented and suggests areas for future research. Inspired by the changes in migration and asylum policies in Europe today, this study has aimed to capture the challenges that refugees face on their journeys to Europe and how they have managed to navigate the barriers imposed by the policies and regulations.

Using a qualitative research approach, primary data was collected from residents in a refugee camp in Greece in 2023 using semi-participatory observations. Although my fieldwork was limited to only five weeks and did not include interviews, I observed and participated in the refugee camp gaining an understanding of the refugee process. To strengthen my primary data, I used secondary data mainly from previous research studies on refugees in Greece, and migration policies in Europe. To help explain border closures, enforcement, and externalisation in relation to asylum policies in Europe, I have used the theory on securitisation developed by the Copenhagen School. This theory provides a clarification that stricter asylum policies are justified by the constructed security threats of migration and refugees (Buzan et al., 1998). Theories on migration systems, linkages and networks have been used to help with the understanding of the migration flows and how this is interconnected. The concept of intermediaries has been emphasised here. Lastly, theories on agency as well as aspiration – capabilities approach (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; de Haas, 2021) are applied to capture the agency of refugees and how they use their capabilities to further their mobilities.

The asylum policies continue to significantly impact the migratory agency of refugees once they have arrived in reception centres. These policies, governing the asylum process, reception conditions, and the rights of asylum seekers, play a crucial role in shaping refugees' futures, whether they aim to continue their journey or integrate into the host society. While

regulations, enforcement, border control, and asylum policies undoubtedly alter the trajectory of a refugee's journey, the aspirations of refugees persist. Refugees are not passive subjects; they possess agency and will adapt or find alternative pathways on their journeys. The first category of their journey is arriving to Europe. In this section my findings illustrate that attempts to manage migration through regulations and policies are often met with counterstrategies by migrants, underscoring the dynamic and adaptive nature of migration. Additionally, this category underlines that the stricter asylum policies are pushing refugees towards riskier routes or draining their resources through reliance on smugglers (Crawley et al., 2018, p.79). One example presented was how the forest fires in Greece had a dual effect on the trajectories for the refugees. For some it presented an opportunity to pass by the borders of Greece, continuing their journey further into Europe with the help of smugglers, whilst for others they became victims of the hostile attitudes that increased in the local society, whereby the refugees were blamed for the fires and punished by the local society.

Furthermore, upon arrival at reception centres, refugees continue to face challenges altering their agencies and capabilities. Findings presented in category two, originates primarily from the observations made in the refugee camp. Here I present examples of the asylum process, reception conditions and how intermediaries such as NGOs present in reception centres provide assistance. The assistance provided by the NGO proves how migration intermediaries can facilitate the journey of refugees, often helping them/ guiding them and further increasing their capabilities. The last category of the analysis examines the integration of refugees into the host society or whether they continue their journeys. I also briefly discuss how the externalization policies can alter their movements, resettling the refugees. Once the refugee receives the residence permit, their next challenge is to find a place to live and employment. One resident from the camp informed me that he had achieved to find employment and would settle in Greece. However, as my findings also discuss, settling in Greece without the help of intermediaries providing housing assistance is difficult. Therefore, many of the refugees are dependent on the assistance. Additionally, the increased hostile attitudes in the country have proved to be a factor that can impact whether the refugees integrate or not, aligning with Portes & Zhou's (1993) theory, where they highlight that the government's policies and host societies attitudes will affect the integration. My observations from the camp illustrated that many of the residents were thinking of continuing their movements, hoping to arrive to Germany. In response to the challenges of continuing arrival of refugees, European governments have increasingly turned to externalization policies aimed at outsourcing border

control and asylum processing to third countries. Resettlement deals, such as those between the UK and Rwanda or Italy and Albania, often overlook the agency and resilience of individuals, treating them as mere pawns in geopolitical negotiations. Refugees are not passive subjects; they possess agency and will adapt or find alternative pathways to pursue their aspirations.

8. 1 Suggestions for further research

It would be interesting to carry out a further study with a larger study area that includes the journey before reaching Europe and the implications of the externalisation deals that have yet to be implemented. Exploring the UK-Rwanda deal, examining both arrivals in the UK and the conditions in Rwanda would be interesting. Investigating what resettling refugees will entail for their agency and how they will be assessed upon arrival in Rwanda, as well as how this will affect their future movements or abilities to move, would provide valuable insights. Having further research on countries of origin and transport through neighboring countries emphasizing the challenges of crossing the borders especially if the country of origin has border controls to prohibit people from leaving the country, such as what is happening in Gaza now would also be interesting. During the COVID-19 pandemic we witnessed member states reinforcing border controls and impose limitations to internal movements. This had implications for refugees as they were “stuck” in their paths, not being able to retreat or continue their journeys. Considering this, examining the impact of COVID-19 on refugee trajectories, would be beneficial. My research study has contributed to the migration discourse and provided findings from lived experiences from residents in a refugee camp in Greece.

In conclusion, the journey to Europe represents an interplay between policies and individuals’ ability to use their capabilities to navigate the challenges present in Europe. Additionally, this interplay shapes the dynamics of arrival, reception, and integration. Despite the challenges, residents exhibit resilience and adaptability on their journey. It is important to note that international migration is a complex phenomenon that touches on a multiplicity of economic, social and security aspects all around the world.

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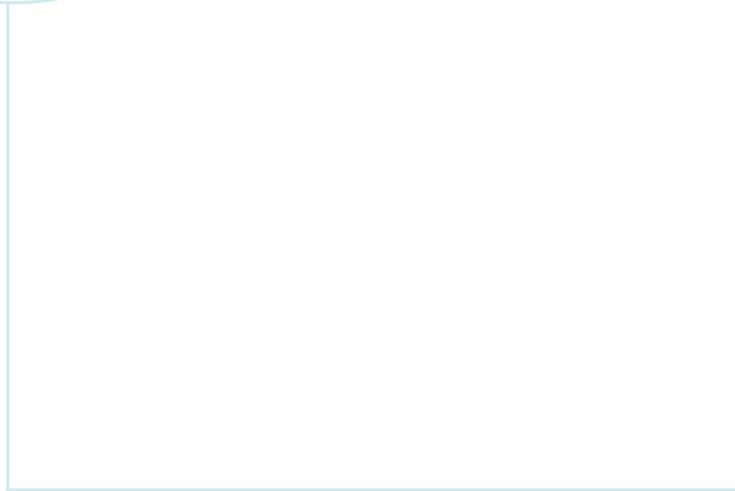
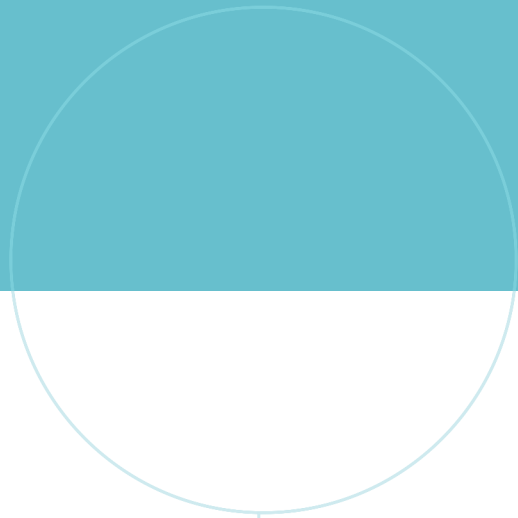
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