

# **The Complexity of Discretion**

Street-Level Bureaucrats' Sensemaking of Their Discretionary Power  
in Dutch Asylum Seeker Centres

## **Master Thesis**

MSc Public Administration: Governance of Migration and Diversity (GMD)

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# Preface

With pride and enthusiasm, I present this thesis. Drawing from my personal experience as a street-level bureaucrat at COA, I got invested in the dynamics of discretionary power. This study has offered me deeper insights into the complexities of the bureaucrat's role. I aspire for this research to similarly provide readers with a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of street-level bureaucracy and, particularly, shed light on the challenges of working in Asylum Seekers' Centers in the Netherlands.

Within this preface, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude, first and foremost, to the bureaucrats who participated in this research. Your trust in me and your willingness to share your perspectives have been fundamental in bringing this study to fruition. Your stories form the heart of this research and contribute to understanding the complexity of discretionary power.

A special tribute goes to my supervisor, Mark van Ostaijen. His guidance, insights, but particularly his involvement in the thesis circles provided an enriching collaborative environment, further enhancing the quality of my work. I am genuinely grateful for the thoughtful guidance and the supportive atmosphere he fostered.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all those who generously dedicated their time to review my work and provide valuable feedback. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge Ruda van Ravensteijn, Aldith Pasveer and Flip Roncken. Your willingness to brainstorm with me and your constructive contributions have been pivotal in refining my ideas and deepening my insights. Furthermore, your emotional support has been really appreciated.

This research marks the beginning of a new chapter in my academic and professional journey. I cherish the lessons learned and look forward to sharing and applying the insights gained in my future studies at the Universitat de Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona .

With gratitude,

Olga van den berg

## **Abstract**

Street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) in asylum seeker centres (azc's) have a certain degree of autonomy – or discretionary power – in implementing public policies and assisting residents. This thesis investigates how SLBs operating under the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands make sense of and utilise this discretionary power. In-depth interviews with 12 SLBs across five azc's reveal the interplay of individual decision maker characteristics, organisational characteristics, client characteristics, and extra-organisational characteristics in shaping SLBs' understanding, reflection and application of discretionary power. Contrary to initial theoretical assumptions, SLBs do not primarily rely on rules when understanding their discretionary power. Instead, organisational characteristics, such as resource constraints and the lack of clear guidance from supervisors and colleagues, wield a more pronounced influence, leading to a diminished role of formal rules in shaping and guiding their discretion. In these situations SLBs often rely on their individual decision maker characteristics to navigate their discretion. Additionally, the research shows that client attributes impact SLBs' approach to discretion. SLBs allocate more time to residents who are vulnerable and friendly, while taking a more guarded approach towards safe country nationals and residents displaying aggression. This cautious approach leads to a stricter adherence to rules and regulations. Addressing the potential biases that might underlie these interactions with residents, this study emphasises the importance of reflective practices among SLBs. Reflective SLBs demonstrate a deeper level of engagement by critically evaluating their own discretionary power, leading to more responsible and effective decision-making in public services. Furthermore, extra-organisational factors, such as political decisions, indirectly influence SLBs' discretion by shaping the overall organisational context and imposing resource constraints. Overall, this research underscores the complexity of SLBs' discretionary power, acknowledging the nuanced interplay of factors that influence their discretion. The study highlights the significance of incorporating reflective practices into SLBs' roles, ultimately leading to better understanding and exercise of discretionary power.

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# 1. Introduction

At the heart of public governance and administrative practices, street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) take centre stage in the implementation of public policies. SLBs are seen as essential links between written policies and practical execution and wield discretionary power to interpret and apply policies (Hupe, 2019; Lipsky, 2010). As such, public policies truly come to life when these SLBs put them into practice during their face-to-face encounters with their clients (Zacka, 2017). Among the many areas where these encounters take place, migration and asylum bureaucracy have become important subjects of observation and study (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017; Darling, 2022; Giacomelli, 2021). Noncitizens seeking safety and protection in foreign countries find themselves navigating constant administrative requirements to substantiate the legitimacy of their presence. As asylum seekers navigate through the complex bureaucratic landscape, asylum seeker centres (azc's) emerge as significant meeting points where their daily lives intersect with the state (Hartmann, 2017). These centres serve as pivotal points of contact between asylum seekers and the bureaucratic system, providing an ideal setting to observe the interactions and decision-making processes between SLBs and those seeking refuge.

In the Netherlands, the SLBs tasked with managing and accommodating asylum seekers are employed by the Dutch Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). Operating within a dynamic environment, these SLBs navigate reception crises, fluctuating influxes of asylum seekers, constant adaptation to new regulations and overcrowded azc's. The discretionary power bestowed upon SLBs allows them to exercise professional judgement and adapt their approach to the unique circumstances of each situation, shaping the implementation of policies on the ground (Lipsky, 2010). This discretion extends to decisions related to the assessment of individual needs, the allocation of state-provided financial resources, and the imposing of restrictions on residents within azc's (*Programmabegeleider*, n.d.; *Woonbegeleider*, n.d.)

In street-level bureaucracy literature, there has been a growing emphasis on exploring the underlying factors influencing SLBs' discretionary power (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012; Prottas, 1978). However, how SLBs make sense of their discretionary power in the specific context of azc's has remained unexplored. According to Belabas and Gerrits (2017, p.148), "contextualized research is needed to better understand street-level workers' behaviour and the various ways in which they tackle the dilemmas that they experience in their work". To address this research gap, this study sheds light on the sensemaking processes of SLBs in the context of azc's in the Netherlands. To achieve these

research objectives, interviews are conducted with COA employees who work in different azc's in the Netherlands. The central research question guiding this study is:

“How do SLBs of COA working in azc's make sense of their discretionary power?”

To answer this question, the following sub-questions are posed:

- What is the discretionary power of SLBs working in azc's?
- How do SLBs working in azc's reflect on their discretionary power?

In the following chapters, this thesis will delve deeper into the research question and sub-questions. The exploration begins by providing a theoretical framework that draws on theories of street-level bureaucrats and discretionary power, as well as literature on sensemaking and reflection. The methods section will explain the research design and data collection methods employed in this study. Subsequently, the findings, analysis and conclusions will be presented in the last two chapters. This research contributes to our understanding of the sensemaking of the discretionary power of SLBs working in azc's in the Netherlands. By examining their discretionary power, this study aims to inform the development of effective policies and practices that promote a thoughtful exercise of discretion.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

To provide a theoretical foundation for this study, this chapter will first introduce the literature and research on street-level bureaucracy and discretion. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss and conceptualise the main theories concerning sensemaking and reflection relevant to this research.

### **2.1 Street-level bureaucracy and discretion**

As noted by Lipsky (2010), SLBs are pivotal players in public administration, acting as *de facto* policymakers who informally construct or reconstruct policies within their organisations through their practices. Discretion, defined as the sphere of autonomy within which one's decisions are a matter of personal judgement and assessment (Galligan, 1990), is a key aspect of their work. It involves the challenging task of balancing general and abstract rules with specific situations, creating a dilemma between flexibility and uniformity (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010). While some scholars advocate for limiting discretionary powers in fear of arbitrariness or power abuse by SLBs (Carrington, 2005), others view it as inevitable or even essential for the efficient and effective implementation of rules and policies when interacting

with citizens (Baldwin, 1997; Evans, 2016).

Discretionary power and its limits can be perceived and used differently by individual SLBs (Raaphorst, 2018). To gain a comprehensive understanding of all the factors that can come into play in the process of sensemaking of discretionary power, the following sections will delve into the factors that influence and shape SLBs' discretion. Scholars such as Loyens and Maesschalck (2010), Prottas (1978) and Scott (1997) have categorised these factors into three main categories: individual decision maker characteristics, organisational characteristics and client characteristics. Additionally, Vinzant et al. (1998) expanded on this with "extra-organisational characteristics" to further include a fourth category. These categories will form the foundation of the theoretical framework guiding this study.

### 2.1.1 Individual decision maker characteristics

Individual decision maker characteristics refer to the personal attributes and values of SLBs that can impact their decision-making process (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Prottas, 1978). Several studies have found that SLBs' decisions are influenced by their level of professionalism, personal beliefs, and moral values (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 1999; Winter, 2001)

SLBs' personal beliefs and moral values are significant factors that can influence their practices (Dubois, 2010). For this study, a personal value is defined as: "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct" (Rokeach, 1973, p.5). Empirical research shows that SLBs who prioritise social justice may emphasise the well-being and empowerment of service users in their decision-making (Finn et al., 2013). Furthermore, Kroeger's (1975) study presents that caseworkers who display sympathetic behaviour tend to provide more benefits to clients compared to workers who are more rule-oriented. Another study by Belabas & Gerrits (2017) on the discretionary power of SLBs who implement integration policies in the Netherlands also shows that the willingness of SLBs to help clients often goes beyond policy rules. Besides high client motivation and extreme personal distress of the client, this is influenced by whether SLBs negatively assess the policies.

Occupations within public institutions can be categorised as professions, indicating specialised knowledge, skills, norms, and identities (Etzioni, 1969). Recognising SLBs as professionals necessitate considering professional values as another factor that shapes street-level practices and SLBs' discretionary power (Hupe, 2019). For this study professional values are defined as "standards for action that are accepted by professional groups and individuals

and are used to evaluate the integrity of the individual or organization” (Poochangizi et al., 2017, p.2). There are several professional values which can vary per organisation and SLB (Miller, 1967). Concerning studying discretionary power one important professional value to be discerned is SLBs' interpretation of the rules they are obliged to follow, or “rule adherence” (Miller, 1967). Organisational rules delineate the boundaries of SLBs' discretionary space and can significantly influence their practices and values (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017). This observation aligns with Lipsky’s (1980) perspective, emphasising the substantial role of professionalism in how SLBs navigate the constraints of organisational rules and regulations, and how their decisions are guided by the need to adhere to these norms.

### 2.1.2 Organisational characteristics

Organisational characteristics, such as resource constraints, formal and informal rules and the social context, are another category of factors that have been found to influence SLBs’ decision-making processes (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Scott, 1997).

Resource constraints have been identified as significant factors influencing the discretion of SLBs and their interactions with clients (Chang, 2022; Lipsky, 2010). The lack of personnel resources, including undertrained or inexperienced caseworkers, can impose additional burdens on senior professionals, thereby influencing their engagement with clients (Chang, 2022). Even when resources are deemed sufficient, their adequacy may still fall short of meeting the public's demands. As a result, SLBs often contend with high levels of stress and occupational constraints often arising from limited resources and heavy workloads (Brodkin, 2011). The impact of such constraints is reflected in the attitudes and behaviours of SLBs, often leading to policy alienation (Brodkin, 2011).

Besides these constraints, formal rules also influence SLBs' discretionary power. Formal rules refer to explicit policies, guidelines, procedures, and protocols that are established by the organisation and are meant to guide the actions of SLBs (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010). A study by Aiken and Hage (1966) found that highly formalised organisations with a lot of formal rules pose significant constraints on case workers’ decision-making processes. Strict organisational routines and rules, as identified by Peyrot (1982), impose limitations on SLBs' decision-making flexibility, particularly concerning client eligibility. Additionally, the clarity of rules plays a crucial role in shaping SLBs' practices. Geuijen's (1998) study on Dutch azc’s highlights the existence of vague and contradictory operational goals for SLBs within COA, where the reception needs to balance frugality and humanity. Furthermore, research on the discretionary power of SLBs in other organisations in the asylum process, such as the



Immigration and Naturalisation Services (IND) reveals that policy largely determines the administrative discretion of the government agency (Severijns, 2019). However, SLBs in the asylum process often perceive these rules as unclear, leading to increased uncertainties regarding rule interpretation (Severijns, 2019). This highlights the intricate nature of formal rules and their influence on the discretionary space of SLBs.

Moreover, the informal rules in an organisation deriving from the organisational culture can also play a critical role in moderating the level and type of discretion exercised by SLBs (Kelly, 1994). These informal rules refer to the customs, norms, and behaviours that are not explicitly outlined in formal policies or procedures. They are typically reinforced through interactions among individuals within the organisation (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). This can also be seen as a reflection of the organizational culture (Serpa, 2016). When individuals become members of an organisation, they often adopt the organisation's goals, values, and beliefs as their own, and this process can influence their decision-making processes (Piore, 2011). Furthermore, informal rules may also govern power dynamics and relationships within the organisation, influencing SLBs' interactions with co-workers and supervisors.

This interaction with co-workers and supervisors is another organisational characteristic that can influence their decision-making. Work group dynamics, including the attitudes of colleagues and supervisors, play a crucial role in influencing the decision-making behaviour of SLBs (Vinzant et al., 1998). Furthermore, Keulemans and Groeneveld (2020) show that frontline supervisors serve as role models for the attitudinal behaviour of SLBs. They highlight the importance of supportive leadership behaviours in maintaining a positive attitude towards clients. According to Vinzant et al. (1998), supervisors can set clear performance expectations for their subordinates, shaping how their employees exercise their job responsibilities. They also frequently carry out employee evaluations and determine salary and bonuses. Due to these actions, the expectations and guidance of supervisors can have a significant influence on the behaviour of the SLBs.

### 2.1.3 Clients characteristics

Another category that can influence SLB decision-making is client characteristics (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010; Scott, 1997). Client characteristics can be divided by client attributes and client demeanour (Jensen, 2019). Client attributes refer to certain identities or qualities of the clients themselves that may influence the decisions of SLBs. These attributes may include demographic information such as age, gender, or nationality as well as more specific information related to the client's situation or needs (Prottas, 1978). Public service

bureaucracies often categorise clients based on these attributes, and this categorisation determines the treatment and resources that the client will receive from the bureaucracy (Keulemans & Van de Walle, 2020; Prottas, 1978). Goodsel's (1981) research, which involved conducting observations and interviews with staff at a county welfare department, revealed that some bureaucrats acknowledged that individual characteristics of clients played a role in their emotional response to them (p. 774). Specifically, elderly citizens, those facing helplessness and large families with numerous or neglected children, were viewed as deserving of aid. The study indicated that such individuals could anticipate that SLBs would allocate extra time and demonstrate a more receptive demeanour during face-to-face interactions with this group that was considered vulnerable (p. 772).

However, some other scholars suggest that the influence of client attributes is uncertain or may even be negligible, arguing that SLBs make decisions based more on social relationships with the client rather than on their attributes (Keiser, 2010). Jensen (2019) adds to this the importance of client demeanour. The literature on client demeanour suggests that SLBs prefer clients who exhibit socially “correct” behaviour, to avoid conflict and tension during interactions (Fineman, 1991; Prottas, 1978). Research indicates that SLBs tend to have a preference for clients who exhibit humbleness, vulnerability, and submissiveness, as they are deemed more manageable (Brown, 1981; Van Oorschot, 2005). Clients who display traits such as humility and a willingness to cooperate are more likely to receive good and thorough processing by SLBs (Lipsky, 2010). Conversely, non-compliant clients may receive limited services or even be denied services (Crewe, 2011; Goodsell, 1981). Studies also show that aggressive, self-assertive clients receive less information and attention from SLBs (Hasenfeld & Steinmetz, 1981; Keiser, 2010). Lipsky (2010) contends that while it is necessary to treat everyone the same in order to foster public trust, there can be acceptable exceptions to this principle. These exceptions should not be based on discrimination or favouritism but should be exercised by SLBs who possess the necessary skills, training, and experience to exercise discretion properly.

#### 2.1.4 Extra-organisational characteristics

The fourth category of factors that influences the decision-making process of SLBs is extra-organisational characteristics. As noted by Vinzant et al. (1998) these factors include the media, other service agencies or situational variables. Another important extra organisational factor can be the political climate. It is within the dynamic relationship between bureaucracy and politics that policy-making processes take place (Nyadera & Islam, 2020). Meier et al. (2019)

argue that the impact of political discourse on the bureaucracy is significant, as it influences the policies, procedures, and overall functioning of government agencies. When political institutions fail to provide clear policy goals, allocate adequate resources, or grant sufficient autonomy to the bureaucracy, it creates challenges and limitations in effective implementation (Meier et al., 2019). When examining the role of SLBs in azc's, Geuijen (1998) for instance argued the operational goals for SLBs are vague and sometimes contradictory. On the one hand, the reception must be austere, on the other hand, it must also be humane. She argues that this is related to the conflicting mandates imposed by politics.

Moreover, in addition to the powerful impact of politics, it is important to recognise that in today's digitised age of governance, the media also plays a pivotal role in shaping policy and governance processes (Karlsen et al., 2020). Civil servants and public bureaucracies can be subject to media scrutiny, especially concerning politically sensitive tasks (Jacobs & Wonneberger, 2017). According to Schillemans et al. (2019), "pressure from the media affects the daily work of bureaucrats and induces 'media stress', with potentially critical effects on the quality of public policy." SLBs increasingly have to engage in media management and be aware of how their work and events are presented in the media (Karlsen et al., 2020).

Another extra-organisational characteristic is other service providers. SLBs often work in collaboration with other agencies to fulfil their duties. They may have to rely on these service providers to complete the tasks related to a particular case, which can significantly impact their decisions on whether to take action (Vinzant et al., 1998). The relationship between the SLBs' organisation and other organisations, can shape the departmental rules, operating procedures, and other factors that can affect SLBs' practices (Vinzant et al., 1998).

## 2.2 Sensemaking and reflection

The previous categories provide the foundation for understanding and analysing SLBs' sensemaking. These factors directly influence the context in which SLBs operate, their challenges and their level of reflection. Therefore, when examining how SLBs make sense of their discretionary power, it is crucial to consider these factors as they significantly shape their perceptions, interpretations, and reflections. In this research, the findings will be analysed through a sensemaking lens. Weick (1995) one of the pioneers in the study of sensemaking, defines sensemaking as a continuous process that people engage in to make sense of their surroundings, especially in situations when they encounter ambiguity or uncertainty. Sensemaking involves the construction of mental models to organise and interpret the stimuli

one encounters in their environment. SLBs rely on sensemaking to navigate complexities in their work environment, exercise discretionary power, and make informed decisions regarding social services and restrictions (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012). Concerning the ontological definition of sensemaking, this research draws on the cognitive sensemaking approach, which emphasises the development of mental models by individuals instead of groups (Minei, 2015).

The construction and refinement of these mental models are not isolated processes. Reflection plays an important role in the sensemaking processes of SLBs. Boyd and Fales (1983) define reflection as an internal examination of experiences that raise issues of concern. Boud et al. (2013) further describe reflection as a cognitive and affective process that allows them to refine their mental models, challenge assumptions, and incorporate new insights, leading to a deeper understanding of their practices. Reflective practitioners, a concept introduced by Schon (1984), critically analyse their work experiences, decisions, and the outcomes of their actions. Reflection offers SLBs the opportunity to critically analyse their practices, leading to continuous improvement of their professional practices and a deeper understanding of their roles (Plack & Greenberg, 2005). Encouraging reflective practices among SLBs is also emphasised by Lipsky (2010) to enhance their decision-making process. Through regular reflection within supportive team environments, SLBs can tap into shared knowledge and diverse perspectives, enabling them to critically review policies and understand the moral reasoning behind their practices (Lipsky, 2010). This promotes the effective and thoughtful use of discretion in their roles as street-level bureaucrats.

### **3. Methods**

This chapter outlines the research design. It presents the operationalisation of the variables of the research, the sampling method and the method of data collection and analysis. Additionally, the limitations and ethical considerations of this study are presented.

#### **3.1 Research question**

The central research question of this thesis is: “How do SLBs of COA working in azc’s make sense of their discretionary power?”

To answer this question, the following sub-questions are posed:

- What is the discretionary power of SLBs working in azc’s?
- How do SLBs working in azc’s reflect on their discretionary power?

### 3.2 Operationalisation

In the following table, the operationalisation of theoretical variables discussed in the theoretical framework is specified.

<b>Theoretical concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Sub-dimensions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Individual Decision maker characteristics	The personal characteristics of the SLB	Professional Values	Adherence to rules and regulation	References to the importance of consistency with formal policies and procedures, or frequency of deviation from standard practices
			Other professional values	References to what is considered professional within their occupation
		Personal Values		References to their convictions or thoughts i.e. I believe; I am convinced; I value
Organisational characteristics	Features of the organisational context in which SLB work	Rules	Formal rules	References to policy guidelines, procedural rules, use of standardised protocols and forms in decision making
			Informal rules	References to unwritten rules and customs governing organisational behaviour
		Resource constraints		References to constraints i.e. staff shortages, budgetary constraints, time constraints, workload pressure
			Social context	Co-workers

		Supervisors	References to i.e. quality of communication, level of support and guidance, degree of autonomy or micromanagement, level of feedback and recognition
Client characteristics	Characteristics of the clients	Client attributes	References to the characteristics of the clients i.e. their age, nationality, family composition, perceived vulnerability
		Client demeanour	References to the demeanour of the client i.e. humble, cooperative, aggressive, stubborn
Extra-organisational factors	Factors outside of the organisation or client group	Media	References to media scrutiny or media pressure
		Political discourse	References to how politics influence refugee reception and policies
		Other service providers	References to other organisations working with refugees such as the IND or municipalities

*Table 1: Operationalisation of categories*

### 3.3 Data collection and sampling strategy

The data collection method employed in this study is semi-structured interviews. This is considered an appropriate method for sensemaking research (Naumer et al., 2008). Semi-structured interviews also have been proven to offer insight into factors influencing SLB discretion (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017). The interviews will commence by presenting a set of standardized questions and topics, derived from the theoretical framework. This initial structure

will be followed by an adaptable approach, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' sensemaking practices, as emphasized by Ahlin (2019). The interview questions, outlined in Appendix 8.1, primarily serve as a foundational guide.

This study specifically focuses on Dutch SLBs from COA who work at five different azc's in the Netherlands. The 12 interviewed SLBs have a breadth of experience, not only at regular azc's but also at emergency accommodation sites. This is a result of COA's current operational setup, with multiple locations and frequent staff rotations, leading to assignments at multiple locations. By sharing their experiences across different locations, the SLBs provide valuable and contemporary insights into the operations of COA as a whole.

This study is focused on the discretionary power of *programmabegeleiders* (program coordinators) and *woonbegeleiders* (residential support workers) specifically. *Programmabegeleiders* are responsible for planning, organising, and implementing phase-specific group-oriented programs aimed at integration and guiding the recognised refugees towards housing in the municipality (*Programmabegeleider*, n.d.). *Woonbegeleiders* play a vital role in creating a safe and liveable environment for asylum seekers. They are the primary point of contact for incoming refugees, responsible for assigning sleeping accommodations, providing necessary explanations regarding facilities, and ensuring a safe and supportive living climate (*Woonbegeleider*, n.d.). Both *programma-* and *woonbegeleiders* are entrusted with the responsibility to make the azc a safe and liveable place and have the authority to impose sanctions on residents. These positions are chosen since they involve daily interactions with all the residents residing at the azc and not merely recognised refugees. Although the majority of interviewees currently work in these roles this study also includes two former *programma-* and *woonbegeleiders* who have transitioned to different roles within COA. Their perspectives add a valuable dimension to the research. Their recent experience as *programma-* and *woonbegeleiders* provides them with insights into the challenges and discretionary power associated with these roles. However, their current distance from these positions allows them to reflect on their experiences with a certain level of objectivity and a broader organisational perspective.

The sampling strategy employed in this study is purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their relevance to the research question (Babbie, 2020). In this case, SLBs are selected based on their job title and whether they currently work at an azc for COA. I have previously worked at an azc in Amsterdam and have a personal network of respondents. Due to this network, most of the participants of the study are working, or have

previously worked at azc's or emergency locations in Amsterdam. The sample takes into account a balance between the two types of counsellors. It includes six *programmabegeleiders*, four *woonbegeleiders* and two SLBs who previously held both positions.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The method of analysis of this study is qualitative content analysis, which involves systematically coding and categorising the data to identify patterns and themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis is a commonly used method in sensemaking research and has been used in previous studies examining SLB discretion (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012). This method allows for a detailed exploration of participants' responses and provides a way to identify commonalities and differences in the ways that SLBs make sense of their work. The analysis is conducted using the software ATLAS.ti.

The coding of the data follows an abductive approach. This allows for a way to discover meaningful underlying patterns to emerge from the data (Graneheim et al., 2017; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). This approach is particularly useful when exploring complex and dynamic social phenomena, such as the discretionary power of SLBs. The initial coding is done inductively to allow for patterns to emerge from the data. Then, deductive coding is used to match the identified frames and patterns with the pre-existing theoretical framework which is operationalised in Table 1. Finally, an abductive approach is employed to iteratively refine the coding and generate new hypotheses and insights based on the identified patterns.

### 3.5 Expectations of this study

Based on the theoretical framework, several expectations can be formulated regarding how SLBs make sense of their discretionary power. The following three expectations are expected to play the most significant role in this study.

The first expectation builds on studies by Geuijen (1998) and Severijns (2019), which also focus on SLBs working with migrants in the Netherlands. Drawing from their insights it can be expected that the SLBs will primarily make sense of their practices by taking into account the overall goals and the formal and informal rules of COA. In doing so, they are likely to align their discretionary space with the organisational objectives, leading them to make decisions that prioritise the interests of COA and ensure compliance with established protocols

Secondly, drawing from Lipsky's (2010) study, it is anticipated that the quality of supervision and team dynamics within the organisation will influence how SLBs reflect on their



discretionary power. A supportive and collaborative team environment is expected to enable effective reflection on discretionary power, utilising shared knowledge and diverse perspectives to inform their understanding of their discretion and improve their professional practices. Conversely, inadequate supervision and challenging team dynamics may hinder the optimal use of discretionary power and how SLBs reflect on this.

Finally, based on the literature by Goodsell (1981) and Jensen (2019) highlighting that SLBs are inclined to favour clients who exhibit correct behaviour and cooperation it is expected that SLBs will allocate more time, attention, and resources to clients who align with their preferred demeanour while being less responsive or accommodating to clients who are aggressive or non-compliant with rules. These expectations provide a starting point for understanding how SLBs make sense of their discretionary power.

### 3.6 Limitations and ethical considerations

For this research, some limitations and ethical considerations should be taken into account. Firstly, the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method may limit the depth of understanding. Participants may not always disclose their full perspectives or experiences, potentially impacting the validity and reliability of the findings. Another consideration is my previous position as a former employee of COA. This position granted me relatively easy access to the SLBs and valuable insights into their work environment. It also facilitated a level of trust and openness among the participants due to our existing relationship. However, this familiarity could introduce biases and influence participants to provide socially desirable answers. To address these potential limitations, I made an effort to adopt a neutral stance throughout the interviews, creating an environment that encouraged participants to express their authentic perspectives freely. Secondly, building on the standpoint theory, which emphasises acknowledging the researcher's positionality (Harding, 2009), I carefully reflected on my position and on how my assumptions and experiences might influence the analysis. To enhance objectivity and neutrality during the data analysis, I employed a rigorous coding mechanism and maintained consistency with the established indicators (Babbie, 2020).

The study prioritised ethical considerations to protect the privacy of SLBs. All participants are informed of the purpose and nature of the study, and their consent is obtained before conducting the interviews, see Appendix 8.2. Confidentiality and anonymity are ensured throughout the study to protect the privacy of SLBs.

## **4. Context**

This contextual chapter lays the foundation for this thesis by describing the state of affairs at COA and the challenges and conditions that the organisation and the SLBs are currently grappling with. In the Netherlands and Europe, the reception of refugees sparks debate, with proponents emphasising the protection of human rights, while opponents prioritise national interests in terms of economy, social security, and security concerns (Boswell et al., 2011). These conflicting views impact the resources and social policies provided to refugees in azc's. SLBs, responsible for refugee reception, face the challenge of balancing these perspectives in their role (Hartmann, 2017). As early as 2021, COA raised concerns with the Ministry of Justice and Security, stating that the quality of reception for both residents and employees was at risk of being compromised due to increasing pressures (Kuiper & van der Poel, 2022). The prolonged stay of asylum seekers within the centres, caused by significant backlogs in IND, further exacerbates the challenges faced by COA. Additionally, the insufficient availability of housing from municipalities and the limited expansion of new reception locations contribute to the pressure. During the spring of 2023, over 40% of asylum seekers in the Netherlands found themselves accommodated in emergency locations (Nieuwsuur, 2023). These locations often face challenges in aligning operational realities with policy guidelines, which in turn has an impact on the work environment of the SLBs. This situation has intensified the pressure on SLBs. Research, supported by COA, has revealed a significant absenteeism rate of 9% at azc's, which is nearly double the average rate observed in other sectors (Kuiper & van der Poel, 2022). This persistent absenteeism, coupled with the need to open new COA locations, has worsened the existing personnel shortage, creating additional difficulties for the organisation in managing its workforce. In this demanding context, it is crucial for SLBs to effectively use their discretion in balancing legal responsibilities and ensuring the well-being of azc residents and themselves.

## **5. Findings and analysis**

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the study, providing valuable insights into the complex interplay between discretion, SLBs' characteristics, COA's characteristics, characteristics of residents and extra-organisational characteristics in the decision-making process of SLBs. The inductive codes that emerged throughout the analysis are integrated into their respective categories.

### **5.1 Characteristics of the SLBs**

This subchapter presents the interconnectedness between the characteristics of the SLB and their perceived discretionary power. When examining personal values and beliefs and their impact on discretion, it became clear that most SLBs prioritise empathy in their interactions with residents. This empathy guides their use of discretionary power to provide additional assistance when needed. The bureaucrats demonstrate their empathy through various approaches. Some SLBs, who used to be refugees themselves, empathise with the residents based on their own experiences in azc's. They draw upon their first-hand understanding of the challenges and aspirations of asylum seekers, leading them to be extra patient. Other SLBs mentioned that they adopt familiar roles, such as that of an older sibling or parent, in their assistance to the residents. This approach allows them to establish a supportive and trusting relationship, providing guidance and emotional support similar to a family dynamic. In addition to personal experiences, some SLBs mentioned that their religious convictions also drive them to be empathic in their interactions. SLBs who prioritise empathy as a personal value often demonstrate a greater willingness to make additional efforts if they believe it is in the best interest of the residents. As one SLB explained:

'It's not that I'm going to change the rules on my own, but if I think something is in the best interest of the resident and I can contribute to it through some extra effort, then I will.' (SLB2)

While recognising the importance of their personal values, it is worth noting most SLBs found it challenging to clearly articulate their professional values. One particular professional value that could be discerned from their answers was the importance of approaching their work with impartiality and treating each resident equally. SLBs emphasised the crucial need to ensure that their perspectives and biases do not interfere with their professional responsibilities.

When it comes to adherence to rules, a distinction can be made between the rules that govern the behaviour of the SLBs themselves and the rules that apply to the residents. When referring to what is considered professional behaviour, SLBs mentioned adherence to regulations such as dress code requirements and maintaining a professional distance from residents. They recognise the significance of the code of conduct, which guides their interactions with residents, promoting impartiality and equal treatment. Overall, SLBs generally do not encounter difficulties with these rules, understanding that protocols exist for valid reasons and contribute to the smooth functioning of their role.

However, the SLBs do sometimes face challenges when it comes to rule adherence concerning rules directed at the residents. For instance, many SLBs mentioned the Regulations

on Withholding Provisions (ROV) policy, which is designed to enforce compliance with house rules by implementing measures such as fines when residents violate them. Some employees expressed that they occasionally feel inclined to deviate from strict enforcement, while others suggested that their colleagues should utilise ROVs more frequently to guide residents' behaviour. The interviews revealed that SLBs strive to strike a balance between following rules and regulations and considering their personal perceptions of a situation. In cases where they perceive rules to be too strict, SLBs often contemplate the context and necessity of the rule.

‘Sometimes you have to be able to take that freedom. For example, with travel expenses or other matters. If someone has an important appointment, you sometimes have to be able to deviate from the rules and be flexible about it.’ (SLB4)

The SLBs trust their ability to assess the reasons behind a rule, most of them even consider that part of being a professional. Some SLBs justify exercising discretion by referring to their work experience as long-term employees at COA, while others credit it to their intelligence or their age and life experiences.

In addition to the previously discussed aspects, it is crucial to describe the beliefs and ideas SLBs uphold regarding their autonomy and discretion specifically. When asked about the extent to which they can shape their own role and exercise autonomy, all SLBs expressed a sense of complete freedom. They emphasised that they can determine their own actions and approaches in their work. As one SLB put it:

‘You can more or less do what you want. [...] there are some things that you have no control over. But how you approach your work, that's entirely up to yourself. [...] therefore there is also a lot of room to relax and take it easy.’ (SLB9)

While their roles are bounded by processes and guidelines, SLBs experience significant autonomy to exercise their judgement and rely on their own interpretation and fulfilment of their job responsibilities. Some mention feeling that their actions go unchecked and they or their colleagues can do “*whatever they like*” without having to face significant consequences. This freedom extends to interpreting policies and deciding the level of proactiveness, including whether to go the extra mile for residents.

It is worth noting that some SLBs express concerns about this approach. When reflecting on the discretionary power and personal values and approaches, a few SLBs suggested that

colleagues sometimes rely too much on their personal judgement and lack sufficient knowledge about the organisation's policies. As one SLB stated:

'I believe there are a lot of employees who lack sufficient knowledge about what the policy exactly means. And maybe they do know the rules, but translating the rules into specific cases seems somewhat arbitrary at times since it depends on the person looking at the case. [...] I think not many colleagues realise that we are playing judge here.' (SLB9)

This viewpoint highlights the potential challenges and inconsistencies that may arise when individual judgement is a significant factor in decision-making processes and expresses the need for a consistent understanding of organisational policies. Particularly the personal approach to discretion can result in arbitrary delivery of services to residents.

## 5.2 Organisational characteristics of COA

This chapter presents how the organisational characteristics influence the discretionary power of SLBs. The interviews shed light on how the resource constraints, as presented in the context chapter, significantly influenced their perception and utilisation of discretionary power. The prevalence of personnel shortages and workload pressure emerged as prominent factors that limited their discretionary space, affecting SLBs nationwide. Additionally, new staff often don't receive adequate onboarding training. All SLBs expressed that when they started working at COA they felt that they were thrown into the deep end, where they had to rely on their own compass rather than relying on established policies or guidance from supervisors. While some SLBs found this exciting and embraced the challenges it brought, it also placed a considerable responsibility on their discretionary power. The scarcity of well-trained personnel has further repercussions as the existing staff members are required to take on additional responsibilities, intensifying the workload pressure. One SLB highlighted the interrelatedness of these issues, explaining:

'There are many new people, and many people who are not trained to make judgments on certain matters. [...] Sometimes it requires a critical look at your own work, like okay, why are we doing it this way, and often it's just, we'll do it this way without questioning and move on. And that is also related to workload pressure. Many colleagues here have been absent, and their workload has been transferred to those who are present, which increases the workload and influences how the work is carried out.' (SLB9)

This citation also highlights the significant impact of workload pressure on SLBs' decision-making processes. Some mentioned that they sometimes cannot provide the appropriate and customised services to all the residents. The interviews also indicate that high capacity at azc's often results in substandard living conditions that fail to meet legal requirements and humane standards. Consequently, the residents experience distress and agitation, adding an additional burden on SLBs who are tasked with addressing and managing these issues.

When reflecting on their discretionary power in light of these constraints, SLBs express a range of perspectives. Some SLBs welcome the space for discretion and argue that they use their discretionary power to adjust to resource constraints and keep up quality standards for the residents. On the other hand, some SLBs feel that the discretion they possess is too significant. They recognise that the lack of clear guidance and the pressure to make quick decisions can lead to arbitrary practices without reflection. As one SLB mentioned that due to the high workload, they don't have time to reflect:

'It also seems that the actions and practices of the employees are rarely addressed or discussed here.' (SLB1)

This variation in perspectives on discretionary power among SLBs raises concerns about the potential implications and consequences of its exercise, particularly in the absence of adequate reflection and discussion of their actions and practices.

Rule adherence, as discussed in the previous chapter, showed that how the SLBs perceive the strictness of the rules and their feeling of autonomy influence how they perceive and use their discretionary space. Nevertheless, all SLBs acknowledged that the key rules, such as the COA law, the ROV policy, reporting obligations, and the integration and asylum procedures, serve as a foundation for their practices and should provide some boundaries to their discretionary power. Furthermore, the lack of rules on something can also provide them with discretionary space. As one SLB mentioned:

'There are many protocols and guidelines, but there are also many things that are not described. In those cases, you have the freedom to shape it in your own way.' (SLB4)

In these cases, informal rules governing the SLBs' practices also affect their discretionary power. According to the SLBs, informal rules can vary among different azc's due to factors such as the type of location manager, the dynamics within the team, and the presence of new employees. However, some SLBs also emphasised that the informal rules and overall culture

within COA exhibit certain consistent trends, transcending location-specific variations. These trends highlight the dynamic and somewhat chaotic character of the organisation, as expressed by a SLB:

‘What we experience here, I think, is embedded in the whole COA, somehow a little bit the chaotic, rigid, the whole dynamic nature.’ (SLB9)

A majority of the SLBs highlight the chaos that they experience at the azc’s, which can be attributed to increased work pressure and the dynamic nature of their job. SLBs expressed concerns about unclear policy directions and solutions, regarding location continuity, the influx of new personnel, and the need for continuous adaptation to new migration influxes.

In addition to chaos, the SLBs mention that COA exhibits elements of rigidity in certain practices and procedures. Established rules and protocols provide consistency and ensure compliance with legal and administrative requirements. However, SLBs have observed that the rigidity of these established practices can sometimes become excessive. Within teams, there is resistance to change, particularly among long-employed colleagues who adhere to the sentiment of *"this is how things are done, and we won't change it,"* (SLB10) even if it contradicts specific policies. Furthermore, SLBs have encountered difficulties when attempting to address policies that do not work in practice. The SLBs mentioned that the complex bureaucratic system can be overwhelming and hinder the ability to bring about meaningful change.

Apart from the influence of chaos and rigidity, the social culture within COA also significantly impacts SLBs. SLBs value teamwork, emphasising the importance of dialogue, brainstorming with, and support from their colleagues. However, the social culture also reveals certain challenges. In line with the rigid culture, some SLBs highlight the presence of colleagues who display a confrontational or resistant attitude towards alternative viewpoints or suggestions, leading to situations where some SLBs don’t feel safe expressing themselves within their team. The composition of teams in terms of experience within COA also contributes to the social culture. SLBs who work at COA for less than two years describe that new teams are often like-minded which contributes to a positive work environment. However, when speaking to some long-term SLBs, they expressed challenges in collaborating with new colleagues. One SLB mentioned:

‘There are so many people who lack experience [...] and the new people don't know how the process works, how the policies are structured, and it becomes very tempting for them to go their own way, despite the associated risks.’ (SLB5)

This sentiment highlights the potential difficulties that arise when working with different people in one team. The lack of familiarity with established procedures and policies can lead to deviations from standard practices, potentially exposing the team and organisation to risks.

Besides co-workers, SLBs mentioned that supervisors also impact their discretionary space. The influence of supervisors varied. Some SLBs benefited from positive communication and easy access to their supervisors, but the majority experienced a lack of guidance, especially when dealing with new managers. These managers are often unfamiliar with the procedures and practices of COA and were thrown into their roles without sufficient knowledge or support. The absence of clear leadership grants autonomy, and leads the SLBs to rely more on personal and professional norms and experiences as mentioned in the previous chapter. This autonomy was sometimes welcomed, but it also presented challenges. As one SLB mentioned:

‘For me, there is too little supervision from the supervisor, [...] We are a team of 40 people, and we need supervision to maintain quality standards.’ (SLB6)

The need for effective supervision and leadership was emphasised by all SLBs as essential for maintaining team functioning and upholding quality standards.

### 5.3 Characteristics of the residents

This subchapter shows how SLBs consider the attributes and demeanour of residents in their work. Most SLBs stressed that they aim to treat everyone with the same level of respect, but that the specific approach varies depending on residents’ attributes. They consider tailoring their approach to individual residents to be an integral aspect of their role as bureaucrats. Tailoring helps SLBs to motivate and guide residents effectively, contributing to the maintenance of an orderly and safe azc. Factors such as age, education level, and nationality were frequently mentioned as attributes that influence the SLBs' approach. For instance, in the context of lessons on Dutch society, SLBs adopt their approach to age and nationality.

‘If you have a group of young Syrians, I usually tell them different things than when I have a group of older Eritrean people. Purely because those young Syrians are almost always highly educated, they want to study here and they want to know different things about the Dutch than older people coming from Eritrea.’ (SLB12)

This highlights the recognition that different residents have unique backgrounds, needs, and interests, which may require tailored information and support. It is within the scope of SLBs' responsibilities to provide appropriate services to all residents, and as such, they exercise their



discretionary power to make decisions based on what they believe the residents they encounter need. Interestingly, a SLB acknowledged that the choice to adopt a different approach based on these attributes often stems from their prejudices. They admitted:

‘But those are also my own prejudices. [...] I already have a certain image of the resident I'm going to talk to beforehand because I'm also a human being. For example, assuming that every Turk is highly educated. And then I approach the conversation in a certain way, even though it doesn't have to be true at all.’ (SLB6)

In addition to considering attributes such as nationality, age, and education level, SLBs often utilise their discretionary space to provide extra attention to vulnerable residents. Multiple SLBs mentioned specific groups they consider vulnerable such as pregnant women, single women, individuals with mental illnesses and drug addicts. They make more frequent visits and provide additional support to these groups. However, opinions and approaches differed when it came to the vulnerability of young men. While some SLBs held the sentiment that young men should be held to higher standards of responsibility compared to other groups they deemed more vulnerable, such as families, other SLBs emphasised the need to pay more attention and provide support to young men navigating their way in the Netherlands alone.

Another specific group frequently mentioned in the interviews were the young, male, so-called “safe country nationals”. Most SLBs discussed how their aggressive and negative demeanour significantly impacted their work. One SLB described this as follows:

‘Lately, there are these safe country nationals, usually younger men from North Africa [...] who don't have any future prospects here at all. They don't care about anything, and it really affects your work tremendously. You're constantly busy with correcting, implementing measures, and trying to change their behaviour [...] You can spend the whole day just dealing with one incident after another.’ (SLB5)

SLBs mentioned that providing support to them also requires a significant amount of time and energy, both emotionally and physically. Another SLB mentioned that safe country nationals often cause more aggression incidents. There have been instances where SLBs have discovered weapons, like knives, during room checks or personally experienced incidents of violence or aggression. In units characterised by high levels of aggression and addiction, where SLBs feel unsafe, they tend to adopt a more cautious approach, leading to a stricter adherence to rules and regulations. The lack of safety and the challenges posed by aggression and addiction can also diminish their motivation. As one SLB expressed:

‘In those units where there is a lot of aggression, addiction. I don't feel safe there, and that affects my job satisfaction and resilience at some point.’ (SLB2)

Besides aggression the SLBs mentioned that they experienced some residents exhibiting manipulative demeanour such as threatening with legal disputes or suicide in order to get things done, trying to be overly friendly or posing a question multiple times to different SLBs. This caused the SLB to take a more distant approach when interacting with the residents. While most SLBs acknowledged that they approached residents differently based on certain attributes or demeanours, they also made it clear that this should never hinder the provision of their services. Despite conflicts or personal biases, their commitment to providing residents with necessary information and resources remained, albeit perhaps without a smile.

Fortunately, most SLBs also stressed that this negative demeanour is only exhibited by a small group and most of the residents are very friendly. This friendly demeanour also has an impact on how SLBs interact with residents. One SLB mentioned:

‘... if a resident waits very respectfully and patiently, then I think, "I'm going to help you, my friend." The way that resident is has a big influence on how I'm going to help that person.’ (SLB3)

This sentiment reflects the impact that the resident's positive demeanour has on the SLB's willingness to provide assistance and support.

#### 5.4 Extra-organisational characteristics

This chapter offers valuable insights into the influence of extra-organisational characteristics on the discretionary power of SLBs at COA. The influence of the media on the perception of SLBs' discretionary space appears to be limited. Many SLBs dismiss media stories as inaccurate and choose not to let them affect their work. While some of them feel powerless due to negative portrayals in the media, others feel compelled to amplify positive stories and counterbalance the negativity. One SLB emphasised the importance of engaging citizens who solely rely on information from newspaper articles, aiming to involve them in the real and positive narrative rather than the stigmatising portrayals of azc's.

SLBs hold varying perspectives regarding the influence of politics in their work. While some perceive political factors as being outside the realm of their discretion, not actively considering them in their practices, others acknowledge the significant impact of the political

landscape on their role as bureaucrats. These SLBs recognise that political decisions shape the parameters within which they exercise their discretion. As one SLB pointed out:

‘Politics definitely have a lot of influence on how we operate. We are a semi-governmental institution, so we are dependent on the government and how they structure things.’ (SLB4)

Consequently, they express concerns about the outcomes of political choices, particularly regarding the challenges and resource constraints that they believe stem from deliberate political decisions. This realisation often leads to feelings of frustration and helplessness, as SLBs are aware of their limited ability to single-handedly change the political system. SLBs emphasise that political decisions and structures exert influence over critical aspects such as resource allocation, azc location, and the quality of facilities for residents, which significantly impacts their overall work experience. As one SLB expressed:

‘Yes, that demotivates me [...]. Sometimes it's degrading, unfortunately. But COA is dependent on the government, the cabinet, the parliament, and the ministers.’ (SLB3)

The quote reflects how SLBs feel demotivated and constrained by political decisions that result in poor-quality facilities for residents. These resource constraints shape the context within which SLBs navigate challenges. While SLBs have discretionary authority in their daily interactions, they recognize the limits imposed by political choices.

According to several SLBs, the impact of ineffective policy decisions and resource constraints extends beyond COA and also affects other organisations within the asylum process, including Asylum Seeker Healthcare, the IND and municipalities. For example, the lengthy procedures implemented by the IND and the insufficient housing options provided by municipalities lead to overcrowded azc's. This indirectly influences the work of COA employees. Additionally, the busyness of other service providers contributes to frustration among residents, thereby influencing their interactions with SLBs.

‘...you are the face of the state. They can't go to the municipality or the IND because they are also inaccessible to them. So you are the only point of contact they have. Even though they are not angry at you personally, you represent COA [...]. Therefore, you might bear the brunt of their frustration.’ (SLB12)

Some SLBs also mentioned their collaboration with on-site security as an external partner that impacts their work. The level of trust they had in security personnel during incidents or the close cooperation at emergency locations affected their sense of safety in the work environment.

## 5.5 Analysis

The analysis of the findings reveals how various categories shape and influence SLBs' decision-making processes, offering a comprehensive overview of their discretionary power and addressing the sub-question of this thesis: "*What is the discretionary power of SLBs working in azc's?*" Additionally, this analysis provides insights into how SLBs reflect on their discretionary power in relation to these different categories, addressing the second sub-question: "*How do SLBs working in azc's reflect on their discretionary power?*"

### 5.5.1 Discretionary power

The findings show SLBs' multifaceted understanding of discretionary power, influenced by individual decision maker characteristics, organisational characteristics, client characteristics, and extra-organisational characteristics. The interplay of these factors underscores the complexity of what their discretion affects and entails.

Firstly, the findings emphasised the significance of individual decision maker characteristics in shaping SLBs' discretionary power at COA. Their perception of the extent of their discretion, their adherence to rules, and their reflection on these aspects depend on their professional and personal values. SLBs who prioritise empathy go beyond their job descriptions, promoting empathy in practice, aligning with Kroeger's (1975) study. Additionally, concerning their professional values, it is important to note that during the interviews, several SLBs expressed challenges in addressing questions related to this aspect, indicating that the term appeared vague and open to interpretation. SLBs' perspectives on rule adherence, however, were quite clear. While most SLBs adhere to professional conduct rules and aim to remain impartial, they often exercise personal judgement and consider the context and necessity concerning rules directed at residents. It can be questioned whether it is appropriate for SLBs to personally interpret these rules and rely on their own values to enforce them.

Secondly, the organisational characteristics primarily influence how SLBs perceive the boundaries of their discretionary power. Resource limitations pose challenges for SLBs in delivering assistance effectively. In situations where formal rules are unclear or insufficient, SLBs rely more on their discretion to address the gaps in available resources. This aligns with Chang's (2022) perspective on the impact of resource constraints on professionals' engagement

with clients. Referring back to the first expectation of this thesis, it was expected that formal rules primarily guide SLBs' discretion (Severijns, 2019; Geuijen, 1998). The findings, however, show that resource constraints and chaotic and rigid organisational culture have more impact on the sensemaking of their discretionary power than the rules. This highlights a theoretical gap in understanding how different contextual factors shape the role of formal rules in determining discretionary power. Additionally, it can indicate that the formal rules within COA specifically are too vague or unknown to properly guide SLBs in exercising their discretion. Furthermore, this thesis provides nuanced insights that supplement existing assumptions on the impact of supervision and a supportive team environment on SLBs' discretionary power. While Vinzant et al. (1998) suggest both factors influence SLBs' discretion, these findings show the consequences of their absence in practice. With limited guidance and no room for reflection, SLBs tend to interpret their discretionary space based on their own personal and professional values. This context-specific finding enhances the understanding of how discretionary power is exercised in real-world settings, underscoring the importance of organisational context in shaping SLBs' discretion.

Client characteristics, like individual decision maker characteristics, also shape SLBs' exercise of discretionary power. While SLBs assert their commitment to delivering equitable services to all, the interviews have brought to light their adoption of different approaches towards certain residents. SLBs adapt their approach to meet residents' attributes, especially vulnerability. This aligns with Prottas' (1978) notion that SLBs categorise clients based on attributes, influencing the treatment they provide. While variations based on attributes such as age or educational background might be part of their job, it becomes evident that the treatment of, for instance, young men is heavily intertwined with an individual's personal perception. This raises questions about fairness and the potential for discrimination or unequal treatment based on subjective judgement. The findings also underline the importance of client demeanour. The expectation based on Jensen's (2019) and Goodsel's (1981) research is confirmed, as most SLBs tend to prefer clients exhibiting socially "correct" behaviour, such as friendliness, while aggressive and negative demeanour leads to more cautious and guarded approaches with residents.

Lastly, the extra-organisational characteristics affect discretionary power in various ways. Interestingly, the media's impact on SLBs' understanding of their discretionary power is not as present as expected. Most SLBs seem to disregard its influence on their decision-making. These insights highlight a contrast with Schillemans et al. 's (2019) argument about the

significant impact of media on bureaucrats. Furthermore, according to the SLBs, the political landscape does not directly shape their discretionary power but establishes parameters within which they can exercise it. This aligns with Meier et al.'s (2019) argument that political discourse significantly influences the functioning of government agencies, including the development of policies and procedures. The SLBs consider the resource constraints mentioned in previous chapters and issues at other service providers to be affected by conscious political choices. These insights reveal the broader systemic forces affecting SLBs' discretion and highlight the need to acknowledge external factors and advocate political stability.

### 5.5.2 Reflection on the discretionary power

SLBs considered various aspects when reflecting on their discretionary power. When reflecting on their discretion in relation to their individual decision-making characteristics, only a few expressed concerns that the broad latitude and personal interpretation of discretion can result in arbitrary delivery of services to residents. The majority of SLBs were able to reflect on what their colleagues' discretionary power entails, but only a subset emerged as true reflective practitioners actively engaging in critical evaluation of their own discretionary power. These reflective SLBs demonstrated a deeper level of engagement by analysing their own work experiences, decision-making processes, and the outcomes of their actions. This critical reflectiveness, as suggested by Plack and Greenberg (2005), can provide a better understanding of their discretion and assist SLBs in their practices.

When reflecting on their discretionary power in relation to organisational characteristics, SLBs acknowledged using their discretionary power as a means to navigate constraints. Some SLBs mention that due to constraints such as overwhelming workloads, the lack of clear guidance and a supportive team environment, there is little room for reflecting on their discretionary power on the job. This shows that for SLBs to become reflective practitioners at COA, they must personally take the initiative to engage in reflective practices. This may not be contributing to effective use of discretionary power by all SLBs at COA. This finding aligns with the expectation based on Lipsky's (2010) argument, highlighting the crucial role of supportive and collaborative team environments in shaping SLBs' use of discretion. By confirming Lipsky's expectation in practice, this research underscores the importance of addressing the specific challenges faced by SLBs in their work environments. Paradoxically, SLBs also expressed a desire to avoid rigidity and believe that practices should be adaptable to their perception. This paradox underscores the intricate nature of their role as SLBs, specifically in navigating the fine line between exercising their personal discretion and adhering to clear

organisational guidelines. This highlights the importance of a work environment that provides both clear policies and organisational support, while simultaneously accommodating discretionary power.

When reflecting on client characteristics, all SLBs considered tailoring their approach to client characteristics as an integral aspect of their job, while aiming to treat everyone with equal respect. However, the interviews revealed that only a few SLBs critically reflected on why they treated residents with specific characteristics or demeanours differently. The lack of such reflection raises concerns about potential discrimination and favouritism. Notably, only one SLB demonstrated critical reflection by acknowledging their own biases, aligning with the concept of the reflective practitioner (Schon, 1984). This exemplifies the opportunity for other SLBs at COA to improve their professional approach in interactions with residents (Lipsky, 2010).

When reflecting on the impact of extra-organisational characteristics, SLBs demonstrate varying levels of awareness and reflection. While some SLBs may not actively consider the influence of media or politics, others recognize the broader implications of political decisions, such as resource constraints and increased chaos, which directly affect their work conditions. This underscores the crucial link between political decisions and their practical consequences on the ground, urging policymakers to consider these ramifications when formulating policies that shape refugee reception.

## **6. Conclusion and discussion**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

After analysing the discretionary power of SLBs and their reflection on this power, the main research question of this study can now be addressed: *How do SLBs of COA working in azc 's make sense of their discretionary power?* The analysis revealed the multifaceted nature of SLBs' discretionary power. How SLBs describe and reflect on this power is influenced by the various individual decision maker characteristics, organisational characteristics, client characteristics, and extra-organisational characteristics. The key insights derived from this study are as follows.

Firstly, contrary to the initial theoretical assumption based on Geuijen's (1998) and Severijns' (2019) research, which emphasised the role of formal rules in shaping discretionary space for SLBs working with migrants in the Netherlands, this study revealed that SLBs

experienced a substantial degree of autonomy in interpreting and utilising their discretionary power. While formal rules lay a foundation for the implementation of policies, COA SLBs often expressed a sense of freedom to interpret these rules and exercise their discretionary power based on their own judgement, such as acting with empathy towards clients. This reveals a close interconnection between how SLBs make sense of their discretionary power and their individual decision maker characteristics. Several factors, particularly within organisational characteristics, underlie this phenomenon, including a lack of guidance, insufficient onboarding training, and at times, ambiguity or unawareness regarding the rules. The chaotic work culture and resource constraints within COA, thus lead SLBs to use their discretionary power as a means to navigate their complex environment. In practice, this raises questions about the specificity and clarity of the formal rules at COA to effectively guide SLBs' discretionary power. Moreover, this study highlights a theoretical gap in understanding how different contextual factors can shape the role of formal rules in determining discretionary power. When examining SLBs working with migrants in the Netherlands, the literature should acknowledge how individual decision maker and organisational characteristics shape discretionary power.

Secondly, this study sheds light on the reflective practices of SLBs working in azc's, a crucial aspect emphasised in the literature for the proper exercise of discretionary power. While some SLBs demonstrated critical reflection by, for instance, questioning the extent of their own discretionary power and acknowledging the potential influence of personal biases on client interactions, not all SLBs demonstrated this capability during the interviews. Some SLBs attributed the limited reflective practices on the job to overwhelming workloads, unclear guidance, and an unsupportive team environment. Notably, these findings confirm and underscore the second expectation based on Lipsky's (2010) argument that a lack of supportive and collaborative team environments restricts the space for reflection and proper execution of discretionary power. Moreover, it extends beyond existing theoretical assumptions by highlighting the need to address work pressure and resource constraints to facilitate these moments of reflection in practice. By addressing these challenges, COA can empower SLBs to employ more reflection in their jobs.

Thirdly, the research highlights the impact of a lack of reflection on how SLBs approach their clients, as evidenced by the influence of client characteristics on their discretionary power. The study confirms the expectation based on Jensen (2019) and Goodsell (1981) that SLBs allocate more time to residents with their preferred demeanour. However, it goes beyond this expectation by emphasising the significance of reflective practices in addressing potential



biases. The findings reveal a key challenge where SLBs' self-perceived neutrality conflicts with their demonstrated preferences for certain groups, leading to actions that align with their biases. The lack of reflection on this raises concerns about potential discrimination and favouritism. Notably, one SLB demonstrated critical reflection, acknowledging their biases and prejudices that play a role in their interactions and questioned whether this was appropriate. This nuanced understanding of demeanour and the need for self-reflection adds depth to the theoretical expectation and emphasises the value of critical introspection in the decision-making process.

Lastly, this study makes a valuable contribution to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of how extra-organizational characteristics, particularly political decisions, influence SLBs' discretionary power in real-world settings. By aligning with Meier et al. (2019), it sheds light on the practical implications of these external factors, adding a deeper layer of insight to the understanding of discretion exercised by bureaucrats.

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into SLBs' discretionary power within the context of azc's. By examining the interplay of the various categories this research has revealed the intricate dynamics that shape SLBs' understanding and utilisation of their discretionary power. As SLBs play a critical role in translating policies into actions it is crucial for them to comprehensively make sense of the factors that influence their discretionary power. By recognising the significance of reflection, fostering supportive team environments, addressing work pressure and resource constraints, and acknowledging the impact of political decisions, policymakers can better support SLBs to make sense of and use their discretionary power in a responsible and professional manner. Fostering a deeper understanding of what their discretionary power entails and what it affects can ultimately lead to better decision-making and execution of their roles. These valuable findings contribute to the growing literature on discretion in bureaucratic settings, shedding light on the challenges faced by SLBs in azc's. They set the stage for further context-specific studies, delving deeper into the complexities of SLBs' discretionary power and its implications for policy implementation in public institutions.

## 6.2 Discussion and limitations

This discussion encompasses a reflection on the theory, methodological considerations and conclusions of the study. Firstly, this thesis presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the sensemaking process of SLBs by using four theoretical categories that influence SLBs' discretionary power. While these categories were distinct throughout the study, interviews revealed practical overlap and interactions among factors, blurring the lines between

the categories they were initially assigned to. Despite these challenges, maintaining separate categories ensured readability and coherence in findings and analysis. Future research could explore and refine this framework to further enhance its applicability and capture the nuanced interactions between the categories.

Another point deserving reflection is the inclusion of professionalism as a factor in the theoretical framework. Given the scope of this research, it was not feasible to fully explore and clarify the complexity of this concept. As a result, this study opted to divide professional values into two distinct categories: "adherence to rules" and "other professional values." During the interviews, it became evident that the term "professional values" was too broad for the respondents to reflect upon consistently, leading to diverse responses ranging from dress code regulations to impartiality. For future research, a more focused investigation into the impact of professional values on discretionary power could be adopted, for instance, by selecting the values upheld by COA as specific professional values for participants to reflect upon.

This study has contributed valuable insights into the understanding of discretionary power by examining its context-specific application among SLBs working with migrants in the Netherlands (Severijns, 2019; Geuijen, 1998). In doing so, it has effectively addressed a notable theoretical gap concerning how different contextual factors influence the role of formal rules in shaping discretionary power. This conclusion underscores the need for further context-specific research to explore the intricate relationship between sensemaking and the exercise of discretion by SLBs in *azc*'s, shedding light on the complex dynamics of contextual factors at play.

The research methodology in this study exhibits both strengths and limitations. A potential methodological limitation lies in the sample size, where twelve interviews conducted across five different *azc*'s may not fully represent the diversity of *programma-* and *woonbegeleiders* at COA. To enhance the research's comprehensiveness, future studies could consider larger sample sizes or conduct comparative analyses across various *azc*'s, allowing for a deeper exploration of contextual differences.

Moreover, while qualitative interviews provided rich and in-depth data, offering valuable insights into participants' thoughts and experiences regarding SLBs' discretionary power, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce potential bias. To improve our understanding of SLBs' discretionary power, future research could adopt a triangulation approach, incorporating observations to examine whether their sensemaking aligns with their practices. Additionally, including the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as asylum seekers themselves, would offer valuable insights into how SLBs' discretionary power is perceived and

experienced from the receiving end.

Finally, it is important to reflect on my positionality. As a former employee of COA, I approached this research with a critical perspective, having often questioned my own actions and the extent to which discretion should be exercised or strict adherence to rules should prevail. This introspective outlook drove me to conduct this study and explore the sensemaking of discretionary power among SLBs. However, to minimise the potential biases associated with my position, I actively sought feedback and input from other students throughout this thesis, aiming for an analysis of the data that is as objective and neutral as possible.

### 6.3 Recommendations

In light of the conclusions of this study, this chapter presents a set of recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges and improving the utilisation of discretionary power among SLBs in azc's. Ambiguity prevails among SLBs regarding the rules and objectives of discretionary power, and there is a noticeable lack of guidance from supervisors and team members on how to effectively employ this discretion. Furthermore, a culture of chaos and rigidity hinders the optimal use of discretionary power, and there is a lack of reflection on its application within the work environment. The recommendations put forth in this chapter aim to address these concerns.

Firstly, develop training programs and comprehensive guidelines that clearly outline the rules, objectives, and ethical considerations related to discretionary power for SLBs in azc's. These guidelines should be accompanied by training programs for both SLBs and managers, ensuring an organisational broad shared understanding of the proper utilisation of discretionary power. Additionally, improve the onboarding program to provide new employees, both supervisors and SLBs, with a better understanding of their roles and the extent of SLBs' discretionary power. This will alleviate pressure on existing employees and promote consistent and effective decision-making.

Secondly, create a culture of reflection and critical evaluation within COA. While there are meetings for SLBs to discuss their practices, there is a need to emphasise the importance of reflection during these sessions. Facilitating peer support and collaborative learning opportunities will further strengthen the culture of reflection, enabling SLBs to share experiences and insights. Moreover, leading by example and incorporating reflective practices into supervisory interactions will reinforce the value of reflection. Additionally, addressing excessive workloads and improving the quality of supervision will provide SLBs with the

necessary space and support to effectively engage in reflective practices regarding their discretionary power. By integrating more reflective practices into the work environment, SLBs can develop as reflective practitioners.

Lastly, it is crucial to address the experienced chaotic culture and resource constraints that COA employees are struggling with, as these factors contribute to situations where employees excessively rely on their discretion. Even though COA cannot always directly influence these complex issues, COA should continue to actively advocate for the allocation of sufficient resources to address the existing constraints faced by employees and residents. This advocacy should include pushing for improvements in facility conditions, increased staffing levels, and preventing overcrowded azc's.

By implementing these recommendations, COA can further establish a work environment that promotes responsible and ethical utilisation of discretionary power, supports continuous learning and reflection, and provides necessary guidance and support for SLBs in their roles. Ultimately, these efforts contribute to improving the quality of decision-making and policy implementation in azc's.

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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix 8.1: Interview guide in Dutch

#### Interview Guide COA medewerkers

##### **Introductie**

Doornemen van informatie en consent formulier en indien nodig vragen beantwoorden.

##### **Algemene vragen:**

O: Ik ben benieuwd naar jouw ervaringen, naar jouw visie en hoe jij tegen dingen aankijkt. Voel je vrij om met voorbeelden te komen om je antwoorden te ondersteunen.

O: Ben je ermee akkoord dat ik dit interview opneem?

O: Kun je me kort vertellen hoe je jouw rol als woonbegeleider/programmabegeleider bij het COA ziet?

O: In hoeverre kan je zelf invulling geven aan de tak                    en die jij hebt?

O: Hoe ga jij om met deze ruimte om zelf invulling te geven aan jouw werk?

O: Wat zijn volgens jou de belangrijkste onderdelen van jouw rol?

O: Op welke manier voel je ruimte om ervoor te kiezen maatwerk te bieden aan de bewoners die je begeleidt?

- O: Wat neem je dan in overweging?
- O: Kan je een voorbeeld geven waarin je hebt besloten om maatwerk te bieden?

##### **Persoonlijke kenmerken:**

O: In hoeverre kun je iets van jezelf, je eigen persoonlijkheid kwijt in het werk dat je doet?

*O: Kan je een voorbeeld geven*

O: Hoeveel ruimte voel je om jouw eigen waarden en overtuigingen te integreren in je dagelijkse taken?

- *Laat iemand uitweiden over zijn / haar waarden en overtuigingen (welke overtuigingen spelen voor jou dan een prominente/belangrijke rol?)*
- *Vraag naar voorbeeld indien relevant. Kan je hier een voorbeeld van geven?*

O: Het maatschappelijke debat rondom migratie en de opvang van vluchtelingen is complex en gevoelig, omdat het raakt aan individuele normen en waarden. Wat zijn voor jou belangrijke overwegingen bij het vormen van een standpunt over migratie en de opvang van vluchtelingen?

- O: In hoeverre spelen jouw eigen overtuigingen over vluchtelingen opvang en migratie een rol in het werk wat je doet?

O: Naast persoonlijke waarden en overtuigingen heeft iedereen ook professionele overtuigingen. Wat zijn voor jou belangrijke professionele overtuigingen?

O: Hoe kijk je naar de rol van déze overtuigingen in de uitvoering van jouw werk?

O: Hoe ga je om met het balanceren tussen je professionele rol en je persoonlijke rol in je werk?

- Ervaar je hierin weleens uitdagingen, kan je daar over vertellen?

O: In hoeverre beïnvloedt jouw professionele achtergrond/ werkervaring de manier waarop je je werk uitvoert?

O: Wat voor invloed heeft de training / opleiding die je hebt gehad om dit werk te kunnen doen op hoe je nu je werk uitvoert?

O: Hoe ga je om met het vinden van een balans tussen het uitoefenen van je eigen persoonlijke oordeel en het volgen van richtlijnen en protocollen?

O: Zijn er wel eens momenten geweest waarop je het niet helemaal eens was met je werkinstructies en gekozen hebt om de situatie op een andere wijze aan te pakken?

- o Kun je een voorbeeld geven van een situatie waarin je deze balans moest vinden en hoe je dit hebt gedaan?

O: Hoe kijk je aan tegen het afwijken van werkinstructies / regels in je werk?

### **Organisatorische kenmerken:**

O: Welke formele regels en werkvoorschriften spelen volgens jou een belangrijke rol voor jouw functie?

O: Hoe kijk je naar de invloed van deze formele regels en werkvoorschriften op de uitvoering van jouw taken?

O: Elke organisatie heeft ook ongeschreven regels en gebruiken, bijvoorbeeld over hoe je met elkaar / de bewoners omgaat, hoe problemen worden aangepakt of vragen worden afgehandeld. Wat zijn volgens jou duidelijke ongeschreven regels en gebruiken binnen het COA?

O: Welke van deze ongeschreven regels en gebruiken beïnvloeden jouw werkzaamheden?

- En hoe?

O: Zijn er bepaalde structurele belemmeringen of beperkingen binnen de organisatie die jouw moeilijker maken?

O: Hoe kijk je naar de invloed van deze organisatorische beperkingen op het uitvoeren van je werk?

O: Hoeverre beïnvloeden jouw collega's de manier waarop jij jouw taken uitvoert?

- Zo ja: Op welke manier ondersteunen of belemmeren uw collega's jou bij het nemen van beslissingen?

O: Hoe ervaar je de samenwerking en communicatie met jouw leidinggevende tijdens je werk?

O: Hoe kijk je naar zijn/haar invloed op jouw werkzaamheden?

O: In hoeverre ervaar je autonomie/zelfstandigheid bij het nemen van beslissingen?

O: Overleg je vaak met anderen voor je een beslissing neemt?

### **Kenmerken van cliënten:**

O: In hoeverre heb je het gevoel / idee dat bepaalde eigenschappen van bewoners jouw werk zouden kunnen beïnvloeden?

- *Indien onduidelijk ondersteunende toelichting:* Hierbij kan je denken aan bijvoorbeeld leeftijd, nationaliteit, familiesamenstelling of kwetsbaarheid
- *Indien relevant:* Op welke manier beïnvloeden deze eigenschappen jouw interactie/contact met de bewoners? Kan je me voorbeelden geven?

O: In hoeverre heb je het gevoel / idee dat het gedrag van de bewoner jouw werk kan beïnvloeden?

- *Indien relevant:* Op welke manier beïnvloedt hun gedrag jouw benadering en reactie? *Voorbeelden?*

### **Extra organisatorische factoren:**

O: Hoe kijkt je naar de invloed van externe factoren, zoals bijvoorbeeld de media of de politiek op jouw dagelijkse werkzaamheden?

- *Indien relevant:* In hoeverre heeft de politieke context invloed op de beslissingen die je neemt tijdens je dagelijkse werk? Hoe dan?
  - o Voorbeelden!
- O: In hoeverre beïnvloedt de berichtgeving in de media over jouw werkgebied de manier waarop je jouw taken uitvoert?

O: Hoe kijk je naar de invloed van andere dienstverleners / organisaties, zoals bijvoorbeeld de IND, DT&V of de gemeente op de uitvoering van jouw werk?

O: Iedere situatie is anders. Hoe kijk je naar de invloed van situationele factoren, (avonddienst, dagdienst, het weer etc.) op jouw werk?

- Zijn er nog andere situationele factoren die jouw werk beïnvloeden?

### **Afsluiting**

O: We zijn nu bij de afsluiting van het interview aangekomen. Zijn er nog factoren die jouw werk beïnvloeden die we niet besproken hebben, maar voor jou wel van belang zijn?

Voor mij is het heel inzichtvol geweest. Dan ben ik tot slot benieuwd heeft dit interview jou nog nieuwe inzichten opgeleverd?

## Appendix 8.2: Information and consent form

### Informatieblad

#### **Introductie**

Ik ben Olga van den Berg en ik ben een master student aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Ik wil onderzoeken hoe ambtenaren die werken met vluchtelingen en asielzoekers op opvanglocaties hun werk ervaren, vandaar dat wij dit interview houden. Indien u op de hoogte wilt worden gehouden van mijn onderzoek kunt u mij mailen op [olgavandenber98@gmail.com](mailto:olgavandenber98@gmail.com) of mij bellen op +31642292050.

#### **Data collectie**

De methode van datacollectie voor dit onderzoek is een interview. Ik zal beginnen met een paar algemene vragen over hoe u betekenis geeft aan uw werk. Daarna zal ik u vragen over sommige onderwerpen nog wat meer uit te weiden. Het interview duurt tussen de 45-60 minuten. Als u tussendoor behoefte hebt aan pauze kunt u dat aangeven. De interviews zullen worden opgenomen op een spraakrecorder. Ik zal dit interview daarna spoedig transcriberen en anonimiseren.

#### **Geen mogelijke risico's**

Er zijn geen fysieke, juridische of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. Het is niet verplicht om alle vragen te beantwoorden. Uw deelname is vrijwillig en u kunt op elk moment stoppen.

#### **Vertrouwelijkheid & data bescherming**

De verzamelde gegevens zullen worden gebruikt voor mijn analyse en er zullen geen vertrouwelijke informatie of persoonlijke gegevens worden opgenomen in de onderzoeksresultaten. De data worden opgeslagen op een beveiligde locatie en zullen ten minste 7 jaar worden bewaard.

#### **Data delen**

Ik zal de geanonimiseerde en getranscribeerde interviews delen met dr. M.A.C. van Ostaijen voor het doel van het schrijven van mijn masterthesis, die verplicht is voor het afronden van mijn studie aan de Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Erasmus Universiteit.

#### **Vrijwillige deelname**

Uw deelname is vrijwillig en u kunt op elk moment stoppen. Wanneer u deelneemt aan het onderzoek, heeft u het recht om meer informatie op te vragen over de gegevensverzameling en -analyse, of om toestemming in te trekken en te vragen om verwijdering van de gegevens voordat de dataset geanonimiseerd wordt of het manuscript wordt ingediend voor publicatie. U kunt uw rechten uitoefenen door contact op te nemen met Olga van den Berg. Indien u klachten heeft over de data verzameling, kunt u M.A.C. van Ostaijen berichten.

## Consent formulier

Bij ondertekening van dit toestemmingsformulier bevestig ik het volgende:

- Ik ben op de hoogte gebracht van het doel van het onderzoek, de gegevensverzameling en -opslag zoals uiteengezet in de informatiebrochure;
- Ik heb de informatiebrochure gelezen of deze is aan mij voorgelezen;
- Ik heb de gelegenheid gehad om vragen te stellen over de studie en deze zijn voldoende beantwoord;
- Ik stem vrijwillig in met deelname aan dit onderzoek;
- Ik begrijp dat de informatie vertrouwelijk zal worden behandeld;
- Ik begrijp dat ik op elk moment kan stoppen met deelname of weiger vragen te beantwoorden zonder enige gevolgen;
- Ik begrijp dat ik mijn toestemming kan intrekken voordat de dataset wordt ingediend ter goedkeuring.

Verder geef ik toestemming om:

	Ja	Nee
Ik geef toestemming om mijn interview op te nemen		
Ik geef toestemming om citaten uit mijn interview te gebruiken.		

Naam van de respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

Datum: \_\_\_\_\_

Handtekening: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_