Erasmus University Rotterdam

Discussing Protection in the Region: Between Political Mantra and Reality

A comparative discourse analysis of legitimation strategies among NGOs and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MSc Thesis

1

Aldith Pasveer (668193)
MSc Public Administration: Governance of Migration and Diversity
August 11, 2023
12000 words
Supervisor: Dr. M. A. C. van Ostaijen
Second reader: Dr. A. Pisarevskaya

Abstract[1]

In recent years, protection in the region policies have become a popular strategy among European governments. In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has financed NGOs and other intermediaries with the aim of 'improving prospects for refugees in the regions of origin'. Scholars have questioned the bundling of humanitarianism, development, and migration control in such policies, as well as the position of NGOs in externalisation practices. A comparative discourse analysis was done to study the discourses that characterise policies on protection in the region, and the ways in which NGOs and the Dutch MFA discursively legitimate their involvement. Interviews and document analysis reveals the contested nature of *what* protection in the region entails, and *why* it is done. While both NGOs and the MFA legitimise protection in the region efforts within a humanitarian and human rights-oriented discourse, the Dutch government simultaneously presents their policy within a discourse on migration management. In addition to literature that conceptualises such discourses as 'competing and contrasting', this thesis shows how these discourses can be co-constitutive of each other in the context of externalisation. These findings, as well as categorisations of 'vulnerable' and 'irregular' migrants, show how language can have profound consequences for international migration governance.

Keywords Discursive legitimacy, Comparative discourse analysis, Migration, Protection in the region.

[1] *Figure 1.* Example of what protection in the region could mean in practice, as explained by an NGO employee participating in this research. The drawing is made by Vera and Nour, who were part of a trauma healing session for refugee, IDPs, and host community children. Nour started her drawing in Lebanon, and Vera finished it in Sweden.

Table of contents

List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CAM	Comprehensive Agenda on Migration
FTDC	Policy Note Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
GP	Policy Note Investing in Global Prospects
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ToC	Theory of Change on Migration and Development
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

List of tables and figures

1. Introduction

Protection in the region policies have become a popular strategy among European governments, including the Netherlands (Betts & Milner, 2007; Hilhorst, Rijpma, Vezolli, Meyer, & van Ostaijen, 2021; Vezzoli, Hilhorst, Meyer, & Rijpma, 2022). While the initiatives differ per country, the common aim is to strengthen refugee protection capacity in 'regions of origin' and work on long-term solutions for protracted displacement via the humanitarian-development nexus. The Dutch case, a policy called 'Improving prospects for refugees in the regions of origin', is particularly interesting because of its approach to policy implementation in the Syria region and the Horn of Africa through 'intermediaries' (Betts & Milner, 2007). In focussing on refugee protection, employment, and education, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is collaborating with international partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the execution of their policy aims (Kaag, 2020). Since the 1990s, the implementation of European migration policies has been shifted 'up, down, and out' (Lavenex, 2006; Lavenex, 2016) and can be characterised as governing through networks (Kooiman, 2000; Kjaer, 2004). A wide range of external actors including national and transnational NGOs are increasingly involved in this outsourcing (Vandevoort, 2017, p. 1909). Werker & Ahmed (2008) define NGOs as "private organisations characterised primarily by humanitarian or cooperative, rather than commercial, objectives … that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development in developing countries" (p. 74).

Betts and Milner (2007) characterise the Dutch policy as part of a broader range of bilateral and multilateral strategies by EU states that are based on the 'externalisation of refugee protection', which is explained as "strengthening protection capacity 'in regions of origin' while reinforcing methods of exclusion and deterrence to reduce irregular migration to the EU" (p. 2). Indeed, scholars have questioned the bundling of multiple objectives that European governments aim to achieve with protection in the region[2] policies: refugee protection, development, and migration control (Betts & Milner, 2007; Hilhorst et al., 2021; Vezzoli et al., 2022). The concern is that the "focus on managing irregular migration and return [may be at] the expense of protecting refugees" (Vezzoli et al., 2022, p. 4). Furthermore, the notion that the strengthening of protection capacity in 'regions of origin' would reduce the number of asylum

[2] In Dutch, protection in the region is referred to as 'opvang in de regio', which translates to 'reception in the region'. Scholars have used these terms interchangeably. Protection in the region does not involve the method of 'external processing', with which it is often conflated in political discourse (Vezzoli et al., 2022).

seekers arriving in Europe has been heavily criticised (Betts & Milner, 2007, p. 1). The narrative that progress in development will reduce migration has largely been present among policymakers, despite literature on the migration-development nexus that disregards this notion (Bakewell, 2008; Geiger & Pécoud, 2013; De Haas, 2019; Raghuram, 2009). The recent EU-Tunisia migration deal, as well as current debates on migration and protection in the region, show the societal urgence of research on these narratives (Grütters, 2023; NOS, 2023).

The bundling of these objectives may put development and humanitarian NGOs implementing protection in the region policy in an ambivalent position, considering that they primarily depart from a humanitarian narrative that prioritises migrants' wellbeing (Cuttitta, 2019; Phillips, 2023; Szent-Ivanyi, 2021; Vandevoordt, 2017). Research has shown that although the EU's agenda to manage migration is often not in line with the moral rhetoric of NGOs implementing this agenda, they continue to be involved due to financial and organisational interests (Szent-Ivanyi, 2021). Although scholars have researched the ambivalent position that NGOs involved in migration policies find themselves in (Bird & Schmid, 2021; Cuttitta, 2019; Phillips, 2023; Szent-Ivanyi, 2021; Vandevoordt, 2017), the way they position themselves in the debate on protection in the region has been understudied. Vezzoli et al. (2022) point to the fact that NGOs involved in Dutch policy would in fact be "aware of the instrumentalization of their programmes for migration politics", however they also see their involvement as a means to achieve 'good' results for the development of the regions that they work in (p. 11). In other words, *what* protection in the region entails, and *why* it is done, may be a fundamentally contested question among different stakeholders.

This thesis therefore aims to problematise the position of NGOs that receive funding from the Dutch MFA for the implementation of protection in the region efforts by studying how their discourses on migration governance converge or diverge with the MFA's discourse (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). This adds to literature on migration policy discourse that has largely focussed on governmental actors (Casaglia & Pacciardi, 2022; Crane, 2019; Krotký, 2022; Rojo & Van Dijk 1997; Walters, 2017), without making a comparison with non-governmental actors in a governance network. This thesis uses comparative discourse analysis to unravel the meanings that people attribute to the notion of 'protection in the region' and the actions that are associated with it. To do so, it uses the theoretical lens of two discourses on migration governance: a management-oriented discourse on the one hand, and a human rights-oriented, humanitarian discourse on the other (Androvičová, 2017; Wise, 2018). Discourse analysis is not only used as a tool to understand the linguistic representation of protection in the region. It is also a means to understand how language constructs a worldview that legitimises

certain actions, policies, and interactions (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Joutsenvirta, 2011). To understand how regional refugee protection is discursively legitimised, this thesis combines migration discourses with the framework on discursive legitimation strategies by Van Leeuwen (2007). This thesis is therefore situated within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) literature, which has addressed how language is used to legitimise certain actions and power-relations in discursively contested areas such as migration governance (Joutsenvirta, 2011; Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Van Ostaijen, 2019).

Hence, the following research question is posed: '*Which discourses characterise policies on protection in the region and how do NGOs and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs discursively legitimate their involvement?'* To formulate an answer, the following sub questions are posed:

1. What is the discourse that NGOs and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs produce around migration?
2. How do NGOs and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs discursively legitimise their involvement in the policy?

The structure of this thesis guides the reader through the theoretical foundation, which operationalises how migration discourses can be used to discursively legitimise actions. The methodology chapter further discusses the discursive approach that this research takes. After explaining the contextual background of this thesis, the findings and analysis are discussed. Analysis reveals the presence of two different discourses on migration governance, and a difference in how the MFA and NGOs legitimate protection in the region efforts.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter first reviews the discourses on migration governance that the existing literature has exposed. This thesis however aims to understand not only *which* discourses are present among the MFA and NGOs, but also *how* these are legitimated. For this purpose, the concept of discursive legitimation is introduced. Based on the conceptualisation of two ideal types of migration discourses and Van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimation strategies, this theoretical framework aims to provide a lens to study the language that characterises protection in the region policy.

2.1. Discourses on the governance of migration

This thesis situates itself in the study of discourse, which can be defined as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena" (Hajer, 1993, p. 45). In other words, discourses are "linguistically mediated representations of the world" (Fairclough, 2003, as cited in Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 2). They "provide the "frames" with which people make sense of issues" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 4). Through discourse, people create knowledge, situations, and social relations (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 92). Discourses provide the recipes, guidelines, and maps for people to justify certain programmes and policies and thereby guide political action (Schmidt, 2008, p. 306; Van Ostaijen, 2019, p. 3). This is especially important for studying public policy, because the way in which a phenomenon is discursively represented has consequences for how people answer political questions such as 'what can and should be done?' (Hajer, 2002; Hajer, 1993, p. 45). In the current debate on global migration governance, scholars have largely distinguished two competing positions or discourses that answer such political questions in a fundamentally different way (Androvičová, 2017; Wise, 2018). These are "a dominant policy perspective centred on migration management versus an alternative view referred to as a human rights comprehensive approach" (Wise, 2018, p. 747).

2.1.1. Management-oriented discourse on migration governance

The discourse on migration management generally "reflects a sense of control, design, and planning, allowing wealthy nations to selectively include certain migrants in accordance with demographic and economic conditions while maintaining the "integrity" and force of their borders" (Crane 2019, p. 22). Since the 'refugee crisis' of 2015, scholars have observed that European migration policy is increasingly driven by a securitised discourse (Krotký, 2022). The argument for migration management stems from a security discourse that frames South-North migrants as a threat to, and fundamentally irreconcilable with, the host country (Dekker & Scholten, 2017, p. 205; Huysmans, 2000). Irregular migration has been framed in different ways, such as a pressure on welfare provisions and labour markets, and the instigation of criminal networks for human smuggling (Boswell, 2007, p. 594; Dekker & Scholten, 2017, p. 205). Securitised language especially emphasises a disproportionate number of 'illegal' migrants entering the EU through metaphors such as the 'invasion' or 'flood' of asylum-seekers or 'border crossers' (Boswell, 2007, p. 594; Crepaz, 2022, p. 1449; Huysmans, 2000, p. 769). This threat has legitimised states to use the language of 'combat' against irregular migration (Jørgensen, 2012, p. 50). Such constructions of irregular migration all emphasise exclusion and migration management as the solution (Boswell, 2007, p. 595; Walters, 2010, p. 73). Policies

that manage international migration are considered an inevitable response to deal with the increase of ('illegal') immigrants and asylum-seekers (Huysmans, 2000, p. 757). Jørgensen (2012) furthermore argues that the category of 'irregular migration' is used to frame such migrants as 'undeserving', thereby referring to the construction of target groups by Schneider & Ingram (1993) (p. 51). States use this language to prevent 'unwanted' migration, in contrast to other types of migration that are facilitated (Collyer, 2019). Particularly those who can demonstrate their integration have been defined as 'deserving' migrants (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014, p. 426). The growing preference to restrict migration has legitimised migration control measures (Huysmans, 2000, p. 753). Such measures include increased border control, restrictive visa policies, detention and deportation, and assisted voluntary return to 'safe third countries' (Boswell, 2007, p. 594).

Furthermore, proponents of migration management advocate for the 'externalisation' of migration control as a strategy to move European borders further away from its territory (Collyer, 2019, p. 170). First, this approach stresses the need for migration cooperation with origin and transit countries, so that potential migrants can be targeted beyond European territory (Collyer, 2019, p. 171; Wise, 2018, p. 751). Second, (economic) development is considered a strategy to control migratory flows by tackling 'root causes of migration' (Wise, 2018). This rhetoric frames managing international migration as a 'triple-win' for countries of origin, countries of destination, migrants, and their families, because it is viewed as a strategy to achieve security and development (Crane, 2019, p. 32; Collyer, 2019; Geiger & Pécoud, 2013, p. 373; Wise, 2018, p. 752). The idea behind deploying Official Development Assistance (ODA) is that migration is caused by underdevelopment (Bakewell, 2008; Collyer, 2019, p. 171). Irregular migration is considered a phenomenon that originates from places outside the country of destination (Wise, 2018, p. 752). Discussions about addressing the 'root causes of migration' portray development as a preventive measure to reduce levels of out-migration towards urban areas or industrialised countries (Bakewell, 2008; Collyer, 2019, p. 171; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017, p. 61). The idea is that development enables people to stay 'at home' (Bakewell, 2008). Beside ODA, information campaigns that promote 'safe', legal migration opportunities have been an extra-territorial measure to counter potential migrants' decision to leave (Collyer, 2019). In sum, state interest is central to a management-oriented discourse on migration governance.

Scholars have argued that this management-oriented discourse on migration governance is prevalent among European politicians and policymakers (Bakewell, 2008; Collyer, 2019; Geiger & Pécoud, 2013, p. 370; Raghuram, 2009; Wise, 2018). However, according to

Bakewell (2008) NGOs may produce a more restrictive discourse as well by framing migration as a negative phenomenon causing multiple problems in 'developing regions'. In line with their donors, NGOs use the rhetoric that development would reduce migration (p. 1348). Hence, migration management discourse is mostly present in state discourse, but it can also be produced by civil society actors.

2.1.2. Human rights-oriented discourse on migration governance

Human rights discourse on migration is often described in the literature as a counter-hegemonic discourse (Androvičová, 2017; Crepaz, 2002; Piper & Rother, 2012; Wise, 2018). Androvičová (2017) states that this discourse is less commonly researched, because many discourse analysts have adopted a critical perspective on securitised discourse that directly stems from the defence of human rights (p. 199). The literature largely describes human rights-oriented discourse as articulated by civil society, which encompasses a large group of non-state actors and social movements, among which humanitarian and development NGOs (Androvičová, 2017; Crepaz, 2002; Piper & Rother 2012; Wise, 2018). For example, Crepaz (2002) describes how pro-refugee actors have produced a "non-securitised humanitarian and empowerment-driven discourse on refugees" in response to the securitisation of migration during the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 (p. 1456). Human rights discourse is human-centred and prioritises the values of human dignity, universality, morality, and ethics (Androvičová, 2017, p. 201). It argues for the central place of human rights in migration governance (Piper & Rother, 2012, p. 1737). Some advocates have encouraged free circulation regimes by putting forward the idea of a borderless world, thereby emphasising the freedom to migrate and the right of all migrants to become citizens (Androvičová, 2017, p. 201; Wise, 2018, p. 752). Human rights are considered essential for supporting migrants and enabling them to self-develop (Piper & Rother, 2012, p. 1737; Wise, 2018, p. 752). In contrast to management discourse that positions itself in a national security doctrine, the counter-hegemonic discourse argues from a human security framework that calls for solidarity (Wise, 2018, p. 752).

A variant of human rights discourse is humanitarian discourse, which focuses on violations of human rights (Androvičová, 2017, p. 207). Humanitarian discourse "promotes the idea of active help especially to the most vulnerable groups of migrants – refugees, displaced persons, unaccompanied minors, and illegal migrants whose (often basic) human rights have been violated" (Androvičová, 2017, p. 206). It "focuses on fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, personal freedom, security, freedom of expression, belief" (Androvičová, 2017, p. 212). Migrants are framed as victims in need of compassion and protection (Dekker &

Scholten, 2017, p. 205; Panebianco, 2022). Humanitarian discourse is characterised by a hierarchy of deservingness in which the notion of 'vulnerability' decides who is most deserving of care (Fassin, 2012; Sözer, 2019, p. 4; Welfens & Bonjour, 2021). The focus is on refugees, but the discourse also includes those on the move due to war, hunger, poverty, or other hardships (Androvičová, 2017, p. 207). Classic humanitarian discourse is grounded in the idea that humanitarian aid is guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence (Lie, 2020, p. 2). In recent years, the classic humanitarian discourse of principled action has changed to a 'resilience humanitarianism' discourse (Vezzoli et al., 2022). This resilience paradigm foregrounds the idea that communities are able to recover from disaster. Refugees are not constructed as people who remain passive recipients of aid, but as people who strive to provide their own living (Crepaz, 2002, p. 1456). In this sense, the resilience paradigm connects humanitarian and development approaches by building local response capacities to deal with disaster (Vezzoli et al., 2022). This has led to a change in the framing of crisis-affected populations and aid responses by international actors. This discourse stresses the resilience of people, communities, and societies (Vezzoli et al., 2022).

Although scholarship largely distinguishes between humanitarian and securitised discourse, some nuance shows that they may overlap. Crane (2019) for example argues that discourses of development and humanitarianism are central to the EU's justification for the externalisation of migration management. This is referred to as the 'paradox of externalisation', which is summarised as "keep them out, but treat them well" (p. 34). In similar vein, Aradau (2004) argues that the categorisation of migrants as 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' may coincide with categorising them as 'a risk' in bordering practices. Here, the 'politics of pity' and the 'politics of risk' become intertwined as governments aim to care for certain populations while at the same time controlling their movement (Aradau, 2004; Welfens & Bonjour, 2021). This way, restrictionist policies may use the vulnerability frame to categorise the good candidate for asylum as those who would not have preferred to migrate but who have come due to an exceptional state of vulnerability (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014, p. 426). This shows that states may also produce human rights-discourse.

The two types of discourses that have been outlined above show that different arguments can be put forward to legitimise protection in the region policy. In this thesis they are operationalised as 'ideal types' to compare the discourses of the MFA and NGOs. To study not only *that*, but also *how* their claims on reality are made, the concept of discursive legitimation will now be introduced.

2.2. A framework for studying discursive legitimation

Legitimation is understood as "the creation of a sense of understandable, necessary or acceptable actions in a specific setting" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 3; Van Ostaijen, 2019, p. 5). It provides the answer to questions of 'why should we do this?' and 'why should we do this in this way?' (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 94). According to Vaara & Tienari (2008), "the starting point for any analysis of legitimation is the notion that senses of legitimacy are created in relation to specific discourses" (p. 4). Theoretically, acts of legitimation should always be regarded in relation to discursive characteristics, because "acts of legitimation are virtually always discursive" (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997, p. 527). The concept of 'discursive legitimation' is therefore central to this thesis. It combines the *institutional discourse* that actors produce around certain ideas, concepts, and categorisations, with the *institutional actions* that they are involved in (Van Ostaijen, 2019, p. 5). Discursive legitimation is defined as "the discursive technique that justifies social activity and involves providing 'good reasons, grounds, or acceptable motivations for past or present action" (Van Ostaijen, 2019, p. 5). Moreover, "discursive delegitimation establishes a sense of negative, morally reprehensible, or otherwise unacceptable notions to dejustify actions (Van Ostaijen, 2019, p. 5).

A particular strand within discourse analysis is CDA, which critically assesses discourses around controversial societal issues and the role of discourse in power relations (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 3). This line of thinking characterises discursive legitimation as a socio-political act to persuade an audience of the advantage of a certain policy or institutional action. In this persuasive discourse, morally controversial actions are ignored or reinterpreted as 'acceptable' (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997, p. 528). CDA aims to "understand the inherent political nature of discursive legitimation: it is through subtle textual strategies that particular interests and voices are reproduced and others silenced" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 12). CDA scholars have studied such legitimation strategies, meaning the specific ways in which legitimising discourse is produced (Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Van Ostaijen, 2019; Joutsenvirta, 2011; Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). This thesis builds upon a "framework for analysing the language of legitimation" by Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 91). This framework distinguishes four categories of legitimation: authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation and mythopoesis. These strategies show how the structure of language can legitimise, or delegitimise, certain actions. Although the strategies can be identified independently, they are often intertwined: "multiple legitimation is often the most effective form of legitimation" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 6). The framework will be used to critically analyse how legitimacy is constructed in discourse (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92).

2.2.1. Moral legitimation

Moral evaluation is legitimation that is based on moral values (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 97-99). This means that "specific value systems provide moral basis for legitimation" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 6). Although moral values are often not made explicit, they can be recognised by adjectives such as 'good', 'bad', 'normal' and 'useful'. Three forms of moral legitimation are distinguished. First, through *naturalisation*, actions are legitimated by normalising them or considering them 'healthy' or 'natural'. Normalisation could be identified in the portrayal of a situation as inevitable, as the best of bad alternatives (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 11). Second, *abstraction* entails the indication of the moral qualities of a certain practice, such as cooperation, independence, or commitment. Third, the comparison of actions with other actions that are associated with positive values are identified as *analogies*.

2.2.2. Rational legitimation

Rational legitimation refers to the "utility of specific actions based on knowledge claims that are accepted in a given context as relevant" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 6). First, in the case of *instrumental legitimation*, the speaker refers to the goals, uses and effects of practices (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 100-103). A practice is constituted a means to achieve another end: 'I do x to have y'. Actions are legitimised because they are considered purposeful or effective and have the potential to serve a specific purpose: they 'facilitate', 'promote', 'help', 'allow', etcetera. A specific form is 'financial rationalisation' (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 9). The purpose that is legitimised can be 'moralised' by referring to the moral qualities of the purpose, for example if an action is undertaken to facilitate a 'good' end-goal. Second, *theoretical legitimation* refers to the justification of something based on whether it represents a 'truth', for example by using scientific arguments (Van Leeuwen, 2007). References to "reliable sources such as authoritative institutions, insisting that facts can be verified, the use of common sense, general knowledge and inference, personal integrity and reliability" are strategies that may enhance the level of 'truthfulness' in discourse (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997, p. 561).

2.2.3. Authority legitimation

A third form of discursive legitimation is "reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 6). Van Leeuwen (2007) distinguishes between *personal authority* and *impersonal authority* (pp. 94-96). First, personal authority can be vested in a person because of their role in an

institution, or because of their expertise, experience, or wisdom. Opinion leaders may be used to legitimate or delegitimate certain behaviour or beliefs. Second, impersonal sources of authority are laws, rules, and regulations. The use of nouns such as 'policy', 'rule', and 'obligatory' are indictors of authority legitimation. Tradition and conformity can legitimise acts by referring to what people 'have always done' or do 'what everybody else does' (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 96).

2.2.4. Mythopoeic legitimation

Finally, "legitimation can be achieved through storytelling" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 105). This type entails "legitimation conveyed through narratives, involving the telling of stories about what good or bad may happen when one does (not do) what is expected" (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997, p. 533). These stories may relate to issues of the past or future (Van Ostaijen, 2019, p. 8). Van Leeuwen (2007) distinguishes between moral and cautionary tales. *Moral tales* tell rewarding stories about what positive situations may result (or have resulted) from certain actions. In contrast, *cautionary tales* tell stories about what negative situations may happen if social norms are not followed.

2.3. Expectations of the study

Considering that scholars characterise human rights- and humanitarian discourse on migration as a counter-hegemonic discourse by civil society organisations, it is expected that NGOs will mainly legitimise their regional refugee protection efforts through this discourse. Central to this type of justification are migrants' rights, their vulnerability and resilience. NGOs may however follow their donor's narratives, leading to the framing of migration as a 'problem' to be solved through development (Bakewell, 2008). In contrast, it is expected that the MFA will produce a more management-oriented discourse, considering that state discourses are generally characterised as securitised. In this line of reasoning, protection in the region would be characterised as a way to 'manage' irregular migration towards Europe. However, discourses on human rights, humanitarianism and development have also been used by European governments to legitimise migration management policies. This may lead to a justification in which Dutch interests and migrants' interests are both represented. Finally, it is expected that both NGOs and the MFA will use multiple legitimation strategies.

3. Research design and methodology

This chapter discusses the research design and methodological choices for the current comparative research design. The methods for data collection and analysis will be outlined, including limitations and ethical considerations. Finally, the operationalisation of this thesis' main theoretical concepts is presented.

3.1. Case selection and sample

This thesis used a comparative research design in which the NGO discourse was compared with the MFA discourse. For this purpose, data from multiple NGOs were considered as a single unit of observation, next to the MFA as a second unit of observation (Babbie, 2016, p. 98). The selection criteria for the NGOs included that a) the organisation received funding from the MFA's Migration and Development grants framework (see chapter 4) and b) that the organisation had an office in the Netherlands. After consultation with the MFA, three international NGOs were selected for this research. These have been anonymised due to the sensitive contexts that they work in. This consultation formed the starting point for a snowball sampling strategy to reach respondents. Employees working at both Dutch main offices and regional offices were selected. This was done to have a more complete understanding of how the organisation understood its relationship with the Dutch policy on protection in the region, as well as how the programmes were understood and implemented. Most participants were directly involved in the programmes that are financed by the MFA.

3.2. Data collection

Desk research and open interviews served as data sources. For the desk research, a total of 13 documents were collected. Participants from NGOs shared a total of 8 documents that explained the content, the motivation, and the results of the programmes they had received funding for. The MFA was asked to share policy documents from 2018 onwards. This is when the Migration & Development grants framework was published, and the current NGOs became involved in their policy. This resulted in the collection of 5 policy documents (see chapter 4) which explain and form the basis of their policy.

Furthermore, a total of 9 open interviews have been collected in May and June of 2023, with participants in the Netherlands, Turkey, Lebanon, Uganda, and the DRC. Interviewing was deemed a suitable method, as it gives insight into participants' intentions and comprehensions concerning protection in the region and their position in it (Cruickshank, 2012, p. 41). Interviewing a range of actors with different roles, experiences and perspectives allowed for collecting data on how organisations may enact, struggle with, resist and evaluate migration

policy. Whereas textual or visual data is more commonly used for discourse analysis, interviews were particularly of value for obtaining information regarding the underlying values of the organisations' work (Cruickshank, 2012, p. 42). A possible risk of interviewing was that the researcher may not capture the discourse in its 'purest form'. Considering that language is not neutral, discourse is created also by actively asking questions (Cruickshank, 2012, p. 43). To mitigate this risk, open interviews were held in which participants were encouraged to speak freely about their organisation's work. The questions contained as little concepts as necessary, so that participants would mostly 'steer' the discourse themselves. For this purpose, the interview questions, which can be found in Appendix 8.1, were mostly used as a topic-list. Another limitation was the difficulty of capturing an 'organisational discourse' through only 2-4 interviews per organisation. Interviews were conducted in person when possible, and online with participants living abroad. Online interviews were held using Microsoft Teams software. Before the interviews took place, participants were informed about the research through an information sheet, where they signed their consent. The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder. An ethical consideration was that NGOs participating in this research could be put in a position where conflict of interest with their donor, the MFA, might take place.

3.3. Data analysis

Considering that this thesis is particularly interested in understanding how actors discursively legitimise their actions, discourse analysis was chosen as the most suitable method to analyse the data. Discourse analysis is a tool for understanding how social practices relate to their linguistic representations (Hajer, 1993, p. 45). Data was transcribed and anonymised, after which ATLAS.ti software was used for qualitative data analysis. An abductive type of data analysis enabled the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of the data in relation to theory, as well as allowing room for the emergence of new patterns that were not expected beforehand (Babbie, 2016, p. 330). Inductively found codes are presented in Appendix 8.2. Multiple rounds of coding were done until saturation was reached.

3.4 Operationalisation

The following tables show the operationalisation of a human rights-oriented migration discourse (Table 1) and a management-oriented migration discourse (Table 2) as theorised in Chapter 2. Considering that the same theoretical concepts and dimensions are used for the operationalisation of both discourses, conceptual definitions are presented only in Table 1.

Table 1

Operationalisation of human rights-oriented migration discourse

Theoretical concept and definition	**Dimension and definition**	**Indicator**
Moral legitimation Specific value systems that provide a moral basis for legitimation (Van Leeuwen, 2007; Van Ostaijen, 2019)	Normalisation Normalising actions by considering them 'healthy', 'natural', or 'inevitable' (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to human-interest as **central** to actions (Dekker & Scholten, 2017)
		References to migration as a **natural** phenomenon intrinsic to broader processes of development (De Haas, 2019)
		References to cultural diversity as a **natural** phenomenon (Androvičová, 2017)
	Abstraction Indicating the moral qualities of an action, such as cooperation, independence, commitment (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to **values** of solidarity, human security, human dignity, universality, morality, and ethics (Androvičová, 2017)
		References to humanitarian **principles** of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence (Lie, 2020)
	Analogies Comparing actions with other actions that are associated with positive or negative values (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to migrants as vulnerable people or victims who require **compassion** and **protection** (Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Panebianco, 2022)
		References to migrants as actively striving for **human development**, for example obtaining work to provide for themselves (Crepaz, 2002)
Rational legitimation Utility of specific actions based on knowledge claims that are accepted as relevant (Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Van Ostaijen, 2019)	Instrumental legitimation Justification by reference to goals, strategies, and effects of practices (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to the **promotion** of human development, empowerment, or self-reliance of migrants (Piper & Rother, 2012; Wise, 2018)
		References to the **provision** of active help to vulnerable groups of migrants (Androvičová, 2017)
		References to the **facilitation** of migrants' active contribution to the receiving society (Androvičová, 2017)
		References to efforts that **protect** migrants' (human) rights (Androvičová, 2017)
		References to **building** local response capacities to deal with disaster (Vezzoli et al., 2022)

	Theoretical legitimation Justification based on 'truth' claims (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to the '**truth claim**' of the resilience of people, communities, or societies to recover from disaster (Vezzoli et al., 2022)
Authority legitimation Legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is invested (Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Van Leeuwen, 2007)	Impersonal authority Authority of laws, rules, and regulations (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to Human Rights **law** (Piper & Rother, 2012)
		References to **policy guidelines** for migrant protection or empowerment
	Personal authority Authority vested in a person because of their status or role in a particular institution (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to external authorities' protection, humanitarian, or development efforts that serve as **examples** for own actions
		References to external authorities' migration management efforts that serve as **counterexamples** for own actions (Androvičová, 2017)
Mythopoeic legitimation Legitimation conveyed through narratives that relate to past or future, involving the telling of stories about what good or bad may happen when one does (not) do what is expected (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997; Van Leeuwen, 2007; Van Ostaijen, 2019)	Moral tales Stories about what positive situations may result (or have resulted) from certain actions (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to improving circumstances for migrants and strengthening of their rights (Androvičová, 2017)
		References to positive effects of migration for receiving countries such as cultural diversity (Androvičová, 2017)
	Cautionary tales Stories about what negative situations may happen if social norms are not followed (Van Leeuwen, 2007)	References to the **violation** of human rights (Androvičová, 2017)

Table 2

Operationalisation of management-oriented migration discourse

Theoretical concept	**Dimension**	**Indicator**
Moral legitimation	Normalisation	References to (irregular) migration as a **problem** or **threat** that needs to be solved, managed, or influenced (Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Walters, 2010)
		References to managing migration as a **beneficial** action or solution (Wise, 2018)

		References to the **necessity** or **inevitability** of migration management (Huysmans, 2000)
	Abstraction	References to the **protection** or **security** of the receiving country (Boswell, 2007; Dekker & Scholten, 2017)
		References to migration **cooperation** with third states (Wise, 2018)
	Analogies	References to the **combat** against **criminal** practices smuggling and trafficking (Boswell, 2007)
		References to irregular migration as **unsafe** to discourage migration to Europe (Collyer, 2019)
Rational legitimation	Instrumental legitimation	References to **prevention** of onward, irregular migration (Collyer, 2019)
		References to the goal of **countering** potential migrants' decision to leave (Collyer, 2019)
		References to practices that **tackle** the root causes of migration as a preventive measure to **reduce** migration to Europe (Collyer, 2019; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017)
		References to the **facilitation** of return of migrants to their countries of origin (Boswell, 2007)
		References to return as **allowing** migrants to use their skills for the development of their country of origin (Wise, 2018)
		References to the goal of **achieving** security for countries of destination (Wise, 2018)
		References to the goal of **achieving** development to **reduce** levels of out-migration (Bakewell, 2008)
		References to efforts that **facilitate** orderly migration
	Theoretical legitimation	References to '**truth claims**' that frame irregular migration as a phenomenon that originates outside the country of destination (Wise, 2018)
		References to the **science** of migration as caused by underdevelopment (Bakewell, 2008; Collyer, 2019)
Authority legitimation	Impersonal authority	References to authoritative **policy guidelines** for migration management (Crane, 2019)

		References to common Dutch or European **policy** (Huysmans, 2000)
	Personal authority	References to external authorities' migration management efforts that serve as **examples** for own actions
		References to common Dutch or European **interest** (Huysmans, 2000)
Mythopoeic legitimation	Moral tales	References to the positive effects of migration management that have been or will be achieved, such as development and security (Collyer, 2019)
	Cautionary tales	References to past or potential future migration **crises** (Huysmans, 2000)
		References to potential **negative effects of migration** for receiving countries (Boswell, 2007; Dekker & Scholten, 2017)
		References to the prevention of a **rising number** of migrants (Boswell, 2007)

4. Contextual background

The regional reception and protection of refugees has been a reality for many years, considering that the largest group of displaced persons either never crosses national borders, or seek refuge in neighbouring countries. According to UNCHR, 85 percent of refugees worldwide are hosted in developing countries, and 73 percent in neighbouring countries (Hilhorst et al, 2021). Within this global issue, this research takes place in the Netherlands, of which the context is explained in this chapter. The Dutch policy called 'Improving prospects for refugees in the region' aims to offer solutions and perspective to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Netherlands promotes the inclusion, resilience, and self-reliance of refugees and IDPs through a sectoral focus on better access to protection, education, and employment (Kaag, 2020). Since 2018, the Netherlands has financed programmes in the Syria region (including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt) and the Horn of Africa (including Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, and Ethiopia). NGOs have been receiving MFA funding through the Migration & Development grants framework, for which 17% of the budget for protection in the region is allocated. The MFA explains that this grant "enables partners (…) to contribute to prospects for displaced persons in the region. The projects financed by this call for grant proposals have the same theme and geographical focus as the Prospects Partnership" (Kaag, 2020, p. 3).

The policy on protection in the region is embedded in the broader migration agenda of the Netherlands. Several documents form the basis of the policy, which is based in the Global Compact for Refugees. These documents include the Comprehensive Agenda on Migration: pillar 2 (March 2018) (CAM), the Policy note Investing in Global Prospects (May 2018) (GP), the Theory of Change on Migration and Development (2018) (ToC), the Update letter to Parliament (January 2021) (LtP) and the Policy note Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2022) (FTDC). The CAM presents a 'six-pillar agenda' in which the policy intentions of the coalition are explained. It states that 'a comprehensive approach means first and foremost that the government's actions in different areas cannot be seen in isolation'. It is therefore that the Dutch policy on protection in the region must be analysed within the broader Dutch approach to migration. Hence, this thesis reflects on the language that characterises protection in the region policy as part of broader Dutch migration policy.

Finally, a short reflection on the current political and societal debate is of importance here. The strategy of hosting refugees in their region of origin has been considered an ultimate solution for the issue of asylum and is broadly preferred by both left-wing as well as right-wing parties (Hilhorst & Rijpma, 2021). Within this societal debate, the term 'opvang in de regio' may have a different connotation for Dutch respondents than the term 'protection in the region' may have for international respondents. In sum, policy context and the current political and societal debate form the context that this research takes place in. The findings of this thesis must be interpreted in this context.

5. Findings and analysis

This chapter aims to answer the two sub questions of this thesis, which concern a) how NGOs and the MFA discursively legitimise protection in the region and their own involvement in it, and b) what discourse is produced while doing so. The empirical findings are presented using Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework on discursive legitimation strategies. The discourse that arises from these views and arguments is analysed by reflecting on migration discourses as discussed in paragraph 2.1.

5.1. Discourse of NGOs legitimating their involvement in Protection in the Region

5.1.1. Rational legitimation

Through *instrumental legitimation*, NGOs explained how their work actively supports vulnerable groups of migrants. Examples included improving wellbeing, mental health, and the

protection of children, the provision of education and alternative livelihood activities, helping children to overcome trauma (see Figure 1), negotiating children's and women's rights. This empowerment was legitimised as a moral end goal, namely, to ensure that people 'live a dignified life' (participant 1), and to 'make them more resilient' (participant 7). The need for providing support in a durable manner was often linked to the truth claim of dealing with a long-term situation: 'now, we are living in a world with many protracted crisis' (participant 7). An inductive finding concerned that NGO employees used the expression of 'tackling root causes of migration' not to address the prevention of migration to Europe, but rather as a fundamental approach to deal with forced migration. This was found in contrast to literature that conceptualises the 'tackling of root causes' as a component of securitised discourse (Collyer, 2019; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017).

Two other types of *theoretical legitimation* stood out. First, the fact that most people are, and will stay, in the region of origin was an important truth claim that was made (participant 5, 6, 7). References were made to 'the numbers' to legitimise regional refugee reception and protection:

> "And in many cases, as I just meant, it is referred to as something that should become possible in the future. While, if you look at the numbers, most of the world's refugees are already in the region. So, it's not some kind of aspiration, it's an actual situation" (participant 6).

Second, regional refugee reception was also legitimised by the truth claim that 'most refugees want to stay close to home because they have return high on their priorities' (participant 5, 6, 7).

Analysis of these results shows that the goals and uses of protection in the region that NGOs put forward can be strongly characterised as a human rights- and humanitarian-oriented discourse. In line with human rights-discourse as described by Piper & Rother (2012) and Wise (2018), supporting migrants to self-develop and be empowered is central to NGO's aims. The focus on both migrants and host communities is characteristic for this discourse in which a broader view on those who experience hardship is taken (Androvičová, 2017). References to the resilience of people and their willingness to provide for their own living show that NGO discourse can be characterised as resilience humanitarianism (Crepaz, 2002; Vezzoli et al., 2022). NGOs showed different degrees of focus on development and humanitarian approaches to refugee protection. Overall, they aimed to provide a long-term solution in a humanitarian

context through development initiatives, showing the presence of a humanitarian resilience paradigm. At the same time, the belief that refugees want to stay 'close to home' and 'return when possible' indicates a sedentary bias (Bakewell, 2008), which is contradictory to the idea of free movement as advocated in human rights discourse.

5.1.2. Moral legitimation

The goal of protection was moralised through references such as 'for the people's sake', 'in the best interest of the child' or 'in response to the needs of family members'. A strong and frequent emphasis on the 'vulnerability' of target groups *normalised* the compassion and protection that is given (participant 3, 4, 7, 8, 9). One participant stated that: '*we will always be working with the most vulnerable populations, no matter what nationality or status they hold*' (participant 7). (Single) women, girls, unaccompanied minors, children, disabled persons were mentioned as particularly vulnerable. At the same time, migrants were also considered to be striving for human development, which was related to the importance of living a healthy and productive life. This was identified as an *analogy*. Another form of *normalisation* concerned the notion that migration was regarded a natural phenomenon but forced migration an 'abnormal condition' that takes away a person's dignity.

Through *abstraction*, the moral qualities of refugee protection efforts were mentioned. Principles that came up in conversations were humanity, universality, solidarity, as well as humanitarian principles such as neutrality. The centrality of human interest in NGO's value systems was visible in the way they included migrants' own wishes into their programming and advocacy work. The universality of rights was highly valued. Participants mentioned the right to decide where one lives, the right to return, the freedom of choice and the right to be safe as motivation for their work and stressed that human mobility is a right.

Again, a strong presence of these values shows how NGOs produce a humanitarian discourse while legitimating their efforts. The emphasis on migrants' rights and the value of migration as a universal right is in line with a non-securitised, human-centred discourse (Androvičová, 2017; Wise, 2018). The way in which migrants are portrayed as victims in need of protection can be identified as a 'human-interest frame' (Dekker & Scholten, 2017). Analysis showed that the concept of 'vulnerability' was central to their discourse. The particular attention to the vulnerability of women and children is in line with Welfens and Bonjour (2021), who argue that this assumption is often uncontested in European resettlement programmes (p. 220). In light of the theory on target group construction (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), this shows that certain categories of deservingness were made in this discourse, in which the most vulnerable

are considered as more ‘deserving’. Taking this a step further, a hierarchy of deservingness as described by Sözer (2019) could be identified in the way NGOs seek to allocate aid to the most vulnerable persons.

5.1.3. Authority legitimation

NGO practices were legitimated through *personal authority* claims, by referencing to several external authorities. Almost all participants referred to a ‘general tendency’ of the Europe or the Netherlands to keep refugees in their places of origin, ‘to give migrants sufficient reason to stay there so that they will not migrate to Europe’ (participant 2). Some of them linked this strategy directly to the MFA. They argued that the MFA’s protection in the region policy itself was ‘humane’, that it stemmed from the vision that local communities and national governments need support to receive so many refugees. Protection in the region policy was generally regarded as ‘good’ if people would be received in a humane way. At the same time, they understood this policy within a larger Dutch and European policy context, of which several practices were highly delegitimated. Examples include responses at EU borders causing boat victims, detention centres or ‘prisons’, migration deals with Turkey, Tunisia, and Egypt, violations of human rights, and the building of walls. These actions had taken away the EU’s ‘moral authority’: ‘*they cannot say that they are all for human rights*’ (participant 1). Some respondents criticised ‘Dutch politics’ for presenting protection in the region as a solution to the issue of asylum in the Netherlands, while this was not the purpose of the policy according to them.

> “And in the Dutch political discourse, reception in the region is, in my experience, too often used as a kind of panacea. Instead of people coming to seek asylum in the Netherlands, reception should take place in the region. And that is moving the problem. Then it's ‘not in my backyard’, but preferably somewhere else” (participant 6).

This ‘political’ discourse was referred to as a ‘political mantra’, ‘false narrative’, and a ‘gratuitous talk’, considering that most refugees are already received in the region. Another participant stated that the way politicians talk about protection in the region is an ‘empty shell’ because the financial investments of ‘rich countries’ were not proportionate to their responsibilities. Respondents argued that the motivation to manage the number of asylum seekers arriving in the Netherlands was in breach with their mandate to act on the basis of people’s needs. Although they regarded the content of the policy as similar to their own

practices, the underlying motivations of external authorities to have such policies differed somewhat from their own motivations. In contrast, Uganda was referred to as a positive, 'textbook example' of how countries *should* organise refugee reception (participant 6, 9). Participants argued that Uganda was providing sufficient facilities to live in dignified conditions. This shows that NGOs legitimated their own practices through an interpretation of other actors' actions.

Impersonal authority claims were made with reference to the Refugee Convention. The argument was made that hosting refugees in neighbouring countries was not something based in international agreements. Instead, the Convention showed the responsibility of 'rich countries' to act.

Analysis of these authority claims shows that NGOs clearly produce a counter-hegemonic discourse, which is in line with literature on civil society discourse (Wise, 2018). In their discourse, they legitimise their own actions by reflecting on other actors' actions. Delegitimising the strategy of 'keeping them in their place' as Bakewell (2008) phrases it, is in line with a human rights discourse. The counter-hegemonic positioning is also evident in the way NGO employees explicitly challenged the metaphor of 'migration flow', by referring to it as '*the ugly word*' used by politicians (participant 6).

5.1.4. Mythopoeic legitimation

Cautionary tales were present in the way NGOs explained their actions as responses to poor humanitarian contexts. Different country-specific crises were mentioned, such as socio-economic meltdown, the presence of armed groups, the effect of the Syrian crisis on host countries, and the inability of national governments to provide basic needs to their population, 'let alone to refugees' (participant 4). The cautionary argument here was that the current humanitarian situation would deteriorate if help would not be given. Participant 3 explained that children's rights are often violated in a situation of migration and displacement, which was a reason to make sure that children are protected. Furthermore, the need to promote social cohesion between the refugee community and the host community, which was rationally legitimised, was often followed by mythopoeic, cautionary reasoning. The argument was that if both were not considered simultaneously, tensions would arise between the groups because the host community would feel left out if only the refugee population was provided with resources.

Although efforts were mainly legitimised through the cautionary argument that not providing aid would lead to a deteriorating situation, some *moral tales* included positive effects of their work, such as better employment opportunities.

A strong focus on the violation of people's rights again shows that NGOs legitimise protection in the region in light of a humanitarian discourse (Androvičová, 2017, p. 207). However, analysis shows that certain elements of migration management discourse were identified as well. Overall, participants spoke about how refugee populations create 'pressure', 'tension', or are 'a burden' to host countries or host communities (Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Huysmans, 2000). Negative effects of migration on the host society that were mentioned included 'economic and political strain', 'exacerbation of problems that were already there', 'tensions between host communities and the refugee population'. One participant stressed the need to help hosting countries to manage the 'refugee population', considering that there was a 'crisis' in 'sharing' the refugee population. Framing migration in terms of negative effects on the host country can be identified as securitised discourse (Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Huysmans, 2000).

5.2. Discourse of the MFA legitimating their involvement in Protection in the Region

5.2.1 Rational legitimation

The Dutch government *instrumentally legitimised* protection in the region by summarising its uses in the Comprehensive Agenda on Migration (CAM): '*increasing the stability of countries, offering prospects to vulnerable refugees, IDPs and host communities' and preventing onward migration'*. The Update Letter to Parliament (LP) explains its goal of 'improving the dire situation of refugees'. Documents often referred to efforts protecting human rights. The MFA emphasised their central goal to actively help 'vulnerable' groups of migrants, with special attention to 'vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people with disabilities' (Theory of Change on Migration and Development, ToC). To do so, the MFA emphasised the improvement of education, employment and protection (LP). These aims show a human-centred description that can be characterised as human rights-discourse (Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Androvičová, 2017).

Protection in the region was furthermore described as 'closely interrelated' to the 'prevention and reduction of irregular migration' (CAM). The Policy note Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (FTDC) explained that the cabinet's 'priority' to combat irregular migration would be achieved by 'developing migration partnerships with important countries of origin and transit, and by encouraging reception in the region'. It was explained that '*the*

necessity to further migrate must be removed by providing reception facilities close to home with prospects for the future' (CAM). It must be noted that this link was questioned by the interviewee, who explained that solidarity, not the goal of preventing onward migration to Europe, was the basis of their policy. This shows how both a management-oriented discourse on the 'prevention' or 'combat' of irregular migration as well as a human rights- and humanitarian oriented discourse are used to legitimise protection in the region (Boswell, 2007; Collyer, 2019; Dekker & Scholten, 2017). The policy was however *instrumentally legitimated* as part of a six-pillar, comprehensive agenda to deal with migration, which explicitly stated that each of the six pillars cannot be seen in isolation. In this regard, protection in the region was linked to other goals: '*tackling root causes, improving prospects in the region, and emphasising the prospect of return can help to dissuade migrants from undertaking dangerous journeys by boat across the Mediterranean*' (CAM). The Policy note Investing in Global Prospects (GP) further explained that the tackling of root causes was a response to the public debate on migration in Europe and the Netherlands. It stated that '*while the greatest migration flows take place within the region of origin, irregular migration to Europe (and also to Asia) is on the increase*'. In line with Wise (2018), these statements show how management-oriented discourse may frame irregular migration as a phenomenon originating outside of Europe. In this regard, 'tackling root causes' through economic development is considered a strategy to manage migratory movements by preventing people to migrate in the first place (Collyer, 2019; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017; Wise, 2018).

In terms of *theoretical legitimation*, the MFA regularly stated that reception and protection in and around conflict regions was the preferred solution because of the reality that 'most refugees seek protection close to home' and 'are received in neighbouring countries'. This knowledge was related to the perceived fact that the wish to return home is a migrant's own priority as well, and that the current strategy would allow refugees to 'return quickly' (CAM, participant 5).

This analysis shows that besides a human-centred description of the policy, the Dutch government has embedded it within a broader goal of reducing irregular migration. In relation to this goal, management-oriented discourse is used to justify protection in the region. The framing of irregular migration as a 'dangerous journey' and the aim to dissuade migrants to travel onwards also point to a management-oriented discourse (Collyer, 2019). Other management-oriented goals included a focus on migrant return, stronger border management to 'combat people smuggling' at the external borders of the EU, and promoting security and mobility along the Dutch borders (Boswell, 2007; Collyer, 2019). Migrant return here was

mentioned within a context of securitised language that prioritises Dutch state interests, which is in line with Boswell (2007).

5.2.2. Moral legitimation

The need to support countries that receive large numbers of IDPs, and refugees was *normalised* throughout the data. The MFA emphasised the 'heavy burden' or 'pressure' that countries and host communities carry (CAM). It was argued that the fact that countries have too little resources to offer protection and prospects constituted sufficient reason alone to support them. The MFA regularly referred to the central position of this 'vulnerable' group of people, who are in 'dire' and 'precarious' situations and in need of 'perspective' and 'a dignified existence'. They were said to be running the risk of becoming victims of violence and a 'lost generation'. Underlining the vulnerability of refugees and IPDs is therefore an important moral and humanitarian strategy for the MFA to legitimise their work. Humanitarian language was especially clear in the descriptions of hardships that people experience.

The MFA furthermore presented protection in the region as an act of solidarity (Androvičová, 2017; Lie, 2020). This was identified as *abstraction*. The central aim to provide 'durable solutions' was made in reference to the UN Durable Solutions. This mainly entailed a focus on 'local integration' which was related to the *abstracted* moral quality of a 'dignified and meaningful participation to local society'. The importance of durable solutions was related to the moral judgement that the 'infinite temporality of staying in camps and improvised shelters' was not a sufficient option. The importance of attaining 'self-reliance' was another *abstraction* of their actions that was expressed. Self-sufficiency was valued as it would make migrants less vulnerable and would improve their contribution to local economy. Refugees were regarded as '*having the potential to contribute to local economy of the receiving country'* (ToC). The portrayal of migrants as resilient, and the combination of humanitarian aid and development cooperation to provide a durable solution for long-term displacement, show that the MFA discourse is grounded in the resilience paradigm (Vezzoli et al., 2022).

Managing irregular migration was *normalised* as a beneficial action. Besides framing 'irregular migration' as a problem to be addressed, 'safe, orderly and regular migration' was promoted as the desired situation (CAM, ToC). These were identified as *analogies*, considering the positive and negative values attached. Analysis shows how management-oriented language was used to promote certain forms of migration, while preventing others (Collyer, 2019). Labour migration in particular was regarded as beneficial for the Netherlands (CAM). By stating that 'it is always essential to weigh up the opportunities against the challenges that

accompany migration', the government created categories of deserving and undeserving target groups (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). In contrast to the portrayal of irregular migrants, labour migrants were discussed in terms of 'opportunities' such as strengthening the Dutch knowledge economy, indicating a categorisation of 'deservingness'.

5.2.3. Authority legitimation

Through *impersonal authorisation*, it was explained that international guidelines and obligations regarding migrant protection form the basis of the policy. These were the Global Compact for Refugees, the Refugee Convention, the Nexus Agenda, and the Grand Bargain. The main idea from these guidelines that shaped the policy was the international consensus that '*instead of prolonged and fruitless reception in camps, refugees should be given the opportunity to build lives for themselves in host countries until they are able to return home*' (GP).

Personal authority claims showed that the MFA legitimised their policy in relation to Europe, the EU, the media, and the Dutch taxpayer. First, migration policy was generally presented as a measure taken in the interest of 'Europe'. For this argument a threat frame was used presenting 'flows of irregular migration' as a concern to European society (Dekker & Scholten, 2017):

> "There is a lack of socio-economic prospects, insecurity and instability in the regions around Europe, which encourages irregular migration flows and the associated suffering. Within the Netherlands and the EU, polarisation and division around the theme of migration and refugees have increased sharply since the 2015 crisis. Reducing irregular migration and better protection are also necessary from this perspective to create support for migration policy'' (ToC).

Second, as mentioned in the quote above, creating societal support for migration policy appeared to be an important argument for certain policy decisions. For example, the FTDC explained that '*migration pressure on the borders*' was found to be the 'number one threat to the Netherlands' among the Dutch population. The phrasing of 'pressure' and 'threat' show a securitised discourse around migration (Boswell, 2007; Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Huysmans, 2000). Furthermore, the choice of Syria region and the Horn of Africa as the focus countries of the policy had been inspired by the number of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. The reasoning for this was that a link between those countries and the Netherlands was necessary to justify the

policy to the Dutch taxpayer. This shows how state interests play a role in legitimating the policy.

Third, the MFA made references to claims that were made in the media. Whereas the media would portray protection in the region as a 'plan' by the Netherlands or the EU to pay countries to provide reception in the region, the MFA's reasoning would be the other way around. It was explained that the Netherlands supports countries because reception is already taking place in the region: *'It is not protection in the region, it is support to protection in the region'*. In addition, it was stated that although politicians wanted to link protection in the region efforts to the 'combat against irregular migration', the MFA did not regard this as a motive for their efforts. This way, references to the interpretations of other authorities were used by the MFA to legitimise their own position.

5.2.4. Mythopoeic legitimation

Two types of *cautionary tales* were distinguished. The first included a tale about the current instability in the regions of origin, causing a high number of refugees and IDPs. The current insufficient provision of aid to migrants and host communities was delegitimised by showing 'worrying' effects that this caused: '*prolonged and hopeless stay in temporary reception centres can lead to more poverty, instability, onward migration and radicalisation'* (CAM). The MFA expressed their concern that the 'horribly unsustainable situation' would force people to return to Syria. This narrative included a cautionary tale regarding the risk of migration in 'the region': '*the influx of large numbers of refugees leads to tensions with host communities and can undermine the stability of the country in question' and 'women and girls in particular are at risk of becoming victims of (sexual) violence'* (ToC). Although these arguments for contribution to long-term reception were largely humanitarian, the framing of 'radicalisation' and 'pressure' on the receiving country was identified as securitised language.

Another cautionary tale presented the policy as a response to the number of asylum seekers entering the Netherlands. The ToC related the current responses to migration to the crisis of 2015, after which 'polarisation and division in the Netherlands and the EU around the theme of migration and refugees have increased sharply'. The link between immigration in the Netherlands and current protection in the region efforts is explained in the CAM:

> "Migration has a major impact on Dutch society, both now and in the future. Against the background of developments such as the expected population growth in Africa and South Asia, instability on Europe's periphery, climate change, the 'battle for talent',

> and shifts in geopolitical and economic power, the number of people migrating worldwide is expected to grow. This reality calls for a government that is well prepared and equipped, and that acts to ensure that migration movements are effectively managed. That means a government that provides protection only to those who truly need it and ensures that migration into our country is attuned to the needs and capacity of Dutch society".

The need for migration management was therefore legitimised as a 'necessary' measure to realise better protection, to reduce irregular migration, to create support for migration policy among the Dutch population, and to ensure that immigration is in line with Dutch capacity and needs (ToC). This mythopoeic reasoning showed that past and potential migration crises were used to legitimate current protection in the region efforts (Huysmans, 2000).

6. Conclusion and discussion

This thesis has sought to understand the discourses that characterise policies on protection in the region. In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has financed NGOs and other intermediaries with the aim of 'improving prospects for refugees in the regions of origin'. Scholars have questioned the bundling of humanitarianism, development, and migration control in such policies, as well as the role of NGOs in externalisation practices (Betts & Milner, 2007; Hilhorst et al., 2021; Vezzoli et al., 2022; Cuttitta, 2019; Phillips, 2023; Szent-Ivanyi, 2021; Vandevoordt, 2017). A comparative discourse analysis was therefore employed to understand the ways in which the discourses of the MFA and the NGOs converge and diverge. This chapter reviews the main conclusions of this thesis in light of larger academic debates in the literature on migration policy discourse, migrant categorisation, and NGOs. Based on these considerations, policy recommendations are presented.

6.1 Migration policy discourses

First, this thesis has shown that the question of *what* protection in the region is, and *why* it is done, is fundamentally contested among different actors. Evidently, protection in the region efforts were *morally* and *rationally legitimised* as a humanitarian practice by all participants in this research. Both NGOs and the MFA legitimised their efforts through a human-centred discourse that prioritises the wellbeing of migrants and the support to migrant-receiving countries. Another way in which their discourses converged, were similar truth claims. First, it

was argued that most refugees and IDPs are already received in their region of origin, and most of them will stay there. Second, participants believed that most refugees want to stay close to home, because they want to return when possible. These claims were central to answering why protection in the region is needed, and showed how the participants *theoretically rationalised* their actions. Furthermore, both discourses entailed the mythopoeic, cautionary reasoning that the current humanitarian situation that migrants face would deteriorate if aid would not be given.

At the same time, a broader analysis of how the policy was presented within the Dutch migration agenda showed that the discourse of the Dutch government fundamentally differs from NGOs. Here, protection in the region was not only legitimated within a humanitarian discourse, but also within a migration management-oriented discourse. This has been an interesting finding, considering that literature on migration policy discourse generally distinguishes between two "competing and contrasting" positions in the current debate. These are "a dominant policy perspective centred on migration management versus an alternative view referred to as a human rights comprehensive approach" (Wise, 2018, p. 747). However, the current analysis has shown that the Dutch government *rationally* legitimises protection in the region as a way to alleviate the suffering of those 'in the region', while at the same time embedding it in a broader policy approach that aims to prevent irregular migration. *Mythopoeic reasoning* showed that past and potential migration crises were used to legitimate current protection in the region efforts. Based on the *moral* claim that irregular migration should be prevented, migration management was regarded a 'necessary', beneficial action. The finding that the Dutch government legitimises its policy both through a discourse of human rights and migration management fits within a line of literature that shows how such discourses become interwoven in the context of externalisation. Instead of conceptualising the two discourses as 'competing and contrasting', scholars such as Collyer (2019) and Crane (2019) argue that development, humanitarian and human rights practices and discourses have become a tool of migration management by wealthy states. The argument here is that externalisation policies may care for the safety of individuals while also preserving the security of the state, which is referred to as the 'paradox of externalisation' (Crane, 2019). This shows that these discourses may not be as contradictory or competing, considering how a government can intertwine both types of discourses to legitimate a policy. Rather, the results of this thesis show how these discourses can be co-constitutive of each other.

6.2 Migrant categorisation

This reasoning is also reflected in the categories that are created to describe migrants. What stands out is the prominence of the word 'vulnerability' in discourses on protection in the region, which is used both by the MFA and NGOs to *normalise* refugees' and IDP's deservingness of care. In contrast to this humanitarian frame that describes migrants 'in the region', the term 'irregular migrants' was used to categorise those who would possibly 'migrate onward'. In contrast to NGO discourse, the term 'flows of irregular migration' was only found in governmental policy notes. It was regarded to create 'migration pressures on Dutch borders'. Securitised language therefore portrayed the irregular migrant as rather 'undeserving'. This finding again shows how the language of humanitarianism and migration management can merge in discourse. Analysis of such categories helps us to "understand who gets 'cared for' and who becomes a 'subject of control'" (Welfens & Bonjour, 2021, p. 214). Others have also shown how humanitarian and bordering practices may simultaneously enact a 'politics of pity' as well as a 'politics of risk' (Aradau, 2004; Fassin, 2012; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Welfens & Bonjour, 2021). In line with Pallister-Wilkins (2015) and Welfens & Bonjour (2021), these categorisations show that the two logics of 'care and control' can be co-constitutive. In turn, as widely discussed in migration literature, the creation of migrant categories highly influences the policies designed for specific target groups (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Indeed, this thesis showed how the category of 'irregular migrant' legitimised management-oriented actions such as stronger border management, migrant return and promoting security. At the same time, the category of 'vulnerable migrant' legitimised humanitarian action. While this thesis has touched upon on the role of migrant categories in the justification of refugee protection efforts, future research could study how such categories play a role in justifying externalisation policies and creating (im)mobility and (in)security, which remains under-explored (Welfens, 2022, p. 3).

6.3 The discursive positioning of NGOs in protection in the region

What does this teach us about the role of NGOs in protection in the region policies? In line with the expectations, NGOs produced not only a humanitarian and human rights-oriented, but also a counter-hegemonic discourse through the use of *personal authority claims*. A 'general tendency' of the EU to keep refugees in their places of origin and prevent onward migration was strongly delegitimised. Dutch NGO employees delegitimised the way in which Dutch politicians use the term 'protection in the region', namely as a strategy to deal with the number of asylum seekers coming to the Netherlands. They referred to this as a 'false narrative' and a 'political mantra'. These findings are in line with literature that characterises human rights-discourse as a counter-hegemonic discourse that is articulated especially by civil society actors

(Androvičová, 2017; Crepaz, 2002; Piper & Rother 2012; Wise, 2018). Surprisingly, NGOs did not consider themselves to be 'implementors' of the policy, despite their assessment that the content of the policy is in line with their organisational mandates. Instead, they *financially rationalised* their involvement in the Dutch policy, considering that it provided them the financial means to continue their own protection programmes (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). This finding shows the multiplicity of perspectives in the current governance network.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown how people make claims on a social reality through language, by studying the way in which actors legitimise their actions. It is through these discourses that people make sense of reality and interpret their own role in it. The analysis of the structure of language has shown the arbitrariness of the claims that are made. However, these claims are not 'just' words. They have 'real' consequences. Public policy is made through language, and to understand that language helps to understand the actions that follow. What is understood by the term 'protection in the region' has profound consequences for the actions that people undertake to respond to their interpretation of reality.

6.4 Policy recommendations

In addition to academic contribution, this thesis is relevant for policymakers, NGOs and other actors involved in protection in the region efforts. Based on the findings, I wish to give two recommendations that can be used to improve future policymaking.

First, considering the 'real' consequences that discourses have for policy actions, policymakers should be aware of the categorisations that are created. A discourse in which migrants in 'the region' are portrayed as 'deserving', and irregular migrants as less 'deserving' has fundamental consequences for the opportunities that are created for them. While the portrayal of migrants and host communities as 'vulnerable' legitimised the need for protection to a large extent, it may also lead to a stigmatisation of 'dependency'. Furthermore, the notion of 'irregular migration' does not do justice to the different motivations that underly people's migratory decisions.

Second, this thesis has shown that although NGOs and the MFA largely overlap in their aims, some contradictions in their discourses exist. On the one hand, this is caused by the aim of the Dutch government to employ protection in the region as a strategy to prevent irregular migration, and on the other hand by the fact that NGOs fundamentally challenge the European tendency to keep migrants away from their borders. However, both NGOs and the MFA emphasised that better protection and opportunities for migrants are needed, and that more solidarity between countries is crucial to achieve this. A main concern among all participants

was the lack of financial resources to properly improve the current situation. By creating a discourse that represents protection in the region in terms of the needs of migrants and host countries and communities, instead of a way to ‘combat irregular migration’, this could create more understanding and alignment between actors, and facilitate their cooperation to achieve common goals.

7. References

Aradau, C. (2004). The perverse politics of four-letter words: Risk and pity in the securitisation of human trafficking. *Millennium*, *33*(2), 251-277.

Androvičová, J. (2017). Human Rights Discourse on Migration–the Case of Slovakia. *Journal of Modern Science*, *35*(4), 197-220.

Babbie, E. R. (2021). The practice of social research (Fifteenth). Cengage.

Bakewell, O. (2008). 'Keeping them in their place': The ambivalent relationship between development and migration in Africa. *Third world quarterly*, *29*(7), 1341-1358.

Betts, A., & Milner, J. (2007). *The externalisation of EU asylum policy: The position of African states*. Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS).

Bird, G., & Schmid, D. (2021). Humanitarianism and the 'migration fix': On the implication of NGOs in racial capitalism and the management of relative surplus populations. *Geopolitics*, 1-27.

Boswell, C. (2007). Migration control in Europe after 9/11: Explaining the absence of securitization. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *45*(3), 589-610.

Casaglia, A., & Pacciardi, A. (2022). A close look at the EU–Turkey deal: The language of border externalisation. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, *40*(8), 1659-1676.

Chauvin, S., & Garcés-Mascareñas, B. (2014). Becoming less illegal: Deservingness frames and undocumented migrant incorporation. *Sociology compass*, *8*(4), 422-432.

Collyer, M. (2019). From preventive to repressive: the changing use of development and humanitarianism to control migration. In *Handbook on critical geographies of migration* (pp. 170-181). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Crane, A. (2020). The politics of development and humanitarianism in EU externalization: Managing migration in Ukraine. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, *38*(1), 20-39.

Crepaz, K. (2022). Overcoming borders: the Europeanization of civil society activism in the 'refugee crisis'. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, *48*(6), 1448-1461.

Cruickshank, J. (2012). The Role of Qualitative Interviews in Discourse Theory. *Critical approaches to discourse analysis across disciplines*, *6*(1).

Cuttitta, P. (2020). Non-governmental/civil society organisations and the European Union-externalisation of migration management in Tunisia and Egypt. *Population, Space and Place*, *26*(7), e2329.

Dekker, R., & Scholten, P. (2017). Framing the immigration policy agenda: A qualitative comparative analysis of media effects on Dutch immigration policies. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *22*(2), 202-222.

De Haas, H. (2019) Paradoxes of migration and development. In Bastia, T. and R. Skeldon (2019) (eds) Routledge Handbook of Migration and Development. London: Routledge. Pp.17-32.

Fassin, D. (2011). *Humanitarian reason: a moral history of the present*. Univ of California Press.

Geiger, M., & Pécoud, A. (2013). Migration, development and the 'migration and development nexus'. *Population, Space and Place*, *19*(4), 369-374.

Grütters, C. (2023, June 8). *De asielbelofte van Rutte is vals* [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nrc.nl/

Hajer, M. (2002). Discourse analysis and the study of policy making. *European political science*, *2*(1), 61-65.

Hajer, M. A. (1993). Discourse coalitions and the institutionalization of practice: the case of acid rain in Great Britain. In: Fischer, F. & Forester, J. (Eds.), *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* (pp. 43-67). Durham/London. S.

Hilhorst, T. & Rijpma, J. (2021, March 26). Opinie: 'Opvang vluchtelingen in de regio kan alleen met steun Europa'. *Het Parool*. Retrieved from https://www.parool.nl

Hilhorst, T., Rijpma, J., Vezolli, S., Meyer, L., & van Ostaijen, M. (2021). Factsheet opvang in de regio: Een vergelijkende studie.

Huysmans, J. (2000). The European Union and the securitization of migration. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *38*(5), 751-777.

Jørgensen, M. B. (2012). Legitimizing policies: How policy approaches to irregular migrants are formulated and legitimized in Scandinavia. *Etikk i praksis-Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics*, (2), 46-63.

Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. sage.

Joutsenvirta, M. (2011). Setting boundaries for corporate social responsibility: Firm–NGO relationship as discursive legitimation struggle. *Journal of business ethics*, *102*, 57-75.

Kaag, S. (2020). *Letter of 25 January 2021 from the Government of the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the House of Representatives on progress on prospects in the region*.

Kjaer, M. (2004). *Governance*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kooiman, J. (2000). Societal governance: Levels, models and orders of social-political interaction. In Pierre, J. (Ed.), *Debating Governance: Authority, steering, and democracy.* (pp. 138-166). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Krotký, J. (2023). "Fortress Europe is an insult to the values of the EU": The legitimation of migrant acceptance in the human security speech acts of Members of the European Parliament. *European Policy Analysis*, *9*(1), 48-68.

Lavenex, S. (2006). Shifting up and out: The foreign policy of European immigration control. *West European Politics*, *29*(2), 329-350.

Lavenex, S. (2016). Multilevelling EU external governance: the role of international organizations in the diffusion of EU migration policies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 42*(4), 554-570.

Lie, J. H. S. (2020). The humanitarian-development nexus: humanitarian principles, practice, and pragmatics. *Journal of international humanitarian action*, *5*(1), 18.

López-Sala, A., & Godenau, D. (2022). In private hands? the markets of migration control and the politics of outsourcing. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, *48*(7), 1610-1628.

Nijenhuis, G., & Leung, M. (2017, January). Rethinking migration in the 2030 agenda: Towards a de-territorialized conceptualization of development. In *Forum for Development Studies* (Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 51-68). Routledge.

NOS (2023, July 16). *Europese Unie sluit migratiedeal met Tunesië* [Press release]. Retrieved from https://nos.nl/

Pallister-Wilkins, P. (2015). The humanitarian politics of European border policing: Frontex and border police in Evros. *International political sociology*, *9*(1), 53-69.

Panebianco, S. (2022). Human security at the Mediterranean borders: humanitarian discourse in the EU periphery. *International Politics*, *59*(3), 428-448.

Phillips, M. (2023). Advocates, Implementers or Allies? NGOs between Humanitarian Borderwork and Migration Management in Libya. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 1-15.

Piper, N., & Rother, S. (2012). Let's Argue about Migration: advancing a right (s) discourse via communicative opportunities. *Third World Quarterly*, *33*(9), 1735-1750.

Raghuram, P. (2009). Which migration, what development? Unsettling the edifice of migration and development. *Population, Space and Place*, *15*(2), 103-117.

Rojo, L. M., & Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). "There was a Problem, and it was Solved!": Legitimating the Expulsion of Illegal Migrants in Spanish Parliamentary Discourse. *Discourse & society*, *8*(4), 523-566.

Sandberg, J., & Alvesson, M. (2011). Ways of constructing research questions: gap-spotting or problematization? *Organization*, *18*(1), 23-44.

Schmidt, V. A. (2008). Discursive institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse. *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.*, *11*, 303-326

Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1993). Social construction of target populations: Implications for politics and policy. *American political science review*, *87*(2), 334-347.

Sözer, H. (2021). Categories that blind us, categories that bind them: The deployment of the notion of vulnerability for Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *34*(3), 2775-2803.

Szent-Ivanyi, B. (2021). Practising what they preach? Development NGOs and the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, *42*(11), 2552-2571.

Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2008). A discursive perspective on legitimation strategies in multinational corporations. *Academy of Management review*, *33*(4), 985-993.

Vandevoordt, R. (2017). Between humanitarian assistance and migration management: On civil actors' role in voluntary return from Belgium. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *43*(11), 1907-1922.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2018). Discourse and migration. *Qualitative research in European migration studies*, 227-245.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & communication*, *1*(1), 91-112.

Van Leeuwen, T., & Wodak, R. (1999). Legitimizing immigration control: A discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse studies*, *1*(1), 83-118.

Van Ostaijen, M. M. (2020). Legitimating intra-European movement discourses: understanding mobility and migration. *Comparative European Politics*, *18*, 1-20.

Vezzoli, S., Hilhorst, D., Meyer, L., & Rijpma, J. (2022). Refugee protection in the region: A survey and evaluation of current trends. *International Migration*.

Walters, W. (2010). Imagined migration world: The European Union's anti-illegal immigration discourse. *The politics of international migration management*, 73-95.

Werker, E., & Ahmed, F. Z. (2008). What do nongovernmental organizations do? *Journal of economic perspectives*, *22*(2), 73-92.

Welfens, N., & Bonjour, S. (2021). Families first? The mobilization of family norms in refugee resettlement. *International Political Sociology*, *15*(2), 212-231.

Wise, R. D. (2018). Is there a space for counterhegemonic participation? Civil society in the global governance of migration. *Globalizations*, *15*(6), 746-761.

8. Appendix

8.1. Interview plan

Introduction

- Introduction of myself and the participant
- Explanation of the research: my research is about how different organizations interpret regional reception. My question is: what is regional reception/refugee reception in the region, and why is it necessary? For this, I will engage in conversations with various organizations involved in refugee reception. In this conversation, I would like to learn more about the work you do and reflect together on your own position or contribution to regional reception.
- Explanation of the information sheet and consent form. Start the recording.

A. Organization's work in the field of migration

Let's start with your organization's own work. The questions may sometimes seem quite general, as I ask the same questions to every organization for consistency. It is possible that I may ask similar things or that your answers may overlap. That's fine. I would like to ask you to provide as detailed answers as possible.

1. Can you tell me something about your organization and the work you do?
2. Defining questions: when you refer to 'migration'/'development'/'humanitarian aid'/'irregular migration'/'displacement'/'regional reception,' what do you mean exactly?

While listening to their story, get explanations for the following questions and ask follow-up questions if necessary:

3. What is the mandate or vision of your organization? What are the values that your work is based on?
4. Could you explain how your organization is involved in the topic of migration?
5. What is the reason that your organisation focuses on migration?
6. We briefly discussed the programs funded by the Migration & Development Grants Framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Which programs are these, and could you tell me more about them?
7. Are there specific laws, policies, or guidelines that your work is based on?
8. Who do you collaborate with for this?

9. Who is the target group of your organization, and why?
10. Are there specific criteria or profiles on the basis of which people are selected for your programs?
11. Which region do you focus on, and why?
12. Does the organization's origin play a role in how you work now?
13. What is the problem you are trying to address?
14. What is the impact of your work (on the target group, the region)?
15. What is the ideal situation you are working towards?
16. Are there any unintended consequences of your work?
17. To what extent is the managing of migration part of your work?

B. Interpretation of the Regional Reception Policy and its relationship with MFA

I would like to talk with you about the role of your organization in the regional reception of refugees, and about the subsidy framework. Your program is linked to the subsidy framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, therefore, to the Reception in the Region policy.

18. What is your interpretation of this policy? Could you describe what you think it is about?

    Explanation policy: the Netherlands has a Reception in the Region policy which aims to offer solutions and perspective to refugees and IDPs mainly in the Horn of Africa and the Syria region, focussing on better access to protection, education, and employment. They aim to promote inclusion, resilience, and self-reliance.
19. What do you think of this approach? Why is it necessary? Why do you think the Netherlands has this policy?
20. What is the role of your organization in regional reception?
21. Is this something that is discussed within your team, how do you reflect on it?

C. Interpretation of the state of migration and the organization's role in it

To better understand your work, I would like to place it in a broader perspective.

22. From what I hear about your work, there seems to be a certain link between migration and development. Could you further elaborate on this connection and how they relate?
23. If we look at the balance between the security of the receiving country and the needs of persons in need of protection, how does your organisation view this balance?
24. If we look at the current situation of migration in the world, how would you describe it, and what is the role of your organization in it? This is a very big question, but I am

very curious about your own interpretation of this question. What comes to mind, could you describe this image to me?

25. Researchers have criticized the Reception in the Region policy, stating that it is part of a larger package of measures and policies aimed at managing migration with the goal of reducing the number of asylum applications in Europe.
    1. What is your opinion on this?
    2. How do you think your organization stands on this issue?
26. If we were to think in terms of possible future scenarios, what do you see as the ideal situation regarding refugee reception? What should we work towards?

Closing

- Are there any other things you would like to discuss that you think are relevant to my research?
- Word of thanks
- Could you possibly share a few documents about your organization's programs and vision with me?

8.2. Code book

This code book shows the codes that were used in ATLAS.ti, containing both deductive and inductively found codes.

1. Human rights-oriented discourse

Theoretical concept	Dimension	Deductive code	Inductive code
Moral legitimation	Normalisation	References to human-interest as **central** to actions (Dekker & Scholten, 2017)	References to the importance of migrants' own wish
		References to migration as a **natural** phenomenon intrinsic to broader processes of development (De Haas, 2019)	References to migrants as integral part of the host community
		References to cultural diversity as a **natural** phenomenon (Androvičová, 2017)	References to the need to provide aid to those who need it the most
			References to the need to support countries that receive a large number of refugees
			References that delegitimate discriminatory migrant categories
			References to women and children as particularly vulnerable
	Abstraction	References to **values** of solidarity, human security, human dignity, universality, morality, and ethics (Androvičová, 2017)	
		References to humanitarian **principles** of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence (Lie, 2020)	
	Analogies	References to migrants as vulnerable people or victims who require **compassion** and **protection** (Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Panebianco, 2022)	References to the importance of providing a durable situation for migrants
			References to the importance of self-reliance of migrants
		References to migrants as actively striving for **human development**, for example	References to the importance of social cohesion between migrants and host community

		obtaining work to provide for themselves (Crepaz, 2002)	References to the need for better international responsibility sharing
Rational legitimation	Instrumental legitimation	References to the **promotion** of human development, empowerment, or self-reliance of migrants (Piper & Rother, 2012; Wise, 2018)	References to efforts that promote inclusion, safety, security and dignity of migrants
		References to the **provision** of active help to vulnerable groups of migrants (Androvičová, 2017)	References to efforts that promote social cohesion between migrants and the host community
		References to the **facilitation** of migrants' active contribution to the receiving society (Androvičová, 2017)	References to efforts that aim to provide a durable solution for migrants
		References to efforts that **protect** migrants' (human) rights (Androvičová, 2017)	
		References to **building** local response capacities to deal with disaster (Vezzoli et al., 2022)	
	Theoretical legitimation	References to the '**truth claim**' of the resilience of people, communities, or societies to recover from disaster (Vezzoli et al., 2022)	References to the fact that migrants wish to return to the country of origin
			References to the fact that most refugees are or stay in the region
Authority legitimation	Impersonal authority	References to Human Rights **law** (Piper & Rother, 2012)	
		References to **policy guidelines** for migrant protection or empowerment	
	Personal authority	References to external authorities' protection, humanitarian, or development efforts that serve as **examples** for own actions	References that delegitimate externalisation practices of the Netherlands or the EU
		References to external authorities' migration management efforts that serve as **counterexamples** for own actions (Androvičová, 2017)	References that delegitimate others not providing sufficient aid
			References to the aim of having added value to existing programmes of other actors in the region

			References that delegitimate other actors stopping movement
			References that delegitimate practices that tackle root causes of migration to reduce migration to Europe
			References to the motivation of the MFA to employ reception in the region
			References to the practice of European countries to tackle the root causes of forced migration
Mythopoeic legitimation	Moral tales	References to improving circumstances for migrants and strengthening of their rights (Androvičová, 2017)	References to the need for an alternative to refugee camps
		References to positive effects of migration for receiving countries such as cultural diversity (Androvičová, 2017)	
	Cautionary tales	References to the **violation** of human rights (Androvičová, 2017)	References that delegitimate the effects of not sufficiently providing aid to migrants
			References to the need for aid in a deteriorating humanitarian context
			References to potential negative effects of emigration for the country of origin
			References to rising tensions between host communities and migrants

2. Code book for a management-oriented migration discourse

Theoretical concept	**Dimension**	**Deductive code**	**Inductive code**
Moral legitimation	Normalisation	References to (irregular) migration as a **problem** or **threat** that needs to be solved, managed, or influenced (Dekker & Scholten, 2017; Walters, 2010)	References to Europe as our 'own' region
		References to managing migration as a **beneficial** action or solution (Wise, 2018)	References to the importance of orderly and regular migration

		References to the **necessity** or **inevitability** of migration management (Huysmans, 2000)	References to regular migration as beneficial for the Netherlands
	Abstraction	References to the **protection** or **security** of the receiving country (Boswell, 2007; Dekker & Scholten, 2017)	References to migration management as needed to create societal support for immigration
		References to migration **cooperation** with third states (Wise, 2018)	
	Analogies	References to the **combat** against **criminal** practices smuggling and trafficking (Boswell, 2007)	
		References to irregular migration as **unsafe** to discourage migration to Europe (Collyer, 2019)	
Rational legitimation	Instrumental legitimation	References to **prevention** of onward, irregular migration (Collyer, 2019)	References to anti-smuggling/trafficking practices as a means to reduce irregular migration
		References to the goal of **countering** potential migrants' decision to leave (Collyer, 2019)	References to efforts for stronger border management
		References to practices that **tackle** the root causes of migration as a preventive measure to **reduce** migration to Europe (Collyer, 2019; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017)	References to migration cooperation as a means to achieve international migration management
		References to the **facilitation** of return of migrants to their countries of origin (Boswell, 2007)	References to migration cooperation as a means to facilitate the return of migrants to their country of origin
		References to return as **allowing** migrants to use their skills for the development of their country of origin (Wise, 2018)	
		References to the goal of **achieving** security for countries of destination (Wise, 2018)	

		References to the goal of **achieving** development to **reduce** levels of out-migration (Bakewell, 2008)	
		References to efforts that **facilitate** orderly migration	
	Theoretical legitimation	References to '**truth claims**' that frame irregular migration as a phenomenon that originates outside the country of destination (Wise, 2018)	
		References to the **science** of migration as caused by underdevelopment (Bakewell, 2008; Collyer, 2019)	
Authority legitimation	Impersonal authority	References to authoritative **policy guidelines** for migration management (Crane, 2019)	
		References to common Dutch or European **policy** (Huysmans, 2000)	
	Personal authority	References to external authorities' migration management efforts that serve as **examples** for own actions	References to the importance of creating societal support among the Dutch population for migration policy
		References to common Dutch or European **interest** (Huysmans, 2000)	References that delegitimate criticism from the media
Mythopoeic legitimation	Moral tales	References to the positive effects of migration management that have been or will be achieved, such as development and security (Collyer, 2019)	
	Cautionary tales	References to past or potential future migration **crises** (Huysmans, 2000)	References to the influx of asylum seekers as putting pressure on the country of destination
		References to potential **negative effects of migration** for receiving countries (Boswell, 2007; Dekker & Scholten, 2017)	
		References to the prevention of a **rising number** of migrants (Boswell, 2007)	