ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM

Redefining Reception at the Border:

The role of non-state actors in welcoming People on the Move in Melilla.

Governance of Migration and Diversity

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Abstract

Reception is significantly under theorized by migration scholarship, typically assuming that front-line reception is solely a state led process. In a different light, the recent literature on local governance has increasingly recognised the role of non-state actors in collaborating with state bodies to welcome people on the move. This study further challenges this sphere of governance and expands it to mirror new welcoming strategies at the border, co-created by independent non-state actors. In Melilla, a bottom-up model of reception is emerging due to a strong social fabric of grassroot initiatives. Here, reception is characterized by a spirit of "welcomeness'' from the locality toward unaccompanied migrant children and asylum seekers. Welcoming acts are carried out through apolitical action, public policy contestation, and community building. These strategies form part of an early and ongoing collective effort that helps PoM establish a sense of belonging. This perspective on reception pushes for more inclusive forms of horizontal governance, and is vital to understand the strict link between early welcomeness and future integration.

1. Introduction

This paper draws from interviews and field notes collected in Melilla, focusing on the reception of asylum seekers and unaccompanied migrant children (UMC). It analyzes the collaboration between actors involved in these processes, comparing the traditional, government-like approach in asylum reception with the emerging horizontal governance seen in UMC reception. This shift toward horizontal governance in the UMC system reflects a broader trend, that is, a move from state-non-state collaboration toward increased independent non-state action in local border reception. In this light, this work will demonstrate instances of collective resistance to top-down reception structures and the development of alternative, grassroots strategies for welcoming people on the move (PoM).

By identifying key collaboration patterns in the reception of UMC including the role of local society and state reception centers, this paper redefines reception from the bottom-up. Similarly, it emphasizes the potential of incorporating non-state led action into more inclusive horizontal governance schemes in the context of small border cities or localities. This could help mirror the complexity of social interactions at particular borders spaces and help recognise the

power of community-building to organize and protect vulnerable groups by making ready resources available for PoM.

The concept of "welcomeness" as a defining feature of reception is also explored through diverse and de-politicised acts of reception initiated by local actors. As it will become clear, these initiatives take place in non-state led spaces of interaction with PoM. For instance, the street or community centers become autonomous spheres of social action that respond to the every-day need of UMC. These interactions help build a more inclusive and supportive environment for PoM, challenging rigid state structures of reception and other state-led administrative barriers at the border.

2. Social Relevance

In Spain, laws and regulations for receiving PoM are set by the central government. The State Secretary for Migration (SSM), part of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration, manages the formal reception of asylum seekers. The SSM oversees four government-run reception centers and funds twenty NGO-operated centers. It also supervises the Directorate General for Migration, which handles reception for asylum seekers, stateless persons, those with temporary protection, and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (ECRE 2023). Despite this national policy framework, local governments are increasingly playing a crucial role in managing migration. Zapata-Barrero (2012) notes that "leadership in the management of migratory policies falls to town councils" (p. 193), highlighting the disconnect between national politicization and local implementation.

Over time, the Asylum Centre Database has reported many challenges in providing adequate reception conditions for vulnerable groups in Ceuta and Melilla. One major issue is the "Immigrant Temporary Stay Centres" (CETIs), managed by the state, which serve as the first contact point for undocumented, newly arrived, non-identified asylum seekers. While CETIs have the potential to identify and protect vulnerable PoM upon their arrival, limited resources hinder local NGOs and UNHCR from performing their duties effectively (ECRE Country Report 2023). Similarly, UMC are housed in Centres for the Protection of Minors, which are also public

institutions supported by local state workers. Both systems have faced criticism for exposing individuals to harsh treatment in these isolated border areas.

Melilla, like Ceuta, is heavily influenced by Spain's colonial history in Morocco and its racialized borders. These enclaves highlight the lasting impact of border controls on people of Moroccan descent. Melilla's exclusion from the Schengen area exacerbates the isolation of asylum seekers and UMC, emphasizing the unique challenges they face. Due to the social complexities of this border city, local governments and social actors are increasingly challenging state migration policies and developing strategies to address diversity (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholten, 2017). Given the state's insufficient support for welcoming services, it's crucial to examine the role of local reception workers, NGOs, and civil society in fostering solidarity and inclusiveness in Melilla (Scholten & Penninx, 2016).

3. Scientific Relevance

This research contributes to the literature on the local turn in immigration policy (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002; Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Caponio & Borkert, 2010), by focusing on how the turn towards local governance in Melilla shapes reception for PoM. It addresses the gap in understanding how Melilla's local government and NGOs interact with the national level and among themselves, responding to the challenges of their fluid local societies (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholten, 2017). In this line, it is relevant to understand how national and local levels collaborate or diverge in reception policies. However, this study goes further to examine how local negotiation processes or intermediaries can create more welcoming conditions for vulnerable populations (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholten, 2017).

In the context of the isolated land borders of Ceuta and Melilla, these border spaces do not seem to fit the centralist model, when studying their reception policies and practices. This would mean a clear top-down distribution of work, and a strong institutionalist policy coordination at the national or european level, leading to policy convergence with local actors in the region (Scholten & Pennix 2016, p. 92). Instead, these cities are expected to follow a localist model, whereby local actors engage in divergent reception practices, respond to local agendas,

exchange knowledge horizontally with other local actors and implement their own policies (p. 93).

As mentioned by Scholten and Pennix (2016), Borkert and Bosswick (2007) and Vermeulen and Stotijn (2010), "local policies are more likely than national policies to be accommodative of ethnic diversity and work together with migrant organizations, due in part to the practical need to manage ethnic differences in a city" (p. 99). Moreover, literature agrees that cities are more prone to place more emphasis on pragmatism, trust, participation and social cohesion, while at the national level, the focus is more on "immigration control and sovereignty" (Garcés-Mascareñas & Rinus Penninx 2016, p. 4). While there has been plenty of empirical work that focused on national-local interactions, there is less research that has focused on the horizontal interaction among local actors in informing welcoming practices of reception (Schiller 2018).

To better understand the dynamics in Ceuta and Melilla and address local diversity challenges, more studies should focus on local governance in each city. Given their diverse contexts and distinct migration processes, this study will focus solely on Melilla. Therefore, it is assumed that local actors interact to maintain social cohesion and trust in their transient societies. This leads to the following research question:

4. Research Question

How do local state and non-state actors organize and collaborate to ensure welcoming reception practices for PoM in Melilla?

1) How do local non-state actors (NGOs and civil society) interact between each other and with local state actors (reception centers) in response to the challenge of asylum and UMC reception?
(2) How is reception governance being redefined in the border city of Melilla?
(3) How does a move towards non-state action play out in the border city of Melilla?

5. Theoretical Framework:

In the following section, the main theories and concepts will be discussed and theoretically expectations will be presented.

5.1. The Governance Perspective

This research critiques the limited view of "methodological nationalism" in studying local reception. It argues that this approach neglects the impact of local conviviality on relationships between residents and PoM. The Melilla-Nador border, historically a site of frequent transboundary movement involving Moroccan and Spanish commuters, emphasizes the region's colonial history and economic interdependence. This perspective challenges the conventional nation-state narrative, which often ignores indigenous and cross-border dynamics. Instead, to fully grasp current reception practices, Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten's (2017) multi-level governance (MLG) perspective is used as the first lens of analysis.

They focus on the **local turn** of MLG. Their work highlights the increasing role of small cities in comparison to large metropoles, in co-producing reception responses to migration-led diversity. Concretely, border cities, due to their geographical proximity to PoM, experience at their doorstep the impact of 'bordering' on the lives of trans-border communities, asylum seekers or commonly – in the case of Melilla – UMC. Turning our eyes on how the city of Melilla responds to migratory journeys or sedentary ones for that matter, can help us understand "state-based models of immigration management" (p.242). Zapata-Barrero et. als (2017) define two main dimensions of interaction between diverse actors: **horizontal** relations and **vertical** relations of governance.

Horizontal Level (local governance)	Vertical Level (local-national)
Society-State cooperation,	center–periphery
City-City collaboration	Policy contradictions
Local government collaboration with migrant organizations/NGO	Distinct policy frames across levels

At the vertical level, local immigration governance interacts with higher government levels, such as national authorities. Local reception actors, like the Temporary Stay Centre for Immigrants (CETI) and the Centres for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, work with national or regional bodies, including the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations, and the Local Council for Minors. However, this vertical focus is well-covered in migration governance literature.

At a **horizontal level**, Scholten (2016) examines interactions between local society, civil society, NGOs, and the local state. This "local-turn" in governance arises as local governments respond to migration-led diversity. They collaborate with NGOs and vulnerable PoM representatives to foster trust and community participation. Local policies, however, can be shaped by political circumstances, which may either support social cohesion and or mobilize minority representation, depending on the socio-political climate (pp. 99-100).

This work explores in more detail the horizontal dimension of local reception, suggesting that local policymakers possess the "creative power to match migration policies with the socio-political and economic needs" of Melilla (Caponio & Borrket, 2010, p. 9). It expects local representatives and NGOs to adopt innovative, pragmatic approaches to reception strategies, fostering social cohesion and trust in the border city. This could lead to a policy divergence between the national level, often more skeptical and politicized, and the local level (Scholten, 2016, p. 93). But, *how do local state actors collaborate with civil society and non-state actors in welcoming PoM?*
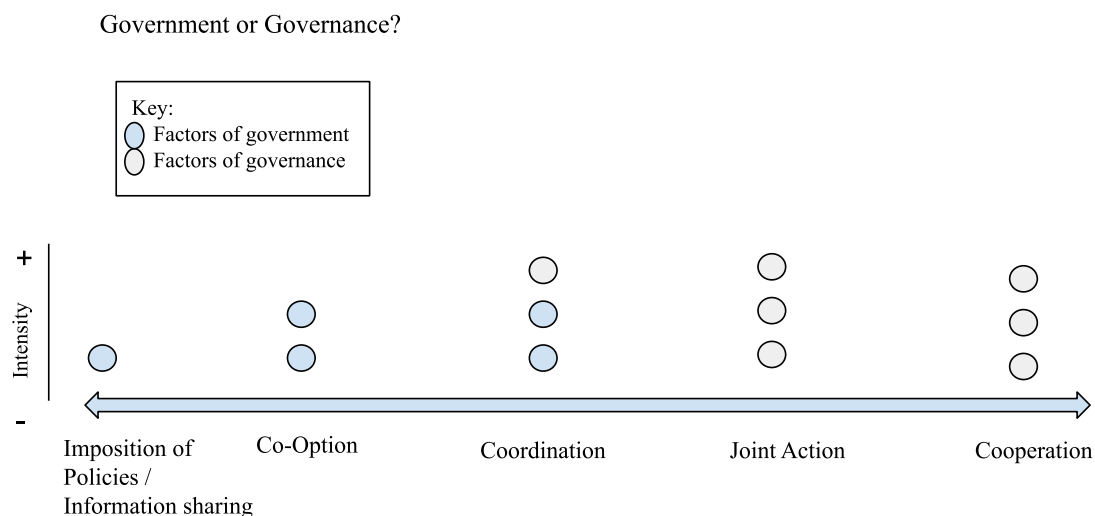
Mapping Collaboration:

Under a horizontal level of analysis, it is important to explore and map the types of collaboration between the state reception centers – UMC reception centers, asylum center (CETI) – and NGOs as well as civil society members (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholten 2017, p. 243).

Degree of Collaboration:

Moreover, to explore in more detail the network of collaboration in the two specific reception systems, this study incorporates Schiller's (2018) analytical model for local governance. As emphasized by Schiller (2018), it is important to understand the ways in which "non-state and state actors are involved in the making of local policy-responses to migration-based diversity" (p. 206). It reveals key indicators like actors' positionality vis-a-vis each other, which can be related to the size and power of each organization, their intensity of interaction and the degree of hierarchy between actors. Following the diagram below, the asylum and UMC reception systems will be compared in relation to their degree of collaboration with civil society and NGOs.

Figure 2: Analytical Model

As shown in *Figure 2*, this degree of collaboration allows us to put into perspective the dynamic nature of local governance. It is important to note that the type of relationship built between two or more actors is not static, but rather fluid. Therefore, the diagram explains the practices and changes in the relationship between the local state and non-state actors or amongst like-minded entities (p. 207).

Schiller (2018) describes the most hierarchical governance as the imposition of policies by state actors or information sharing by non-state actors, characterized by low intensity between actors. This occurs when "state actors impose policies and non-state actors learn post-facto about

the policy-making process or outcome" (p. 208). In a second, more coordinated scenario, there is a flat hierarchy and low intensity, with actors coordinating and consulting each other. A third scenario involves cooptation, where state actors co-opt like-minded non-state actors into policy formation, maintaining high hierarchy and intense interactions. The final scenario is the cooperation and coproduction of local policies by both state and non-state actors, characterized by a flat hierarchy and intense collaboration, ensuring both perspectives inform the policymaking process.

The fieldwork also indicated that trust is a key factor in the fluid nature of governing relationships. Trust influences collaborations, as it is built inter-personally and within specific contexts, depending on local actors and the spaces of interaction built together or separately that encourage or hinder trust. High trust promotes more cooperative and collaborative relationships, while low trust correlates with higher levels of hierarchy and less interaction among actors. In line with Schiller (2018), lower trust indicates **government-like relationships**. Alternatively, high trust will demonstrate signs of **horizontal governance** in the field of reception.

Given the politicization and normalization of restrictive asylum policies at European borders, and Scholten's (2016) observation that the socio-political climate impacts migration governance, it is expected that hierarchical relationships will dominate the asylum reception system. However, the historical movement of UMC across the Melilla-Nador border may spur stronger political mobilization from civil society for this group (pp. 99-100). This implies that horizontal governance will be more prominent in the UMC reception system. Local NGOs and civil society are thus expected to engage cooperatively in welcoming UMC, while state workers in the asylum reception center (CETI) and NGOs may operate in a more hierarchical manner.

Notwithstanding, this approach can also be used to disprove solely state-non-state collaboration. The following theoretical lens expands on an alternative way of understanding local reception on the ground. More importantly, it theorises how to conceive of an increase in the role of non-state actors in reception governance.

5.2. Bottom-Up Reception Governance

While Schiller's (2018) analytical framework examines degrees of collaboration within the scope of governance or government, Jonitz, Schiller, and Scholten (2024) critique this focus for its rigidity and lack of replicability to explain reception on the ground. This alternative view argues that such an approach overlooks **the role of non-state actors operating outside this structure and their increasing role in facilitating reception strategies for PoM in small cities.** In this line, this paper studies the role of non-state actors in countering governmental initiatives to provide a more comprehensive approach to migration-led diversity. Empirically, *it is crucial to observe if and how non-state actors are moving beyond the traditional state-non-state collaboration model*. Therefore, this lens aims to expand the scope of reception beyond solely state-funded spaces, such as public reception centers, to include other non-state, community built spaces to welcome PoM.

As part of this debate, Ambrosini (2021) argues that "de-bordering solidarity" occurs when mundane citizens engage in voluntary, a-political actions. These local volunteers play a crucial role in challenging state reception practices to support PoM. This view strengthens the idea of non-state actors operating outside state-led collaboration to provide more solidarity experiences that can yield a new sense of belonging and entitlement among PoM. This form of strategic resistance in the reception of PoM is vital against the backdrop of national narratives and a hostile border space.

In the same line, Jonitz, Schiller, and Scholten (2024) describe how "local authorities carry out formal duties while outsourcing tasks to non-public actors which support refugees through formal and informal activities and services." These diverse forms of activities are conceptualized in this work as ´welcoming´ reception strategies. These services are facilitated and thus dependent on the social fabric or network of non-state actors in Melilla. As defined by Jonitz et als. (2024), these non-state actors include institutionalized entities like CSOs as well as emerging civil society initiatives, including residents. They distinguish between **'formal organizations'** that have official or contract agreements with local governments to provide services for refugees and '**informal actors',** such as churches, faith-based organizations, and voluntary groups, that do not receive dedicated funding for these tasks. Additionally, informal

actors are structurally more flexible and can offer a variety of services, ranging from language support and legal advice to facilitating social cohesion and interaction among residents and people on the move. Notably, this group can still apply for state subsidies to engage in reception governance structures. However, this paper prioritizes understanding civic action and organization outside the traditional governance scheme of reception. This will be done by exploring the growing role of non-state actors in building alternative spaces of interaction with PoM in Melilla.

To expand on Schiller´s (2018) and contribute to Jonitz et al. (2024), this work will first examine the **types of collaboration** among local state and non-state actors within the **UMC** and **asylum reception system**—whether *government-like, governance-based, or driven by rising non-state action*. It will then highlight trends toward either open or closed **spheres of interaction.** If an open sphere of interaction is identified, this will be indicative of a move beyond the government-governance scheme. In contrast, if a closed sphere is detected, this will refer to the stability or maintenance of strict collaboration between the state and like-minded (governmental or non-state) entities.

I.   Typology of local reception systems:

Aspects	X reception system	Y reception system
Type of collaboration	Governance/Government	Rise of non-state action
Sphere of interaction	Closed sphere of interaction **(state-IGO)**	Open sphere of interaction **(state-local society-CSO)**
Operational dynamics	Static rules and hierarchical work	Fluidity and cooperation
Policy outcome	No policy change	Policy learning
Protection for PoM	Lack of protection/arbitrary treatment	Protection for PoM

The typology table presents several expectations regarding trends in collaboration that could suffice in each reception system. Should a trend towards non-state action be identified, it will be characterized by open interaction between local state and civil society actors. Conversely,

if governance or government collaboration is identified, it will result in a closed sphere of interaction, marked by static rules and hierarchical relationships in the reception of PoM. This perspective challenges traditional top-down governance frameworks by emphasizing the agency and influence of local non-state actors in shaping inclusive and responsive reception strategies.

Given this integrated lens, this paper will strive to argue that maintaining a top-down government-governance approach hinders policy learning and perpetuates inadequate protection for PoM. This approach leads to a dissociation of state actors from the migratory needs of PoM, exposing them to restrictive and arbitrary treatment by state bodies. This research aims to reveal the extent to which **local reception is deeply intertwined with the social fabric and welcoming practices of actors such as non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations**. It emphasizes the roles these actors play in enabling policy learning to meet the changing needs of PoM in front-line and often sedentary reception conditions.

5. 3. Welcoming People on the Move

The concept of reception or termed by Carbonell et al. (2020) "welcoming" has been neglected from a theoretical perspective. Without a clear framework, it is hard to distinguish policies of 'welcoming' or 'receiving' PoM from processes of integration. This gap in the study of reception can encourage situations of socio-legal limbo for PoM, especially at early stages of entering a locality, when administrative barriers and structural violence are most felt by individuals in the frontier between access or restriction to basic services.

In this context, it is crucial to bridge the study of reception and the contested definition of integration. While integration is typically seen as a long-term process involving a migrant's willingness to join society, this paper focuses on **how early 'welcomingness' impacts their future integration**. Emphasizing welcomingness highlights local actions in creating solidarity spaces, countering the traditional view of reception as only present via state-led detention centers or via acts of temporary protection. These statist forms of reception ultimately lead to exclusion and stigmatization of PoM in later stages of integration. Instead, by documenting civil society's role, this paper challenges the state-dominated reception model commonly described as isolating and inhumane, and suggests a collective approach to reception that restores agency and

decision-making power to PoM at earlier stages of their migratory journey. This bridges the gap between reception and integration by showing how individuals can challenge preconceived notions of fitting into a container society by gaining more agency earlier on in the process and, together with civil society, co-create a more welcoming community.

This calls for a move away from top-down foundations of reception as solely related to state led detention or temporary protection for PoM. Unequivocally, reception has been at times strictly linked to border spaces being sights of detention (Mountz A. (2011); Swanson, K (2019); Abdirahman O. (2017); Van der Woude et als. (2017); Silverman & Molnar, 2021 and more). Alternatively, reception has also been conceived as temporary (Oesch, L. (2019); Stoyanova, V. (2022); Triandafyllidou, A. (2022) and more). In both cases, reception is understood as a top-down governance or government process, whereby state bodies and co-opted agencies impose rigid structures of reception assistance i..e, public reception centers, and state/NGO worker assistance. In turn, these services are typically embedded in politicized visions of *otherness*, when depicting PoM.

It is even more necessary to draw bottom-up practices of welcoming PoM in isolated land borders to contribute to the theoretical gap of reception. Based on the field work in Melilla, and the idealized *Y Reception System* in the previous typology table, this paper redefines reception from the perspective of civil society initiatives. Here, regular residents – with or without migration backgrounds – engage in bottom-up, non-state action to welcome PoM. Following Jonitz, Schiller, & Scholten (2024), **reception is conceptualized as ´welcoming´ strategies in alternative city spaces, where PoM and local actors interact, separate from rigid state-driven action.**

Therefore, this research aims to determine if diverse collaborations among non-state actors enhance the protection of PoM in Melilla by identifying new reception spaces created exclusively by these actors. Following Jonitz, Schiller, & Scholten (2024), the study expects to find independent efforts of non-state actors in fostering autonomy and a sense of rootedness for PoM.

6. Research Design

6.1. Case Selection

Spain was chosen for its crucial role as a gateway into the EU, particularly through key entry points like the Canary Islands and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa. These locations make Spain an ideal setting to explore how local actors manage the complex dynamics of reception, especially in the face of increasing border violence. I selected a small border town to focus on, aiming to highlight how NGOs and local state officials navigate these often-politicized spaces to provide essential welcoming services for PoM.

This choice also aligns with the recent academic focus on the "local-turn" in migration governance, which emphasizes the significant role small localities play in managing migration-led diversity. While much research has centered on integration in large cities or towns in mainland Europe, there is also a notable gap in understanding reception in border areas, particularly under conditions of rising violence, detention, and deportation. By studying Melilla, this paper challenges academia to reconsider how current governance schemes are shaping reception at the border, and to rethink integration based on a fuller understanding of how an individual's early migratory journey influences their later rootedness. For this reason, I chose a small border city as the focus of this case study. Moreover, my ability to speak Spanish also facilitated my choice in a Spanish border city, which enabled deeper, more nuanced conversations with the participants involved.

Moreover, choosing Melilla for this study was strategic, as my volunteer work with a local NGO allowed close engagement with reception governance. This provided direct access to grassroots NGOs and limited interaction with state actors during monthly roundtables, focusing on both UMC and asylum seekers. This work compares these two reception systems, reflecting the network divide between services for UMC and those for asylum seekers. Additionally, volunteering enriched the research by engaging in interviews with diverse local stakeholders. Partnering with Solidary Wheels, an NGO that documents human rights abuses, helped to build trust with their team as I supported their ongoing social, legal, and research efforts. This collaboration also extended to building trust with other smaller NGOs.

6.2. Data Collection

To explore all sub-questions and understand reception policymaking across governance levels, including the shift towards non-state action, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local NGOs and state actors in both reception systems. Open questions encouraged fluid responses, providing in-depth testimonies from front-line NGO staff and social workers on policy implementation (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

In addition to interviews, field notes from participant observation were used to provide empirical examples of collaboration. A focused observation methodology guided what to observe during specific meetings based on interview insights (Kawulich, 2005). This was complemented by selective observation, focusing on different event settings to note differences in collaboration (Angrosino & De Perez, 2000). The field notes were gathered during UMC roundtables and general asylum roundtables.

In the context of the UMC protection and asylum reception roundtables, I observed interactions between state bodies or IGOs and smaller NGOs or CSO initiatives. These meetings were particularly valuable because my attempts to interview high-level officials in the asylum reception system were often rejected. For example, the Director General of the CETI (asylum center) remarked in an email to me that such requests were uncommon for a "high-level" body like theirs. This experience highlighted the public administration's distance from academic research, revealing a significant lack of transparency and a high level of politicization surrounding the issue of asylum reception.

Interview Table:

Respondents	Name/Org.	Position	Where	When	Length
R1	Alvaro/CEAR	Asylum Lawyer in CETI.	Melilla	3rd of May 2024	50 min.
R2	L. /UNHCR	Team Coordinator	Melilla	5th of May 2024	40 min.
R3	Mar / Solidary	NGO Lawyer	Melilla	12th of May 2024	40 min.

	Wheels (SW)				
R4	Lourdes/SW	Social Worker	Melilla	17th of May 2024	40 min.
R5	Sisi & Fati/YoDono	Grassroot org/ social workers	Melilla	21st of May, 2024	1h.
R6	Andres/Gota de Leche (UMC centre)	Educator, pedagogue, director of UMC branch of center.	Melilla	23rd of May, 2024	50 min.
R7	Maite/MDLR	Grassroot org. Social Worker	Melilla	3rd of June, 2024	1h.
R8	Susana/ UNICEF	Childhood policymaker in Ceuta and Melilla.	Online	5th of June, 2024	40 min.
R9	Nerea/Fiet	NGO/Psychologist	Melilla	7th of June, 2024	45 min.

The interview with the Pedagogue/Director of the UMC branch in Gota de Leche, one of the three UMC reception centers, revealed vital governance collaborations, highlighting daily horizontal relationships with the local council for minors and active cooperation with other CSOs. Interviews with local NGOs like MDLR and YoDono provided insights into grassroots reception strategies. The UNHCR interview touched on the politicization of asylum reception but also emphasized expanding cooperation with local NGOs. Meanwhile, the UNICEF interview emphasized their stand in supporting non-state action and future projects with both state and non-state actors to better UMC rights in Melilla. Aside from the interviews with SW, which revolved around the logistical and daily work of the organization, my volunteer experience with this NGO also helped me understand the local reception efforts in the city.

Participant Observation Table:

Local State Bodies/Actor	Details	Duration
DGC: Javier Soria Zaragoza	*Insights gathered from field notes at the Childhood roundtable.*	2h.
UMC Religious Center, Divina Infantita: Madre (Director)	*An introductory meeting was held in the UMC center, but a full interview was not possible due to her illness.*	1 h intro meeting.
CETI	*Lack of transparency prevented interviews; but throughout my volunteer experience testimonies helped construct an understanding of reception conditions in the asylum center.*	-
UMC Centre, Purisima.	*Direct access was restricted; concerns about management impunity were noted from several UMC.* *Information was obtained through Gota de Leche, MDLR, and SW as a volunteer, revealing that children involved in street education activities and communal dinners often view Purisima as a 'prison'.*	-

6.3. Sampling Strategy

The respondents for the interviews were selected based on a non-random process, whereby purposive sampling was used for both approaches, and snowballing was also used for the interviews (Babbie 2016). While, purposive sampling enabled the identification of respondents based on a clear-cut, theoretically defined approach, the snowballing practice allowed for tracing NGOs, and other actors in the reception networks which were later considered as respondents for the interviews (Barlowski 2016, pp. 161-165). The selection criteria for the interviews were: (1) NGO staff members and project lead in the respected reception systems, including Solidary Wheels, CEAR and other active NGOs in Melilla, (2) via snowballing, partner organizations, and (3) officials working in the UMC or asylum reception centers.

6.4. Data Analysis

The interview questions were guided by a closed codebook developed from theory derived assumptions (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011). The coding process was conducted in three cycles:

Cycles of coding	Actions	Codes
First cycle	Focused on categories to divide the three sub-questions: (1) mapping collaboration, (1) the degree of collaboration, (2) independent non-state action, and (3) material acts of welcoming people on the move (PoM).	1. State-non-state collaboration 2. Government or governance 3. Non-state action 4. Material/community action
Second cycle	Expanded the initial four codes into more detailed sets.	**State-non-state collaboration**: 5. UMC state-non-state collaboration 6. Asylum state-non-state collaboration **Government or governance**: 7. Co-option 8. Coordination 9. Cooperation 10. Joint action **Non-state action & Community Action**: 11. Fluidity in cooperation 12. Policy learning 13. A-political action 14. Independent community building actions.
Third cycle	Further refinement of categories, focusing on specific interactions, comparing reception systems, and merging non-state action with material acts.	**UMC & Asylum State-non-state collaboration**: 15. Local state-NGO/IGO collaboration 16. NGO-CSO collaboration 17. Intermediary collaboration Government or governance? Analysis of **similarities and differences** in reception systems **Non-state action & Material acts of**

		welcoming: Same categories as in the second cycle.

Therefore, a total of 17 codes were created to analyze the interviews and field notes. The latter categories of similarities and differences only helped distribute the findings into a coherent structure for the discussion and analysis section.

As explained above in a more systematic way, the information from the transcribed interviews was analyzed with a pattern matching technique to identify patterns in the data and compare them with arguments derived from the study's theoretical framework. This enabled both the themes and patterns collected to inform and test my initial theoretical expectations. (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy 2014).

6.5. Ethical Considerations & Feasibility of study:

In light of the qualitative nature of my migration research it was important to reflect on the ethical challenges of my work. While conducting field interviews, especially in small NGOs, it was important to remain conscious of potential forms of extractivism in my own research practice. I was confronted with this due to the fact that I was reaching out to NGOs that are self-organizing entities and who's organization structure depended entirely on volunteers. For this reason, I discussed with some respondents the possibility of extending my research by volunteering for two or three months with these entities after completing my research.

In relation to trust and consent during interviews it was key to ensure that respondents were well prepared and well-informed, and I was constantly aware of potential consequences of their participation, i.e., resurging sensitive topics. In cases of engaging in conversation with PoM, it was important to maintain the anonymity of the person. This also applied to anyone who expressed a problem with sharing their identity. Distinctively, power dynamics were at times present during interactions with respondents, so it was vital to create and ensure safe spaces.

Moreover, in terms of the categorisation of studied groups, the choice of definitions were carried out in a critical manner, giving weight to the various connotations that can be linked to certain migrant groups. I also constantly questioned the positionality of my own work, as a

researcher and tried when possible, to engage in inclusive discussions. In this manner, many reflections during the research included recognizing the intersectional nature of migration (gender, class, race, nationality, age, education, undocumented status, etc) and one's privilege in this sphere of study.

6.6. Operationalization Table

Concept	Definition	Dimensions	Indicators	Sources
Horizontal Governance of Reception. **(IV)**	The interaction and level of collaboration between the local society and local state entities in response to the challenges of migration-led diversity.	Mapping collaboration Zapata-Barreraet. als (2017)	Collaboration between state actor and NGOs/civil society. *(Zapata Barrero et. al, 2017, p.243).	From field notes and interviews.
			Collaboration amongst NGOs and civil society. Zapata Barrero et. al's (2017) and work on solidarity at border spaces (Gilberti, Potot 2021; Bauder 2020; Filippi et. al 2021).	
			IGO's as intermediary actors between the local state, and NGOs. (Steffek 2013).	
		Degree of Collaboration Schiller (2018)	Imposition of policy/information sharing: low trust, high hierarchy and low intensity.	Field notes and interviews
			Co-option -	
			consultation/coordination: medium trust, flat hierarchy but minimal interaction.	
			Joint action: high trust, flat hierarchy and intense interaction.	
			Cooperation: high trust, hierarchy and interaction.	

		Rise of non-state action	Separate non-state spaces of interaction with PoM. Alliances and dynamics of sharing, or contesting power around the issue of reception: bottom-up policy learning (Jonitz et. als, 2024).	
			Non-state actors supporting PoM through "formal and informal activities and services" (Jonitz et. als, 2024).	
			A-political action, de-bordering solidarity (Ambrosini 2021)	
Reception of PoM: Welcome-ness (DV)	Following Jonitz, Schiller, & Scholten (2024), **reception is conceptualized as ´welcoming´ strategies in alternative city spaces, where PoM and local actors interact, separate from rigid state-driven action.**	Welcomeness	**Formal Services:** - Housing - Public education (schooling) - Documentation - Employment **City spaces of interaction:** - Public reception centers - Public schools - Office buildings.	Field notes and interviews.
			Informal services: (Ambrosini 2021) - educational programmes - food distribution, - recreational activities, - access to social rights, sense of togetherness (p. 382). **City space of interaction:** - state/non-state roundtables - community spaces - street education.	

7. Analysis

7.1. Mapping of the Asylum and UMC Reception Systems

Several types of interactions were found in the asylum and UMC reception systems. These interactions are explored in the two diagrams below:

Figure 3. Asylum Reception System - Network

Government Sphere inside CETI

Governance Sphere outside CETI

Melilla Acoge

ACCEM CETI CEAR

UNHCR

CEAR FIET

Protection Roundtable

UNHCR Solidary Wheels

Note: *there are many more NGOs participating in the protection roundtable but they do not work with asylum seekers.*

—— Local state - NGO/IGO collaboration.
—— NGO-CSO collaboration
—— IGO as intermediary actor
—— : vertical network
—— **:** horizontal network
Bold: interviewed actors.

Figure 4. UMC reception system - network

Purple: IGOs/NGOs
Blue: State Reception Centers
Yellow: Local NGOs and CSO
Orange: horizontal network
—— : vertical network

Governance Network

NANA Proj. Alpha Centro Fratelli CEAR SC

Purisima **Gota de Leche** Divina Infantita

MDLR Fiet

UNICEF Local Council for Minors **UNHCR**

SW **YoDono** MdM

Note: *not all civil society actors (yellow ones) were interviewed, so only MDLR, SW, YoDono and Project Alpha are discussed in the next sections.*

7.2. Degree of Collaboration between non-state, IGO and state actors

In this part of the analysis, I used the Schiller (2018) model to report on instances of government-like interactions and horizontal governance in the asylum and UMC reception systems in Melilla. I observed a more extensive horizontal governance network within the UMC reception system compared to the asylum reception system. Given the significant role of non-state actors in ensuring reception for UMCs, this paper proposes at a later stage, a reconfiguration of Schiller's (2018) model, moving away from the binary, government or government scheme in the study of local reception.

The tables below outline the four degrees of collaboration identified after mapping the actors in each system: *information sharing, coordination, cooperation,* and *joint action*. As the theory suggests, the nature of these collaborations depended on the level of trust, influencing whether they resembled government or governance relationships. Therefore, as it will be discussed below, government-like relationships, marked by lower trust, featured hierarchical structures and limited interactions between actors. In contrast, governance relationships, with higher trust, showed horizontal and intense interactions.

Figure 5. Asylum Reception Table

Actor 1	Actor 2	Trust (1-4)	Level of Collaboration	Governance or Government?
CETI	UNHCR	3	Coordination	Government
CETI	CEAR	3	Coordination/Co-op.	
CETI	Medicos del Mundo	2	Information sharing	
CEAR	UNHCR	4	Cooperation	Governance
CEAR	Fiet	4	Coordination/Coop.	
UNHCR	Solidary Wheels	3	Coordination/coop.	

Figure 6. UMC Reception Table

Actor 1	Actor 2	Trust (1-4)	Level of Collaboration	Governance or Government?
UMC centers	CEAR	4	Cooperation	Governance
UMC centers	UNHCR	4	Cooperation	
UMC centers	UNICEF	4	Cooperation	
UMC Centres	Cruz Blanca	2	Information sharing	Government
UMC Centres	Medicos del Mundo	2	Information sharing	
UMC Centres	Fiet	2	Information sharing	
UMC Centres	Save the Children	3	Coordination/coop.	Governance
UMC Centres	NANA association	3	Coordination/coop.	
YoDono	NANA	4	Joint Action	-
YoDono	MDLR	4	Cooperation, Joint Action	Governance
MDLR	Save the Children	4	Cooperation, Joint Action	
Solidary Wheels	MDLR	3	Coordination, Joint Action	
Solidary Wheels	Save the Children	4	Cooperation, Joint Action	
Solidary Wheels	Hijas de la Caridad	4	Cooperation, Joint Action	
Solidary Wheels	Project Alpha	4	Joint Action	-

To compare the state reception systems for asylum seekers and UMCs, the first section highlights their main similarity: both systems featured **government-like information sharing** interactions. The second section explores key differences. In asylum reception, there were few interactions between state and non-state actors, which created a **closed network of collaboration**. In contrast, the UMC system showed more horizontal governance, with extensive interactions and new collaborative spaces amongst non-state actors, which lead to an **open network of collaboration**.

Similarities between Asylum and UMC Reception

Following Schiller's (2018) analytical model, **information sharing** was primarily observed during workshops and conferences, where NGOs like Medicos del Mundo and Cruz Blanca conducted events in state reception centers. These events focused on educating vulnerable UMCs about preventing prostitution and sexual exploitation amongst this migrant group, and providing psycho-emotional support for asylum residents at the CETI. The collaboration level, rated as level 2 trust, was influenced by the hierarchical relationship between state reception centers and NGOs, requiring NGOs to seek approval for workshops. This reflected a government-like structure with limited interaction, as these educational programs were not integrated into the daily operations of the centers. According to Schiller (2018), this is conceived as a result of an imposed policy framework where local NGOs only learned about whether they can conduct workshops in state centers after policy decisions were made at higher levels of governance.

Differences between Asylum and UMC reception

In the context of asylum, moments of government and governance were found. First of all, *coordination* and aspects of *co-option* were found to be an example of *government-like* relationships, between the CETI, CEAR and UNHCR. In contrast to information sharing, more agency was recorded among these actors. The nature of this relationship was categorized as a level 3 of trust. The factors influencing trust and thus collaboration were related to the size and power of these organizations, the positionality of the local actors, as well as the intensity of interaction among actors.

The size and power of CEAR was visible in the words of Alvaro, CEAR asylum lawyer: "*The old asylum law of 1984 names CEAR in its preamble, as it was a forerunner and had great collaboration with the legislators.*". This illustrated the NGOs recognised 'powerful' national and international outreach. Additionally, CEAR, as a non-state actor, played an active part in the design/implementation of asylum policies by taking up legal case work and accompanying each asylum seeker through the application process. In turn, the Ministry (national body) only cooperated with CEAR because it was made to conform to their views (Schiller 2018, p. 7). This embedded form of co-option in the government scheme of the CETI, showed the politicized nature of asylum in Melilla.

The UNHCR Team Coordinator highlighted the significance of positionality and organizational power in collaboration with the CETI. He stated, "*I want to fight against the CETI, ... but the CETI is run by them ... UNHCR has great power, ... it all depends on how it is used and put into practice. It's one thing to use it to claim it for yourself, it's another to use it to leverage the power of others.*" This quote reflects the vertical, governmental relationship between UNHCR and the CETI. It shows how UNHCR's institutional power could potentially influence smaller NGOs, yet its actual impact remained limited. Despite its monitoring role, UNHCR's presence was often noted in the field work as symbolic rather than effective, with little noticeable impact on residents' lives. This situation emphasized the coordinating role of UNHCR within the asylum reception system but also highlighted the persistence of hierarchical structures or as termed by Schiller (2018) co-optive relations between formally like-minded entities.

Additionally, both the UNHCR Team Coordinator and the Solidary Wheels (SW) lawyer highlighted key events demonstrating the **CETI's unidirectional decision-making power.** The first event was the entry bans on Moroccan nationals from 2021 to 2022, and the second was the arbitrary expulsions of South American residents in April 2024. These decisions, influenced by local political pressures and convivial realities between residents, reflected a pattern of arbitrary exclusion rather than genuine accommodation (Scholten, 2016).

During the pandemic, Moroccan nationals were unjustly excluded from accommodation under the guise of public health measures, revealing in the view of the SW lawyer, explicit forms of racial discrimination towards Moroccan would-be residents of the CETI. In early 2024, the

expulsions of Colombian and Venezuelan asylum seekers from the CETI—justified by the Sub-director as a measure to protect "families and women residents from individuals' misconduct"—revealed underlying stigmatization and racial discrimination against these groups. This was corroborated by testimonies from South American asylum residents, who reported being called derogatory names like "*inmigrantes de mierda, volved a vuestro país*" by CETI security personnel. These xenophobic remarks and the evident incompetence of state workers highlighted a significant disconnect between the authorities and the needs of asylum seekers. Moreover, the politicized and restrictive asylum reception system obstructed effective accountability mechanisms for state-led violence within the center, allowing inadequate reception conditions to persist with impunity.

This confirmed the governmental pattern of asylum reception, where local political pressures drive ad hoc exclusionary actions against asylum seekers. It also revealed how the subordination of state workers to government-led policies only reinforced anti-immigrant sentiment and discriminatory practices against PoM.

In terms of intensity (Schiller, 2018), CEAR and UNHCR engaged directly and on a daily basis with the social workers and residents of the reception center. These interactions were indicators of **coordination** in action. CEAR organized informational talks about the asylum application process and worked individually with each asylum seeker, while UNHCR created interactive spaces where residents could raise and address everyday concerns with social workers. Moreover, CEAR's communication with Madrid involved minimal inquiries and lacked call to action moments for institutional change regarding the management of the center. In contrast, UNHCR demonstrated a degree of negotiation with the state body, working to co-create a 'welcoming' living environment for PoM. This role expanded as UNHCR staff reported and monitored the CETI's opaque practices and their impact on residents' sense of isolation. Despite these efforts, the UNHCR Team Coordinator's push for transparency remained constrained by a hierarchical, governmental framework. Once again this showed that coordination still existed under a top-down imposition of reception policies.

As a counterweight, the hierarchical governance in the CETI was resisted by horizontal governance outside its power structures. Instances of **governance** were detected between the

large NGOs (UNHCR and CEAR) working inside the CETI and smaller NGOs or civil society initiatives in Melilla.

Here, forms of **cooperation** were identified among these actors. The level of trust was conceived as a 4, because actors verbally recognised the available resources of each local NGO and regularly derived asylum cases to each other based on the needs of each applicant. Additionally, they jointly responded to changing systematic injustice. This was illustrated in three ways:

In the years 2021-2022, there was a joint response against the state entry ban of Moroccan asylum seekers into the CETI reception center. As shared by the UNHCR respondent, *"guaranteeing access to all has been an incredible achievement. And we achieved it together. I mean, it was thanks to UNHCR, Solidary Wheels, Save the Children, Peace Movement and Médecins du Monde, each playing their part. Of course, if you want to inform the press, do it now, tomorrow. I can't do it, because I have to compile all this material and send it to the minister.".*

In April 2024 another joint response took place due to the arbitrary expulsions of residents from the CETI leaving them sleeping under a bridge for a month or in some cases indefinitely. In this context, there was constant coordination and information sharing between UNHCR and Solidary Wheels. Solidary Wheels worked on the ground, helping to file individual allegations with the CETI, sending accountability complaints to the Ministry, and reporting on human rights violations in local and national news. Meanwhile, the UNHCR's lawyer followed some cases, and the team coordinator advanced these demands to the local administration and the Ministry. These two examples demonstrated the visible strength of the local network in pressuring state bodies to provide essential care for PoM.
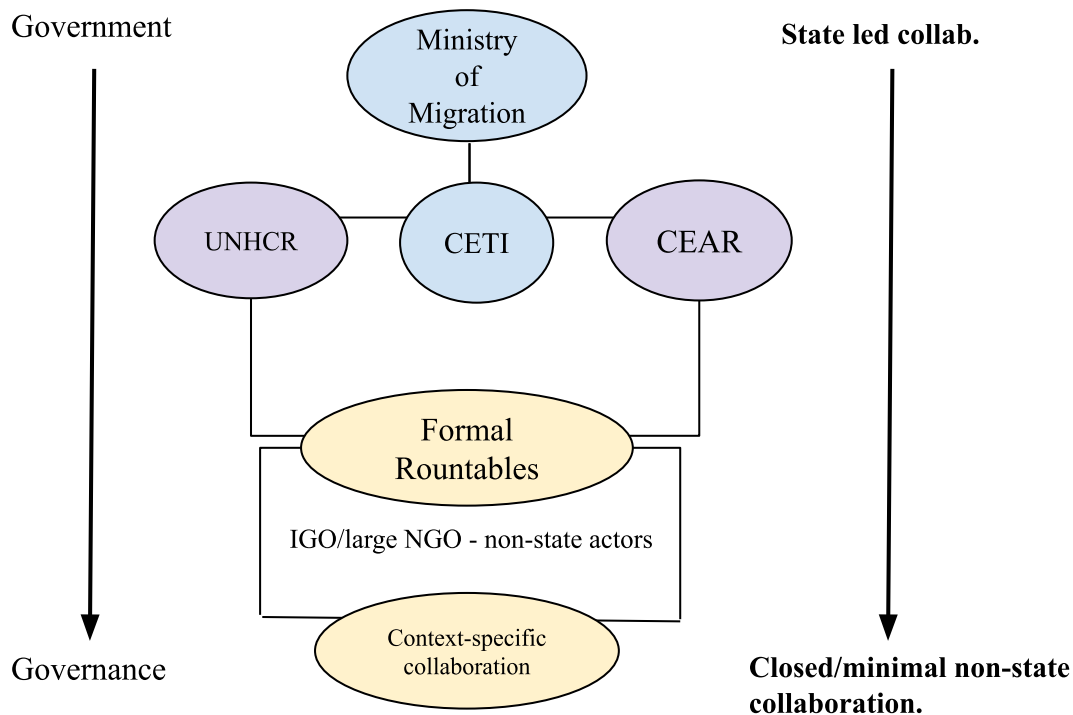
Lastly, actions of cooperation between CEAR and FIet were also notably reported. This involved connecting women asylum seekers or undocumented women with backgrounds of sex trafficking or exploitation to specialized services provided by a local NGO in Melilla, "*One successful case was that of a woman from Morocco who was being severely abused by her partner. Thanks to our work with Fiet Gratia, we were able to transfer her and her children to*

another center in Cantabria. This place not only keeps them out of danger, but also provides them with social support". This last form of horizontal governance ensured an integrated and welcoming approach in front-line reception to ensure that women on the move gain access to specialized services.

It must be added that all these examples of cooperation took place during punctual events or particular asylum cases. Even though formalized roundtables among this group also take place on a monthly basis, this section argues contrary to Schiller's (2018) notion of cooperation, that it doesn't have to only occur under a context of intense interactions. Given the above examples, context-driven and case by case analysis of the needs of each asylum seekers, must also be taken into account in the configuration of cooperation as a form of governance, especially in the context of politicized and changing border spaces.

Another pattern also emerged during the field work. Despite the rise in horizontal governance through formal roundtables and cooperation strategies, these relationships remained tightly linked to the decision-making power of the asylum reception center, or as described below, state-led collaboration. Notably, large NGOs or UNHCR, played a significant role in creating interaction spaces with non-state actors to improve safeguards for PoM. However, the political and top-down influence of state workers and large NGOs over reception conditions and their regular exposure to asylum residents limited the opportunities for broader non-state cooperation in welcoming PoM. In other words, the control exerted by these entities restricted the potential for more extensive collaboration involving other non-state actors.

The following diagram depicts this observation as a **closed network of collaboration**:

Government

State led collab.

Ministry
of
Migration

UNHCR   CETI   CEAR

Formal
Rountables

IGO/large NGO - non-state actors

Context-specific
collaboration

Governance

**Closed/minimal non-state
collaboration.**

It clearly shows that asylum reception functioned as a closed network of collaboration. As also reflected in the findings, formal roundtables and cooperation among UNHCR, CEAR, and non-state actors like Solidary Wheels illustrated forms of governance, but these interactions were confronted with top-down reception governance. Consequently, non-state actors engaged minimally in the reception of asylum seekers. In contrast, the UMC reception system presented a different dynamic.

In the context of UMC reception, the previous example of state driven collaboration and imposed vertical relationships was not evident. Instead this reception system exhibited an integrated form of governance across the entire reception system. Collaboration was seamless both inside and outside the reception centers, with transversal cooperation among state reception centers, local NGOs, and civil society groups. The horizontality of this network allowed this analysis to go further and argue against the traditional state-non-state schemes, or as Schiller (2018) puts it government-governance collaboration. As found later in this section, the local council for the protection of minors, also called the Directorate General for Children (DGC)

showed signs of slowly disentangling itself from the sole responsibility of managing reception of UMC. Simultaneously, this existed next to an expanding scene of non-state action in the design of local reception.
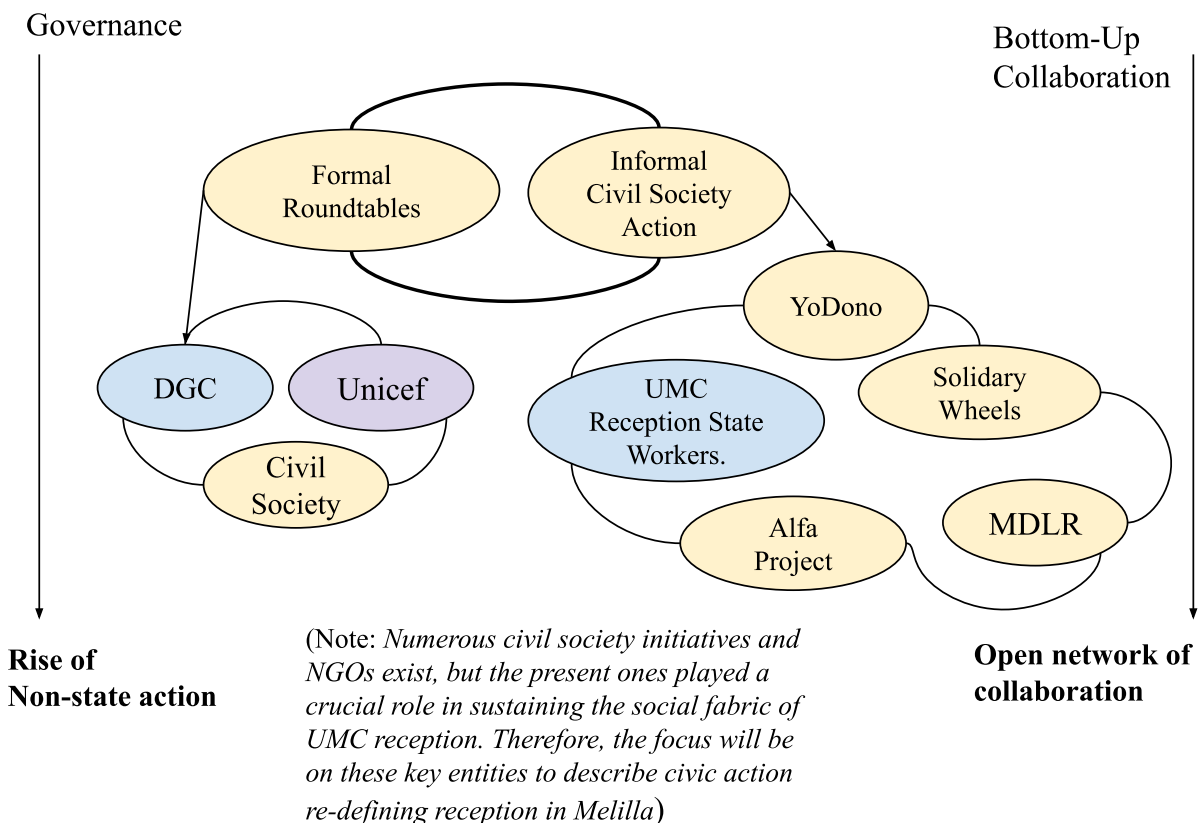
This was seen in the context of horizontal cooperation in the formal roundtable and outside the formal structure, in informal civic society action. In regards to the formal roundtable, a variety of local NGOs, CSOs, and state workers in reception centers participated. Scholten (2016) describes this shift towards more collaborative reception practices as the "local turn" in migration policy-making towards horizontal governance. The DGC encouraged this shift "***without politicization***" to ensure the rights of UMC in state reception centers. This, aligned with the idea of localities being spaces of performative rather than politicized action, prioritizing social cohesion over conflict (Scholten 2016, p. 99).

In this case, the level of trust was rated a 4. Susana Hidalgo, UNICEF project leader in Melilla, noted, "*I have found a lot of collaboration from all key actors, such as the Directorate General for Children, protection centers, and social entities in Melilla"*. Likewise, the DGC, responsible for the legal guardianship of UMC, expressed their commitment at the monthly childhood roundtable to ensure the protection of all children in reception centers. Hidalgo also reported cases of sexually exploited UMC, and the DGC demonstrated transparency and a willingness to cooperate. The latter committed to participate in the childhood roundtables without politicization and provided direct contacts of social (state) workers in each reception center to enhance collaboration with specialized local NGOs, thereby improving individualized care for UMC. Notably, this new approach by UNICEF and local state actors demonstrates a performative effort to address the challenges of migration-led diversity in Melilla (Zapata-Barrera et. al 2017).

Outside the formal structure, horizontal governance thrived in the **daily cooperation** and **joint actions of civil society groups and local NGOs**. Visible examples in Melilla included regular collaboration amongst MDLR, Proyecto ALPHA, NANA, and YoDono, which together shaped the city's solidarity network of reception. This group not only participated in formal roundtables with larger organizations and the local council of minors but also met in "women roundtables" to discuss gender perspectives on UMC, particularly those transitioning to adulthood without state

protection. These women roundtables are an example of the evident rise of independent spaces of interaction among civil society actors, to confront public policies and contest power around the issue of reception. Civic action also occurred in joint participation among a diverse group of NGOs via initiatives like food distribution or informal educational workshops co-designed with UMC.

The above observations resulted in the finding of an **open network of collaboration** in UMC reception. The following diagram illustrates this findings:

Governance

Bottom-Up Collaboration

Formal Roundtables

Informal Civil Society Action

YoDono

DGC

Unicef

UMC Reception State Workers.

Solidary Wheels

Civil Society

Alfa Project

MDLR

Rise of Non-state action

(Note: *Numerous civil society initiatives and NGOs exist, but the present ones played a crucial role in sustaining the social fabric of UMC reception. Therefore, the focus will be on these key entities to describe civic action re-defining reception in Melilla*)

Open network of collaboration

Here, the diagram shows a move away from the notion of governance in explaining reception practices in Melilla. Rather than a clear state-non-state degree of collaboration, the creation of bottom-up spaces of interaction i..e., not just formal settings like the roundtable, but also informal settings like civil society action, illustrates **the rise of non-state action** in setting the stage for welcoming PoM. This bottom-up approach will be further analyzed in the next section.

In regards to the theoretically derived expectations, state workers in the asylum reception center (CETI) and the state affiliated IGO- NGOs interacted vertically and with high levels of hierarchy. While a slight shift towards governance relations were identified, the expectations of a government-like structure was indeed pervasive in the asylum system. This was further illustrated with the closed network diagram. The results also proved that horizontal governance was more visible in UMC reception. Similarly, the network of local NGOs and civil society did engage in cooperative UMC reception practices to welcome PoM. Therefore, it can be attested that there is a more bottom-up approach, and open network of collaboration in the reception system for UMC , than in the asylum reception system.

Ultimately, this increase in the role of non-state action in the field of reception challenges Schiller (2018) government-governance scheme. Rather than a top-down analysis of reception, the next section analyzes the rise of non-state action in welcoming PoM.

7.3. Empirical Examples of Bottom-Up Reception Governance

While the previous section followed Schiller (2018), this section explores how signs of an open network of collaboration in the UMC system can help us change our understanding of reception governance. Following Jonitz et. als (2024) argument, this part illustrates how non-state actors counter governmental initiatives through their own forms of welcoming people on the move. The following typology table summarizes the main differences found in the previous section.

II. Local reception systems:

Aspects	Asylum reception system	UMC reception system
Type of collaboration	Governance-Government	Rise of non-state action
Sphere of interaction	Closed sphere of interaction **(state-IGO-large NGO)**	Open sphere of interaction **(minimal state role -local society-CSO-PoM)**
Operational dynamics	Static rules, political and hierarchical work	Fluidity, a-political cooperation

Local Policy outcome	No policy change	Policy learning
Protection for PoM	Lack of protection/arbitrary treatment	Protection for PoM

To contribute to future governance schemes on reception, this section will explore further how the **UMC reception model** encourages **policy learning** and the **protection for PoM**.

To do so, this analysis will first use Jonitz et al. (2024) to explore the roles of formal and informal actors in delineating non-state action in local reception. Field research revealed that formal actors were largely absent in UMC reception, with no NGO or CSO holding contracts with state centers to provide services. Formal services related to housing, employment, or education were managed exclusively by state entities. In contrast, informal actors, including volunteer groups and local residents, were integral to the UMC reception system in Melilla. The next examples will illustrate the cooperative nature of these informal actors, their role in encouraging policy learning, and how their apolitical approach contributed to community building and redefining "welcomeness." Ultimately, the analysis will include a table outlining the welcoming strategies of informal actors and it will also reflect on the impact of non-state action in shaping rootedness for PoM.

In regards to cooperative action of normal residents, I had the chance to interview two sisters who founded together the grassroot organization of **YoDono**, "I donate", in the wake of the pandemic. Over the years, Sisi and Fati have come to be the social fabric of the city and the safety net for primarily UMC on the move, as well as asylum seekers residing in the CETI. In the interview, they described their form of working as 'fluid' and fully based on local cooperation. This was transmitted by Sisi: Right after the closure of the border in May 2020, "*with a group of all women, all of us, 'who can bring snacks? Who can bring fruit? Who can bring....?' And we worked for days at the border*". As reflected by Ambrosini (2021), these are "common citizens without any political association who have spontaneously mobilized for the reception" of PoM and "support immigrants in difficult circumstances" (p. 381). Here, the open sphere of interaction started out as spoken word efforts in reaction to restrictive border control or as described by YoDono, as a response to local diversity with a minimal state response.

Sisi and Fati rewrote "the idea of citizenship" by challenging policies like the closure of the border in May 2020 (Ambrosini 2021, p. 382). Their efforts, alongside strong local cooperation, drove accountability and change at higher government levels. For example, despite fines from police for providing food to those on the streets right after the closure of the border, YoDono persisted, using medical aid logic to contest discriminatory healthcare policies against Moroccan commuters. The resulting collective action demonstrated that welcomeness can extend beyond traditional political boundaries. It showed how grassroots efforts can influence policy and expand state-imposed reception structures. Sisi recounted how there was initial reluctance, but given the collective effort the local municipality accepted the relocation of people from the border, who were at this point sleeping in the streets, to a local cemetery, with YoDono and residents providing essential supplies like sleeping bags and food packages.

Another empirical example of contesting public policies in the field of reception was observed in the context of the local NGO, *Mec de la Rue* (MDLR). This entity was successful in pressuring the local municipality to adjust their policies to protect UMC. Already in 1999, with her previous NGO, "Asociación ProDerechos de la Infancia", in her own words, Maite managed to "*create strategies to force the local administration to create reception centers to guarantee the basic rights like education and documentation of children on the move*". She then transitioned to her own NGO, MDLR to continue specializing on care for UMC, in concrete, undocumented street kids. This is an empirical example of policy learning, where local state actors changed reception policies, or even facilitated new reception centers due to civil society pressure.

The efforts of Sisi and Fati with Yodono, or MDLR and Proyecto Alpha in supporting undocumented women and UMC, lead to further policy changes. As described by Maite from MDLR, "*the minors under the care of the autonomous city now leave the centers with legal documentation after many years of struggle*". This can be interpreted as a *policy divergence* from reception centers in mainland Spain, where documentation for UMC in similar reception centers for UMC is still not guaranteed (Scholten 2016, p. 93). This policy change in Melilla can be also viewed through the lens of Caponio & Borrket (2010), as the "creative power by local state actors to match migration policies with the socio-political and economic needs of the city" (p. 9). This makes practices that re-draw the social fabric of the city like 'welcomeness' in reception

alongside the increasing power of non-state actors, key to push forth policy learning and guarantee protection for PoM.

Sisi also emphasized how her work is not attached to the idea of political militancy or political membership. "*Moving away from monotonous and bureaucratic procedures allows us to be more effective and to provide more immediate and personal support... **by operating independently, we can be more flexible and not be tied to rigid policies***." This de-politicised vision and more performative form of reception, has been described by Ambrosini (2021) as 'de-bordering solidarity', whereby mundane acts are disconnected from the notions of 'insider-outsider' logic. By breaking away from this dichotomy of state-non state action, local society can encourage welcomeness and a sense of belonging for PoM. Moreover, the flexibility of not being tied to government schemes is also echoed by Jonitz et als. (2024), demonstrating how YoDono, as an independent NGO, are structurally more flexible and offer a variety of services, and coordinate with other entities to ensure that each person has access to language support, legal advice or other necessities. This facilitated rootedness and closer interaction among residents and PoM.

This aspect of structural flexibility (Jonitz et als. 2024) was also visible by witnessing the open spaces of community buildings around the city. Now, MDLR alongside other civil society groups like YoDono, continue to engage in giving back agency to PoM by "providing food or shelter, teaching language, or organizing entertainment for people in need" (Ambrosini 2021, p. 382). "*...children can rest, charge their mobiles, connect to the internet, talk to their families, watch their favorite Moroccan programmes, or just relax. We also offer something to eat, as children often come here who haven't eaten all day.*". Educational support is also provided by MDLR: "*We run workshops to help minors apply for asylum...We also explain what to expect when they arrive on the mainland and what strategies they can develop...*". These acts promoted by NGOs account for the mobilization of non-state action in re-defining reception as 'welcoming' acts at the border.

Moreover, community building was also detected as an alternative to the state's top-down approach to reception, which often involves detention practices or temporary protection. This is especially evident in Melilla, known for its 'crisis of reception.' Interviewees, including Solidary Wheels and MDLR, highlighted that many UMC prefer living on the streets rather than in

reception centers, intending to leave Melilla with papers at 18, "*due to the conditions and treatment they receive in the reception centers*." The streets thus become vital spaces for community building between locals and UMC. As Sisi and Fati put it, "*on the street, that's where you create real links with the children, because that's where they see the people who really work with them and look for them.*"

It was noticeable in the field work that street interactions between UMC and local NGOs allowed UMC to become their own protagonists and in many ways become part of the civil society response to European structural and racial violence at the border. Engagement in diverse forms of street education by Solidary Wheels or MDLR, in spaces like the beach or recreational spaces, fostered a sense of 're-appropriation' of their time, countering the isolation and 'prison'-like conditions of formal reception. Additionally, these community spaces created by groups like MDLR or individuals like Sisi and Fati facilitated the development of 'friendship' or 'family' bonds between the local society and PoM, transforming hostile environments into a sense of 'home' and belonging for UMC. This finding was strongly reflected in the discourse of grassroots and NGO organizations.

> Sisi and Fati: *We want the children to see the center as a place where they receive food and shelter, but also to feel that they have another family, that they can count on other people, on "mums" and "friends" who give them love.*

Given the above empirical examples of bottom-up reception governance, the following table takes Jonitz et als. (2024) idea of informal actors and provides a schematic overview of **civil society reception** in the border city of Melilla:

Informal Actors	Service	Space of Interaction with PoM
YoDono	Donations of clothes, food to people in need, entertainment,	Street education, own NGO center, women roundtable, entertainment in UMC centers.

MDLR	Informal workshops for autonomy building, legal counseling, social activities, community building, community dinners.	State-nonstate roundtables, Community spaces, street education, entertainment centers, participation in women roundtable.
Solidary Wheels	Community dinners, street presence, social work, documentation of violations of rights.	Street education for UMC.

As a result, this **bottom-up approach** to reception governance has recognized the role of non-state action as key in redefining welcomeness at the border.

This account of reception not only emphasizes how welcoming acts can influence individuals' sense of belonging in a community but also highlights an inherent connection between reception and integration. Understanding future integration asks for an in depth examination of these non-state welcoming strategies and how they come to shape PoM´s link to small localities during their sedentary or shifting migratory journey. Ultimately, this section calls for an urgent need to bridge the gap between reception studies and contested integration theories, by offering deeper insights into welcoming patterns by civil society in Melilla, where PoM as well as residents are coming together in resistance to arbitrary and often violent state-led reception. Only by bridging this gap can we fully grasp one´s growing 'rootedness' to a locality and recognize how welcoming acts can determine one's choices to leave or form part of a community.

As demonstrated, local cooperation, non-political actions, local state policy learning through civil society pressure, and community building through non-state interactions with PoM significantly contribute to bottom-up reception governance. Understanding and expanding these aspects are essential for enhancing not only the sense of "welcomeness" for PoM in small border cities but also future reception-integration patterns.

In this last section, civil society initiatives and ordinary residents were described as key in shaping local responses to UMC arrivals and influencing local government policies. Future

studies should continue exploring this bottom-up reception governance shift to understand the impact of non-state action in protecting the rights of all PoM.

8. Conclusion

Based on the field notes and interviews gathered in Melilla, several conclusions were drawn on how local state and non-state actors organize and collaborate to ensure welcomeness for PoM.

Firstly, the study highlighted clear differences in how NGOs, IGOs, and state reception centers interact across the two reception systems. At the asylum center, large NGOs and IGOs worked within a hierarchical, government-like structure. In contrast, UMC reception centers exhibited a more horizontal governance model with organizations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and CEAR. This horizontal approach allowed UMC centers and local NGOs to focus on UMC needs, promoting a bottom-up redefinition of border reception. Also, local NGOs and civil society showed cooperative efforts across both systems. However, NGO cooperation was more extensive in UMC, reflecting a trend towards more collaborative governance. The key finding was the rise of non-state action in UMC reception, demonstrating how civil society effectively addressed the protection gaps that state actors could not cover.

In response to the second sub-question, the findings revealed that reception governance can indeed be redefined from the bottom-up. While powerful governmental structures still dominate asylum reception, this research highlights the strategic resistance by local non-state actors protecting UMC rights. These actors are pioneering new forms of local reception governance. The study showed that in the UMC system, local municipal actors are moving away from a government-centric approach by collaborating with NGOs. This shift towards an open, collaborative network, rather than a closed, state-imposed framework, has allowed local authorities to enact meaningful policy changes in response to civil society demands. For example, securing documentation for UMC in the three reception centers demonstrated the positive impact of non-state action on state bodies. This rise of non-state action took place outside traditional government-governance schemes.

Voluntary groups and the action of residents, like YoDono and MDLR, evidenced the impact of non-state action in welcoming PoM. These groups played a crucial role in contesting

public policies during the pandemic, promoting a non-political discourse, and fostering community building. Their efforts were essential in resisting the negative effects of border policies. These initiatives demonstrated the power of civil society in driving change, creating a more inclusive and responsive reception system, and improving welcoming practices.

While horizontal governance is essential for understanding actor collaboration, it's crucial to expand this concept to fully capture the evolving dynamics of local reception. In Melilla, for example, the local state's more adaptable involvement allowed non-state actors to play a significant role in UMC reception. This suggests that other border cities could benefit from similar approaches, where local flexibility and creativity lead to more effective responses to migration challenges. In these settings, local authorities might deliberately step back from certain responsibilities, fostering non-state initiatives. To grasp this shift comprehensively, horizontal governance should remain a key analytical framework, but future research must broaden the concept to include varying degrees of state disengagement and the impact of non-state actors.

Regarding the last sub-question, a bottom-up approach to reception governance was clear in how civil society actors interacted with UMC. This included street education, activities at NGO centers, communal dinners, and ad-hoc meetings like the women's roundtable organized by MDLR, YoDono, and other groups. These interactions occurred in separate non-state spaces. Notably, in the context of asylum reception, no alternative/non-state space of interaction was created for families or groups of asylum seekers.

Together, this paper has contributed by mapping the relationships between government and horizontal governance in both the asylum and UMC reception systems in Melilla, revealing key differences in actor collaboration. The asylum system's limited network reinforced its hierarchical structure, highlighting the need for better resources for asylum seekers. Conversely, the UMC system demonstrated the power of robust civil society networks, which fostered genuine connections between PoM and local residents, helping UMC build a strong sense of community.

This approach also helped to bridge the gap between reception and the contested concept of integration. By creating spaces where UMC could naturally develop a sense of belonging, their connection to the community became self-driven, rather than being externally imposed as a

stage of 'integration'. This finding is applicable to studies on integration by introducing the idea of a 'natural process' or exploring the concept of rootedness from the perspective of PoM. This shift would move away from the temporal aspect of integration—'long-term accommodation into a society'—and better reflect the personal choices of individuals and families on the move in deciding to settle in specific localities. Similarly, reception was viewed as a bottom-up process, characterized by early and ongoing collective action that welcomes and helps PoM establish a sense of belonging in Melilla. These perspectives on integration and reception are crucial to understand the logical steps taken by PoM either to set down roots or move elsewhere, making their transitions more meaningful and self-directed.

Moreover, the development of this non-state action model can be seen as contributing to reception literature by highlighting how community centers and civil society initiatives foster a sense of rootedness for PoM. Moving beyond detention and temporary measures, this approach emphasized the crucial role of community networks in creating humane reception environments. Integrating self-governing services like street education and community centers into governance frameworks is essential to support non-state actors. Despite the challenges, coordinating with local state bodies remains feasible and important for enhancing these efforts.

This work had several limitations, including limited time in Melilla and restricted access to CETI state workers due to their politicization of asylum issues. While field notes and insights from the UMC director were collected, including perspectives from various state workers would have provided a more comprehensive view of their collaborations with non-state actors.

It is important to note that the findings of this study are specific to Melilla and may not apply to other border regions. Although similar horizontal governance and local solidarity networks may exist elsewhere, Melilla's unique collaborative governance are based on trust and specific interaction patterns that shape collaborations and the protection for PoM. However, studying different contexts could broaden the understanding of 'reception governance' as a socially and locally defined concept.

9. Recommendations

Based on this research, this paper recommends the following initiatives to local state and non-state actors working in the field of reception:

In the context of UMC reception, leverage UNICEF's leadership to bridge official UMC childhood roundtables with Melilla's social fabric.

- ❖ **Establish separate roundtables** with UNICEF and smaller CSOs like YoDono and MDLR to address apolitical needs and ensure these NGOs receive the necessary resources to support PoM effectively.
- ❖ **Regular channels of communication**: This initiative would also provide regular opportunities to discuss the real impacts of poor reception conditions in state-led centers. By sharing their firsthand experiences of mistreatment with smaller NGOs or CSOs, PoM can bring forward, with the help of CSO daily issues and bring forth more institutional safeguards.
- ❖ **Interactive spaces with UMC:** To strengthen the previous accountability mechanisms, this paper recommends expanding the idea of small NGOs or CSOs guiding and elevating the voices of UMC through more inclusive and interactive spaces. This can be achieved by proposing a new model of interaction that actively involves UMC in roundtable discussions.
  - ➢ Organize community events and invite UNICEF, UNHCR, and CEAR to collaborate with smaller CSOs. This will facilitate direct communication of UMC needs to key stakeholders, fostering a unified and effective support system. Avoid political jargon to ensure active CSO participation.
- ❖ **New windows of collaboration**: Encourage larger NGOs and state bodies to include independent CSOs in governance while maintaining their political stance. Instead of traditional funding, engage with CSOs to understand UMC challenges through their stories. This collaboration could lead to more inclusive solutions.
  - ➢ Harness non-state actions to strengthen communities, particularly through cultural grants. Integrate these grants into reception governance to support small NGOs and local initiatives, preserving their autonomy while fostering cultural exchange

through workshops and festivals, such as celebrating Tamazight women from the Rif.

In the context of asylum reception, reform the hierarchical CETI structure by promoting open, collaborative networks.

- ❖ Encourage collaborations between local state entities, large NGOs, small CSOs, and local communities to build a more inclusive support system for asylum seekers.
- ❖ Create platforms for direct involvement of small NGOs and asylum seekers in decision-making to improve reception conditions.
- ❖ Engage in testimonies and reception experiences with asylum seekers to recognise changes in policy effectiveness and adapt joint strategies between state and smaller, non-state actors, as needed.

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Annex 1. Interview structure

Civil Society Interview Guide:

1. How and when did you start working together? I would like to know how the idea of X originated?

2. What has been the trajectory of X

3. How do you see and perceive the changing reality of street children? Taking into account this reality, can you talk about the type of intervention that was done before, and if there have been any changes in the management, or in the type of work you do now?

4. What are the key spaces, from X where you create links with children in street situations or with families?

5. To maintain your presence in the street, how do you create these spaces for intervention with children, is there a lot of change required? I would like to know more about your activities with children... How would you describe this type of initiative?

6. Due to the changing realities and needs of children in an irregular situation, what was the approach, or way of working before and what kind of work is being done now from X to ensure care for people on the streets.

7. What are the care practices or projects you are involved in in the city of Melilla? Recently, or in the present that you would like to share.

8. Do you like to maintain or collaborate with other organizations? Would you describe the type of relationship you have with organizations (CENTRO, UNHCR, CEAR, other local entities…)

9. Would you say that there has been a diversification of collaborations with entities in Melilla from your org. to address the situation of migrant minors?

10. In this process, how would you describe the type of relationship built between local actors and your organization to guarantee the basic needs of each child?

11. What would be, from a personal and professional point of view, the specific challenges at the local level in the context of the reception of children in an irregular situation? And what suggestions or practices do you see as examples to follow in order to address these problems?

NGO/IGO Interview Guide:

1. What is your role and function in your organization?
2. How do you see and perceive the local reality of irregular migration in your daily work?
3. From your work perspective, how would you describe the approach taken by your organization towards the reception of irregular people on the move?
4. What are the policies promoted by your organization to manage the reception of irregular PoM?
5. What are the implementing practices in terms of reception that your organization is involved in? Would you say that there has been a move towards a diversification of approaches by your organization in terms of reception policies/practices to meet the reality of irregular migration?
6. If so, how would you describe this diversification? How do you see these practices taking shape within your organization? Could you describe the measures a bit further?
7. In this process, how would you describe the type of relationship built between local actors and your organization, to ensure reception?
8. Which actors have you collaborated with in the past, most recently or currently and how would you describe this experience?
9. Do you see a benefit in reaching out and collaborating with different local actors?
10. How have you seen the event of the 24th of June of 2022 impact or influence your daily work, as well as the degree of collaboration with other involved actors?
11. Lastly, what would you say from a personal and professional point of view, are specific challenges felt at the local level, in the context of the reception of irregular migrants?

UMC Reception Centre/ Gota de Leche Interview Guide:

1. What is your role and function in the center?

2. From your experience and knowledge, could you explain to me how the idea of creating this center came about, and what has been the focus of the center from its inception until now?

3. How would you describe the different stages of the reception policy taken by Gota de Leche towards unaccompanied children in an irregular situation?

4. And from your experience, how have the reception spaces been filled over time, especially for unaccompanied migrant children?

5. How do you see and perceive the local reality of irregular migration of minors both in the street and in the center?

6. In terms of profiles and needs, how do you create spaces for intervention, both on a pedagogical, educational and social level, in the center itself?

7. The activities offered are changing, is it a changing approach, what factors would you say motivate these changes?

8. Due to the changing realities and needs of children in an irregular situation, what was the approach, or way of working before and what kind of work is being done now from Gota de Leche to guarantee care for this profile of children?

9. What are the collaboration practices with external entities, or reception projects in which Gota de Leche participates in the city of Melilla? Recently, or in the present that you would like to share.

10. Do you opt for collaboration with other entities, and why?

11. Would you say that there has been an increase in the level of collaboration with other entities?

12. In this process, how would you describe the type of relationship built between local actors and your organization to ensure the reception?

13. What would be, from a personal and professional point of view, the specific challenges at the local level in the context of the reception of children in an irregular situation? And what suggestions or practices do you see as examples to follow in order to address these problems?

Annex 2. Code Book

Theme	Sub-Theme	Definition	Ex. Interview Transcripts.
Mapping of Collaboration	NGO/IGO and Local State	Refers to the identified interaction between NGOs and the local state reception systems for asylum seekers or UMC. This follows Zapata Barrero et. al (2017) emphasis on studying specific local governance models that respond to the challenge of diverse local society. Here aspects of coordination (Verleuren, Stotijn 2010) and contention (Ambrosi 2012) can arise between diverse local entities based on the socio-political needs of the locality.	*COORDINATION-CEAR* Ex.*"The relationship is good. ...as a private entity auxiliary to the public authorities, it collaborates closely with the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration...our influence on the functioning of the CETI is minimal, as we do not control its organization.".* CONTENTION-UNHCR Ex. "*We are significantly enhancing the relationships between the organizations operating within CETI and those outside it. Our goal is to ensure CETI is not an isolated entity, and we are committed to continuing this effort"*
	NGO-NGO/ and Civil Society	Refers to the horizontal level of interaction amongst local civil and NGO actors co-creating spaces of reception through the construction of a solidarity network in different spatial domains around the city. This is foregrounded by Zapata Barrero et. al's (2017) understanding of arrangements of local governance including social actors that are part of migrant associations. As well as work revolving around solidarity at border spaces (Gilberti, Potot 2021; Bauder 2020; Filippi et. al 2021), describing solidarity actions and grassroot mobility without an endorsed economic logic or state incentives that support migrant agency.	Solidary Wheels (SW): *we collaborate with practically all the organizations in Melilla that work with migrants.* *One of the first people we met was Maite(MDLR), an exceptional woman from Melilla who has dedicated her entire life to advocating for the rights of migrant children and trans-migrants.* Soliday Wheels (SW): *We have received many derivations, for example from Save the Children who have detected cases of children in street situations or with problems of access to documentation..* SW: *We have started to work more with the ALFA project, which is La Salle's literacy project with women in an irregular administrative situation.*

	IGO-Civil Society	Refers to the identified interaction between IGOs like UNHCR and UNICEF and local NGOs in the field of local reception. The description of this interaction follows Steffek's (2013) pull and push model that traces cooperation between these actors in formalized spaces. Pull factors explain how IGOs pull NGOs in, to acquire new information on local issues, support to implement projects, and data to monitor compliance. Push factors explain NGOs willingness to participate in shaping projects, informing research and addressing parties' compliance from below.	SW: *We began our collaboration with UNICEF to support the implementation of a project in Melilla focused on recognizing children's rights. We have been working closely with them to ensure its success.*
Degree of collaboration	Government	Refers to a vertical, hierarchical type of relationship between the local state reception centers and non-state, IGOs in the field of local reception. As described by Schiller (2018) government action is characterized by forms of information sharing or imposition of predefined policies, without moments of consultation or interaction with other actors.	UNHCR - "*the CETI is run by them*"
	Governance	Refers to horizontal types of interaction between the local state reception centers and civil society/NGO/IGOs actors. Following the Schiller (2018) model, governance takes place when there's acts of cooperation or joint action between state-non-state actors. This concept is also expanded to modes of coordination, and context-specific incentives for collaboration that expand the	UNICEF - UMC reception system: "*We participate in all spaces and we have included local entities in the diagnosis and training. We are trying to strengthen the children's roundtable and facilitate dialogue between the entities and the Directorate General to improve coordination and referrals*".

		notion of horizontal governance to the border specific demands of Melilla.	
	Rise of non-state action/ independent non-state collaboration.	Also termed "de-bordering solidarity" by Ambrosini (2021), this can be observed when common citizens spontaneously mobilize for the reception of PoM. As a result, this solidarity experience can create familiar bonds and allow PoM to create their own biographical journey, break away from the temporal limbo of protection. Most of these actions take place in non-state spaces of interaction.	*YODONO: We want the children to see the center as a place where they receive food and shelter, but also to feel that they have another family, that they can count on other people, on "mums" and "friends" who give them love* *On the street. That's where you create real links with the children, because that's where they see the people who really work with them and look for them.* *SW: We (SW) do routes and (Hijas de la Caridad) have some services for street people such as, for example, showers and a cyber resource, where they can go and have a snack at the computer and so on.*

Local reception / Welcomeness	Informal spaces and services of interaction with PoM. / Welcoming Factors.	The role of local inhabitants and NGOs in the creation of welcoming spaces of interaction and sense of "conviviality" or togetherness in hostile border spaces. This relates to work that explores how localized interactions (spaces) empower migrants in the city. (Siim, B., Meret, S. (2020). These are identified in educational, recreational actions, emerging reception facilities or organizational structures.	MDLR: *children can rest, charge their mobiles, connect to the internet, talk to their families, watch their favorite Moroccan programmes, or just relax. We also offer something to eat, as children often come here who haven't eaten all day.* Women Roundtables (Social Catholicism, Muslim Women, Atheist IO): *These collaborations allow us to pool our efforts and resources to better support people in need - MDLR.* MDLR: *We run workshops to help minors apply for asylum...We also explain what to expect when they arrive on the mainland and what strategies they can develop…* *When children are supported, they are more likely to achieve their goals. Our association focuses on being there for them, listening, and advocating for their needs to help them overcome obstacles.*
	Barring Factors	In a similar way specific spaces of intervention in the city can be conceived as barring and make PoM feel trapped. These are identified in examples of exceptional administrative barriers, physical isolation or temporality of protection.	MDLR: *The term "reception" does not reflect a permanent situation because migrants do not want to stay due to the difficult situation. Previously, the children lived in small houses and integrated in the neighborhoods, but over time they were moved to an abandoned barracks known as "La Purísima", which does not facilitate integration. Children who misbehave in other centers are sent to La Purísima as punishment, which aggravates their situation. In general, minors prefer to leave Melilla when they turn 18 because of the conditions and treatment they receive in the reception centers.*