

Multiplicated borders, increased precarity and lost control

A qualitative study on the impact of a temporary digitalized asylum procedure on applicants for international protection and the borders they must overcome in doing so

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Abstract

NEDERLANDS

Begin april 2020 lanceerden de Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken en voormalig Minister De Block een online preregistratie procedure (OPRP) voor verzoekers tot internationale bescherming (VIB's). Zoals de naam impliceert, vormde de OPRP via een online afsprakensysteem slechts een opstap naar de officiële asielregistratie. Deze masterthesis onderzoekt de impact van de OPRP op VIB's en de grenzen die ze moeten overkomen om zich voor internationale bescherming (IB) of asiel te registreren. De data die ik aan de hand van interviews en participatieve observatie heb verzameld toont aan dat de gedigitaliseerde aard van de OPRP een interne, administratieve grens heeft opgeworpen die de toegang van VIB's tot zo een officiële asielregistratie heeft bemoeilijkt. Dit is bovenal gebleken voor kwetsbare en non-prioritaire VIB's, zoals alleenstaande mannen, omwille van hun gebrek aan materiële (bv. laptop, gsm, printer, camera), sociale (bv. familie, netwerk) en linguïstische (bv. kennis van Frans of Nederlands) middelen. Door er niet in te slagen zich te preregistreren, zijn VIB's geconfronteerd met langere wachttijden zonder daarbij onderdak of materiële hulp te krijgen. Hun toenemende onzekerheid (of precariteit) heeft ze bijgevolg afhankelijk gemaakt van de humanitaire hulpverlening van Brusselse Ngo's die daarmee de overheid deels hebben vervangen en, onbewust, de levensduur van de OPRP hebben verlengd. Hoewel Europese lidstaten massaal hebben teruggegrepen naar digitalisering om asielprocedures veilig en efficiënt verder te zetten tijdens de eerste lockdown(s), heeft de OPRP in België bijgedragen aan de totstandkoming van een zogenaamde 'humanitaire' en 'technologische marge'. Hierin hebben VIB's de controle over hun eigen procedure en persoonlijke data verloren en heeft het toenemende belang van digitale technologie VIB's onderworpen aan zogenaamde 'uitputtingspolitiek'. Bovendien bewijst de OPRP hoe 'grenzen' vandaag de dag meer zijn dan fysieke scheidingslijnen, maar in plaats daarvan in een digitale, administratieve en onzichtbare hoedanigheid kunnen voorkomen.

SLEUTELWOORDEN: online preregistratie procedure, verzoekers om internationale bescherming (asielzoekers), humanitaire marge, technologisch marge, uitputtingspolitiek, civiele actoren, grenzen

ENGLISH

Early-April 2020, the Immigration Office and former Minister De Block launched an online preregistration procedure (OPRP) for applicants for international protection (AIPs). As the name suggests, the OPRP only meant a steppingstone towards the official asylum registration through a system of online appointments. This master's dissertation researches the OPRP's impact on AIPs and on the borders they must overcome to register for international protection (IP) or asylum. The data that I have gathered through interviews and participant observation demonstrate that the OPRP's digital nature has raised an internal, administrative border that has hindered AIPs from accessing official asylum registration. Above all, this has been the case for vulnerable and non-priority AIPs, like single men, because of their lack of material (e.g., laptop, phone, printer, camera), social (e.g., family, network) and linguistic (e.g., Dutch or French proficiency) resources. By failing the preregistration, AIPs have been confronted with longer waiting times without getting shelter or material assistance. Their increasing precarity has rendered them more and more dependent upon the humanitarian support by Brussels's NGOs, that, in doing so, have partially substituted the state and, unconsciously, extended the OPRP's durability. Although EU member states have en masse resorted to digitalisation in order to continue asylum procedures safely and efficiently during the first lockdown(s), the OPRP in Belgium has contributed to the emergence of a so-called 'humanitarian' and 'techno-borderscape'. Here, AIPs have lost control over their own procedures and personal data, while the increased importance of digital technology has subjected them to so-called 'politics of exhaustion'. Furthermore, the OPRP proves how 'borders' today go beyond physical boundaries, but can appear in digital, administrative and invisible forms instead.

KEY WORDS: online preregistration procedure, applicants for international protection (asylum seekers), humanitarian borderland, techno-borderscape, politics of exhaustion, civil society, borders

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Abbreviations

AIP	Applicant for International Protection
CGRS	Commissioner-General for Refugees and Stateless Persons
DPI	Demandeur de Protection Internationale (French)
DVZ	Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken (Dutch)
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EU	European Union
FDP	Forcedly Displaced People
IB	Internationale Bescherming (Dutch)
IBZ	Federal Public Service for Internal Affairs
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IO	Immigration Office
IP	International Protection
OPRP	Online Preregistration Procedure
FRA	Flemish Refugee Action
UNAM	Unaccompanied Minor
VIB	Verzoekers om Internationale Bescherming (Dutch)

1. Introduction

In the week of March 16, 2020, the former Minister for asylum and migration De Block (Open Vld) decided together with the Immigration Office ('Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken') to close the federal arrival centre Little Fortress ('Klein Kasteeltje') in Brussels. This because of the national lockdown following the covid-19 outbreak and the lack of staff and space to safely receive applicants for international protection (AIPs) according to the emergency health measures at the time. Without immediate alternatives at hand, new AIPs were temporarily unable to apply for international protection (IP), and therefore lacked access to shelter as normally provided by Fedasil, i.e., the federal agency responsible for the reception of this population (Delepeleire, 2020).

As Little Fortress's closure allegedly violated AIPs' basic rights and led to additional safety risks by leaving them on the capital's streets, Brussels's civil society soon called to rescind the decision (Delepeleire, 2020). An alternative procedure, introduced by De Block and the IO after a three-weeks radio silence, obliged new applicants to preregister online for a physical appointment in Little Fortress (Delepeleire, 2020c). Rather quickly, the turbid communication around this procedural adjustment and its requirements proved a stumbling block for both new AIPs and civil actors¹. The latter, for instance, was called upon by the government to assist the former, yet without receiving information on how to do so. Since waiting times for (physical) registration appointments grew and AIPs were confronted with increased precarity (Temmerman, 2020), Brussels's NGOs started providing support and raising public awareness, fearing for a quickly growing humanitarian crisis.

Yet, on the European level, Belgium formed no exception. Whereas some EU members states like France and Greece continued suspending instead of recovering any type of asylum registration (EASO, 2020c), the OPRP by Belgium's IO, as an 'interim solution', found echoing in the Netherlands, Germany and Czech Republic (EASO, 2020b). Since the then circumstances legitimized the (extended) presence of 'interim solutions', and since the OPRP thereby seemed to comply with the European Commission's recommendation to continue the registration of third-country nationals' applications (EASO, 2020b), it remained in place. Although the OPRP led to further outcry concerning the inadequate follow-up on unaccompanied minors, the legal terms for AIPs' appeal procedures and increasingly severe action towards so-called 'Dubliners' (Delepeleire, 2020b; Rombaut, 2020; Verbergt, 2020), and

¹ Here, and in the remainder of this dissertation, 'civil actors' allude to "non-state or non-governmental and non-market actors" amongst which NGOs are the most prominent (Ambrosini & Van der Leun, 2015).

although it was depicted as a temporary and interim solution (Delepeleire, 2020c), it eventually lasted for more than seven months.

Eventually, the OPRP's complexity made an assembly of AIPs, civil actors and voluntary lawyers prosecute the Belgian state, leading to tens of convictions for Fedasil by early October 2020 (*700 Mannen, vrouwen en kinderen op straat*, 2020). Pressured by these convictions, the new Secretary of State Mahdi (CD&V) quickly implemented several reforms (*Asielzoekers kunnen weer terecht*, 2020). Although Belgium had just entered a second lockdown in mid-October 2020, the doors of the Little Fortress were finally reopened for (new) asylum registration and reception on November 3, 2020. By reverting to the former procedure of instant physical registration and reception, the IO and Mahdi made sure to avoid further accumulation of periodic penalty payments, as ordained by the Court (De Witte, 2020).

At the time of writing, vaccination programs all over the country are gaining speed and society's pressure on the federal government to 'reopen' society is mounting. More than a year after Little Fortress's closure, however, migrants of all kinds have remained a dark spot in societal debates around the virus' impact and the ways out of the pandemic. Although undocumented migrants have been asking for collective regularisations until very recently, partly to facilitate access to health services, the societal and political 'climate' has not really changed. Even more, the covid-19 pandemic is said to have uncovered and further aggravated the problems with which the European continent was already plagued earlier, i.e., long-running shortages in reception capacities, the permanent overuse of emergency accommodation in the reception system, the rigorous policing of migrants and further violations of the EU laws (JRS, 2021). Within this context of global crisis, it is all the more interesting to zoom into one particular aspect of the troubled climate and restrictive policies that surround people on the move, namely an interim digitalized asylum procedure.

The vast current-day literature on borders and people's mobility proves the relevancy of this topic, as well as how "disputes over who has to authority to protect, who will be protected and under what terms and conditions" have become divisive matters of (political) contention (Nyers, 2003, p.1069). Following this statement, asylum procedures are quintessential as they are AIPs' best shot for official recognition and thereby reflect the state's conditions under which migrants (possibly) 'deserve' international protection. Furthermore, asylum procedures are not immutable but instead can teach us about the ever-changing attitude of 'the state' vis-à-vis its noncitizens in times of global crisis. With 'the border' moving "to the centre of political life" (De Genova et al., 2015, p.80) for instance, rigorous asylum procedures have put AIPs all over Europe in stuckedness, either awaiting their application to be processed (again) or living in irregularity after having seen their procedure rejected (EASO, 2020d; JRS, 2021; Kalir, 2019).

Here, scholarly debate has pointed out not only the proliferation of physical and external(ized) borders at the EU's perimeter, but also the multiplication of internal and administrative borders within the union's boundaries. Since Belgium's OPRP can be situated within this field of tension between a nation state and its noncitizens, it, again, proves an interesting research subject.

In the remainder of this dissertation, I will consistently abbreviate an 'applicant for international protection' with AIP. Although often named differently (e.g., 'asylum seeker'), I hereby follow the terminology at the European level (European Commission, n.d.). In general, AIPs are understood as third-country nationals who are seeking international protection and are awaiting a decision on their application. Outside of EU legislation, the terms 'asylum' and 'asylum seeker' are still omnipresent, for example in Belgium's official nomenclature on procedures for international protection. Likewise, civil society actors still stick to the term 'asylum seeker'. Here, the difference also lies in the choice for either 'applicant' or 'seeker', two terms with different nuances to them. Due to its terminological complexity, I consider it necessary to differentiate between the often-confused terms 'refugee' and 'AIP'. As refugees are recognized and protected by international treaties, AIPs are in search of such status. Sometimes, however, AIPs are accused of being 'illegal refugees' or 'illegal migrants'. Yet, from the conviction that no human being can *be* illegal, AIPs can only be *made* illegal (or 'illegalized') when their application for international protection is rejected.

2. Conceptual framework

In order to describe the aforementioned dynamics between the Belgian state and newly arrived AIPs between March and October 2020, I rely on the two concepts ‘sovereignty’ and ‘illegality’. Both will allow me to gain further insight into the current-day theoretical debates on asylum policies in Europe and Belgium, as well as to formulate specific research questions further on (see 4.1.).

2.1. Sovereignty

Generally speaking, sovereignty is the authority of a nation state to govern itself and its subjects. Yet, as Hansen and Stepputat (2006) accurately describe, this notion’s understanding has been contested over time, ranging from kinships to colonies and modern nation states. Historically, sovereignty was based on a more culturally and collectively defined system of centralized rule and control (Clastres, 1989; Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Hocart, 1936). Basically, it was meant to control a society of savages (Clastres, 1989; Hobbes, 1996). Yet, from the 19th century onwards, colonialism gave Western states incentives to experiment with different forms of sovereignty, entailing techniques of government based on exploitation, unlimited violence and civil stratification (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006). Through a combination of coexisting legal and factual sovereignty, colonial rule came to represent an extrinsic threatening force. Compared to legal sovereignty that recognized authority determined by law, factual sovereignty emphasized how individuals or institutions have authority by exercising “the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity” and obtain actual obedience by doing so (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006, p.296).

Considering sovereignty’s different modalities from colonialism, Hansen and Stepputat demonstrate how factual sovereignty became the dominant view on political authority in the postcolonial era, going beyond the “formal language of law” as main constituent for the modern state (p.301). As the idea of national sovereignty became undermined in the late 20th-century because of the emergence of global transnational networks and the proliferation of post-Cold War ethnic conflicts, the debate on the meaning and expression of sovereignty has been ongoing while its definition and interpretation remain food for discussion. Nevertheless, with contemporary challenges of increasing globalization, migration, market capitalism and modernization, sovereignty has, again, become central to nation states.

Regarding modern states, both Agamben (1998, 2005) and Foucault (1980, 2004) have argued that sovereignty constitutes itself on “the included outside” and is spread out through society, institutions and “rituals of self-making” (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006, p.296). As the state’s embodiment in a leader, party, movement or institution remains incomplete, they argue that sovereign power therefore originates from a kind of state-of-exception (e.g., colonialism),

in which a ground zero allows for a self-constitution of laws and politics that expresses the capacity to decide over life and death, to use violence and to declare 'undesirables' (Agamben, 1998). For Foucault (1980), the depoliticization of modern forms of sovereignty "in the name of scientific rationality and improvement" of citizens' lives can be called 'biopolitics' (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006, p.302). With so-called 'biopower' residing in sovereignty, states have gradually gained control over the domain of life, including issues of life and death, desirability and undesirability.

Diverging from Foucault's positive account on biopolitics, Agamben (1998) has related sovereignty with the production of 'bare life' by looking at the context of the Nazi extermination camps. Here, he considered sovereign or 'biopower' capable of differentiating within its citizenry and creating 'killable bodies'. The 'state of exception' that is produced in this context does not merely imply a temporal suspension of the state of law, but "acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that remains continually outside the normal state of law" (Mbembé, 2003, p.13). For Agamben, the body is the site in which sovereignty is performed, creating a 'bodily duality' in terms of a coexisting biological and political body (Balibar, 2009). In contexts of war, extreme condition, fragmentation and marginalization, it is the biological body that is reducible to 'bare life'. By introducing the concepts of 'necropolitics' and 'necropower', Mbembé adds to Foucault's biopower and Agamben's state of exception. Inspired by Fanon's (1976) critiques on the late-modern colonization of Palestina and the West Bank, Mbembé uses these concepts to demonstrate how sovereignty under colonial rule spatialized power and established internal boundaries, allowing one "to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembé, 2003, p.27). Considering sovereignty as the power over life and death, Mbembé's (2003) 'necropolitics' describe how violence is inflicted on subjects without necessarily killing them. Accordingly, sovereignty can deploy the political technology of 'suffering' to put subjects into 'death worlds' since it keeps people alive but in constant state of injury.

More recently, new forms of informal and outsourced sovereignty have emerged, originating from 20th-century colonialism when private companies and external actors interfered with central authority and acted with almost complete impunity. Basically, these modalities of sovereignty demonstrate a recent tendency in which the nation state "is no longer the privileged locus of sovereignty", but instead has become more fragmented and outsourced to private companies and third parties (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006, p.309). Accordingly, we could argue that the current-day globalized means of movement are challenging nation states' "monopoly over matters of security" that serve their own legitimization. In response to increasing global mobility, however, modern nation states are altering the implementation of their sovereignty. With the concept of 'illegality', I look into how such sovereignty nowadays appears more

comprehensive, pervading the lives of its citizenry and elaborately creating boundaries for in- and outsiders (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006).

2.2. Illegality

The concept of illegality is overall used in terms of people's status and movement(s), often in relation to migration. Dating back from the post-First World War era, the concept is rather 'new' compared to sovereignty. De Genova (2002) argues that illegality initially concerned the status of labour migrants, whose undocumented movements within an increasingly global capitalist economy appeared too unpredictable for migrant-receiving nation states. By consequence, these countries increasingly assumed a unilinear dominant discourse, essentializing undocumented migration into its proclaimed problematic consequences. According to Andersson (2014), this has resulted in increased border security and enforcement policies as illustrated by the U.S.-Mexico border and Europe's fortified enclave on the African continent. For De Genova (2002), this has gone hand in hand with a reification process in which 'the migrant' has gradually been transformed into an "essentialized, generic and singular object" (p.421). Other authors like Sassen (1998) and Willen (2007) claim that the agency residing in such reification process highlights the need for a 'denaturalization' of migrant illegality and for a critical account on the production of it.

By denaturalizing migrant illegality, Sassen (1998) stresses the legal productivity of modern nation states. With such productivity, nation states define the parameters of legal and illegal practices or statuses by law (cf. legal sovereignty). Therefore, the 'naturalistic' discourse of nation states towards migrant illegality proves oversimplistic, but still contributes to the reification of the state's sovereign power (De Genova, 2002; Sassen, 1998). Opposing such naturalistic approach, the productivity and historicity of the law together with the artificiality of migrant illegality are increasingly translated into the term 'illegalized' when speaking of migrants whose documentation or movement(s) are deemed invalid or whose procedures rejected. The use of 'irregular' or 'undocumented' serves the same purpose and defies the naturalistically tending 'illegal' (De Genova, 2002; Sassen, 1998). Genova (2002) further emphasizes the socio-political processes of 'illegalization', and the law's productivity inherent to it, with what he calls "the legal production of migrant illegality" (p.429).

With this, Sassen and De Genova identify the law as a tactical tool for both discipline and coercion. As advanced by Foucault (1979), the "production of delinquency" and the critical role that illegality plays "for disciplining and othering all noncitizens" seem essential for the productivity of the law in general (De Genova, 2002, p.425). In addition, Behdad (1998) and Coutin (2000) regard the Immigration Law as a practical struggle that aims at turning a social group into a manageable object. By doing so, the law not only marginalizes noncitizens, but

also reproduces “normative notions of national identity for citizens themselves” (De Genova, 2002, p.425). The notion of ‘illegality’ is then established not only for a physical exclusion of migrants, but also for a social inclusion “under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability” (De Genova, 2002, p.429). This implies that for the migrant-receiving state, the illegality of undocumented migrants is no aberration, but can be considered an available resource and disciplining tool instead (Andersson, 2014; Heyman & Smart, 1999).

According to Kalir (2019) and Willen (2007), the one-sided illegalization of migrants inflicts a kind of epistemic violence on the social reality of these people’s everyday life. Similarly, Foucault (1979) has argued that in these contexts people are confronted with alienation and surrounded by “a field of illegal practices” that is established through “the existence of a legal prohibition” (p. 280). Here, the visible everyday existence of undocumented migrants strongly contrasts with the law’s invisibility (Coutin, 2000). With the ‘border spectacle’, De Genova (2002) refers to the “the exemplary theatre for staging the spectacle of ‘the illegal alien’ that the law produces” (p.436) and highlights countries’ necessity to visualize and naturalize migrant illegality. Here, again, migrants’ socio-physical presence is at odds with their negation as ‘illegals’ that generates so-called ‘spaces of nonexistence’ (Coutin, 2000). Here, this so-called nonexistence implies predominating experiences of “forced invisibility, exclusion, subjugation, and repressions”, as well as “enforced clandestinity”, “social death” and “legal ineligibility” (De Genova, 2002, p.427).

Furthermore, Willen (2007) discusses how illegalization processes also heavily impact the somatic, temporal and spatial experience(s) of migrants’ everyday life, both externally (i.e., legal status and sociolegal positionality) and internally (i.e., being-in-the-world). Inspired by Desjarlais (1997), she identifies a narrow connection between migrants’ objectified status and their subjective lived experiences, which creates migrants’ way of living under the condition of illegality. Therefore, illegality can be regarded as “the catalyst for particular forms of abjectivity” (Willen, 2007, p.11). While illegalized migrants are objectified through governmental processes of criminalization and othering, they (forcedly) develop new individual subjectivities around spatial, temporal and somatic experiences.² Consequently, illegalized migrants are in a constant state of ‘bodily vigilance’ (Willen, 2007) because their physical exclusion from the “host society space” brings along “a temporality of everyday risk” (p.19-22) or “enforced orientation towards the present” (De Genova, 2002, p.427). The constant reminder of their ‘otherness’ thus objectifies illegalized migrants (Fanon, 1968; Tormey, 2007).

² The notion of ‘abjectivity’ is used with both Nyers (2003) and Willen (2007). Derived from the adjective ‘abject’, it contains a double meaning: being a synonym for ‘despicable’ or ‘cast-off’, ‘abjectivity’ is also theoretically conceptualized as something in between ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’.

In sum, migrants' "everyday illegality" (De Genova, 2002, p.438) causes predominating experiences of immobility, precarity and provisionality (Vigh, 2009; Willen, 2007). By submitting migrants to everyday encounters with surveillance, repression and intimidation, as well as with heightened policing towards their bodies, movements and spaces, illegality can be regarded as a 'spatialized social condition' that enables racialized discourse of 'illegal aliens' within the nation state (De Genova, 2002). Similarly, such condition "reproduces the physical borders of nation-states in the everyday life of innumerable places throughout the interiors of the migrant-receiving states" (p.439). Following his argument, illegalized migrants are then disciplined with the threat of deportation from the receiving state's territory. For Willen, this threat has proven successful with actual deportation and detention practices, as well as with "sowing anxiety and fear among those who have managed to remain" (Willen, 2007, p.27).

3. Concepts applied to Europe's asylum and migration policies

In the following, I relate the concepts of sovereignty and illegality to the EU's contemporary asylum and migration policies. Given that this is a much-debated context, I have selected only those topics that seem most relevant to my research topic. Specifically, I delve into the relationship between borders, (humanitarian) borderwork and borderscapes on the one hand (3.1.), and between borders and temporality (3.2.), as well as borders and citizenship (3.3.) on the other. The concepts of sovereignty and illegality provide a suitable framework to do so (see 2.). As they both converge in nation states' illegalization practices vis-à-vis migrants, these concepts allow for questioning the nature of boundaries, self-other relations, as well as ethical and political practices of the sovereign state (Nyers, 2003).

3.1. The proliferation and multiplication of borders and borderscapes

As mentioned, Western nation states have increasingly resorted to border securitization in the light of intensified migratory movements prior to, during and after the so-called 'refugee crisis' (Andersson, 2014; De Vries & Welander, 2016). Although authors like Agamben, Foucault and Mbembé (cf. 2.1.) have theorized how sovereign power can use racial boundaries to differentiate belonging in 20th-century colonialism, Nazi extermination camps and Israel's settler colonial project in Palestine, European nation states now illustrate how boundary-making isn't confined to racial boundaries. By engaging in physical (e.g., walls, fences) and administrative (e.g., bureaucratic and legal impediments) border enforcement (Menjívar, 2014), these states are still answering globalizing movements with repressive action (De Genova, Mezzadra, & Pickles, 2015; Walters, 2015).

Although the current world looks more connected than ever before (Vigh, 2009), there were never more walls and fences at our borders than today (Kalir, 2019). With adapting their asylum and migration policies to a repressive extent, modern nation states give expression to matters of in- and exclusion of noncitizens, i.e., one of the key elements of sovereign power (Nyers, 2003). In sum, the recent multiplication and proliferation of borders has given a new dimension to the illegalization of people's statuses and movements, or at least, to our conception of these notions (Menjívar, 2014). In the subsections below, I demonstrate how borders can be considered sovereign instruments of control (3.1.1.). Subsequently, I comment upon recent phenomena of border insourcing or internalization (3.1.2.). Finally, I briefly introduce alternative conceptualizations of borders, as well as the emerging share of humanitarian actors in them (3.1.3.).

3.1.1 Borders as sovereign instruments of control

Analysing borders teaches us how state sovereignty engages in bordering practices against noncitizens, i.e., migrants and refugees. Compared to when sovereignty and control over who and what moved across borders was maintained violently, Pallister-Wilkins (2017) argues that border controls are now progressively moving towards more biopolitical forms of government. Consequently, a new 'spatial configuration of security' has emerged based on the circulation of people, something which was formalized with the 'Schengen Agreement' in the late 2000s (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017).³ Walters (2011, 2015) adds to this by arguing that bordering practices and controls, being part of migration policies, have developed into a sovereign state's essential instrument for the control of its population, territory and bureaucracy. Accordingly, migration policy sets the terms under which people can potentially integrate, and thus isn't confined to "a set of laws, regulations, bureaucracies and procedures that [...] regulates the cross-border movement [...] of people" (Walters, 2015, p.13). Altogether, bordering practices in migration policies can be semantically summarized by the term 'borderwork', which transcends the mere implementation of physical borders (Andersson, 2014).

3.1.2. Border externalization and internalization

By tightening up its migration and asylum policies at its outer borders, the EU has engaged in a process of 'border externalization' over the last decades. Matched by the latest Dublin III-Agreement, refugees are now compelled to apply for asylum in the first country of registration.⁴ By increasingly implementing militarized apprehensions, detentions and deportations into borderwork (De Genova, 2002), the EU has institutionalised measures that hamper refugees' access to asylum systems and aim at controlling and containing them in so-called 'hotspots' in its own southern periphery (De Vries & Welander, 2016). Pallister-Wilkins (2017) sees how border spaces, consequently, now involve suffering and death, legally compelling migrants and refugees towards risky illegalized practices and informal networks. Vandevoordt (2020) argues that by doing so, the EU's border externalization 'polices'⁵ migrants and refugees into the European 'refugee regime' and 'polices' illegality on them at the same time. According to De Genova et al. (2015), discourses of crisis (e.g., 'refugee crisis'), security and illegality have thereby affected the social relations of border crossing. So, while the EU's border spectacle

³ The Schengen Agreement was signed in 1985 and abolished the national borders, and thereby also border controls, between most European countries. The Schengen Agreement really became operational almost ten years later, in 1995 (Schengen Visa Info, 2021).

⁴ The latest Dublin III-Agreement entered into force by July 2013 and aims at ensuring "quick access to the asylum procedures and the examination of an application on the merits by a single, clearly determined EU country". By consequence, it makes the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application (European Commission, 2016).

⁵ 'Policing' in this context, as advanced by Rancière (2011), consists of "a set of practices that allocate a certain position to an individual or a group" (Vandevoordt, 2020, p.5).

aims at managing migrants and refugees in a biopolitical manner, this population is criminalized.

Whereas the European Union's externalized border policies have been granted a lot of academic attention, both Menjívar (2014) and Godin and Donà (2020), argue for shifting the focus towards internal borders and corresponding processes of border internalization or 'insourcing'. The fact that border out- and insourcing can be considered twin processes and constituents of the securitization of migration management explains borders' omnipresence; They have not only expanded outwards, but also inwards, or, as Menjívar names it, 'multidirectionally'. Besides the 'usual' practices of detention and deportation, she thereby argues how internalized borderwork aspires to govern and control migrant populations through "mechanisms that are not as visible as deportations and detention but that in effect delink territorial presence and citizenship, as states can also exclude through redefining laws that govern citizenship" (Menjívar, 2014, p.361). Consequently, migrants and refugees are kept in a state of suffering and precarity as tools for disciplinary purposes. That said, De Genova et al. (2015) introduce the notion of 'border regime' to imply "[an] epistemological, conceptual and methodological shift in the way we think about [...] borders" (p.69). Opposite to its commonplace understandings, the border is everything but homogenous and establishes "a site of constant encounter, tension, conflict and contestation" instead (De Genova et al., 2015, p.69).

3.1.3. From borders towards techno-borderscapes and humanitarian borderlands

The previous understandings of borders hint at their reconceptualization, moving away from their understanding as mere physical borderlands but exposing their changeable and fragmented nature instead. By consequence, authors like Pallister-Wilkins (2017), Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007), as well as Godin and Donà (2020), rely on more suitable notions such as 'borderland' and 'borderscape' to grasp the complexity, contingency and fluidity of contemporary borders. The fact that these borderlands or -scapes nowadays can be regarded as zones of both mobility and immobility, leads these authors to the conceptualization of the notion of 'stuckedness'. As there is also an increasing presence of technologies in these borderscapes, both from authorities and migrants and refugees themselves, Godin and Donà (2020) introduce the concept of 'techno-borderscapes'. In the light of these borderscapes, both Walters (2011) and Pallister-Wilkins (2017) have theorized the emergence of the 'humanitarian borderland', a type of borderscape that involves the opposite forces of lifesaving interventions (by civil actors, NGOs, etc.) on the one hand, and border policy restrictions on the other.

3.2. Temporality at the border

The multiplication and proliferation of both physical and administrative, externalized and internalized borders have altered migrants' experiences of space, time and belonging (Menjívar, 2014). After having elaborated on the changed conceptions of space, I here delve deeper into the experiences of time at both sides of borderwork. Accordingly, processes of border externalization and internalization have not only served the state to complicate migratory movement(s), but also to govern their temporal experiences in the process. Accordingly, Tazzioli (2018) argues that the recent enforcement of migration controls has created a specific 'temporality of control', which serves the EU as a tool for new selection, government, and disciplining strategies of migration control. More specifically, she sees how the establishment of deadlines and time limits, as well as the implementation of protracted (asylum) procedures and stays in detention camps, have helped governments to retain migrants in a kind of temporary strange hold that feels indefinite. Firstly, I comment upon time as a tool of discipline (3.2.1.). Second, I give a brief overview of what other authors have called politics of suspension, exhaustion, deterrence and disintegration in which this so-called 'temporality of control' is vital (see 3.2.2.).

3.2.2. Time as a tool of discipline

Like Pallister-Wilkins' (2017) and Godin and Donà's (2020) understanding of borderscapes, Tazzioli applies a ubiquitous and mobile definition of temporal borders. Inspired by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), she portrays how temporal borders negatively affect both the somatic experience of time and the temporality of migrants' journeys. In her opinion, such 'temporality' then refers to the "change of speed that concerns both mechanisms of control and asylum procedures" (p.15). As a result of such speed oscillations, migrants repeatedly get stuck in "protracted moments of wait and of legal impasse", eventually becoming subject to abrupt and random "discontinuities, alterations and irregularities" (Tazzioli, 2018, p.16). Moreover, the 'temporality of control' tends to retain migrants in 'illegality' for extended periods of time, rendering them vulnerable to possible deportation. Altogether, this causes predominating feelings of uncertainty and confusion (De Genova, 2002; Willen, 2007).

3.2.3. Politics of suspension, exhaustion and disintegration

Drawing upon Hage's (2009) understanding of waiting as a reason for feelings of profound stuckedness and immobility, the temporality of control that is inherent to the EU's asylum policies is said to dehumanize migrants strongly. Since such dehumanization resides in the institutional management of speed and time, Bagelman (2016) names this 'politics of suspension', which aim at putting migrants and refugees in temporal-spatial problems of waiting. Lucht (2011) takes 'waiting' beyond its understanding as a mere procedural

consequence, and recognizes how forcing people to wait is an expression of power par excellence. Therefore, 'waiting' entails a certain 'doubleness', constituting a state of stuckedness and being a strategic technique at once (Griffiths, 2014; Hage, 2009). Moreover, Bagelman (2016) identifies within the institutionalization of waiting a range of political actors 'behind the scenes', including states, state institutions, private agencies and the like (Collyer et al., 2020). The aspects of suspension, protraction and waiting are also present in De Vries and Welander's (2016) 'politics of exhaustion', in which exhaustion is used as a political technology for deterring migrants and refugees both mentally and physically. Since so-called politics of suspension and exhaustion undermine, and even impede, processes of integration, they both relate to Collyer et al.'s (2020) 'politics of disintegration', which basically aim at hindering and discouraging migrants' settlement.

Altogether, these politics of suspension, exhaustion and disintegration can be summarized under Andersson's (2014, 2018) all-embracing notion of politics of deterrence'. Compared to the previous authors, however, Andersson adds an economic layer to this notion. By introducing his 'bioeconomy of waiting', this author observes how migrants and refugees are (economically) deployed by states as constantly disposable labour surplus by means of time control and illegalization mechanisms. Additionally, forcing migrants and refugees into a state of 'legal limbo', states are said to create a conditioning phenomenon of protracted waiting and stuckedness as an exemplary 'deterrent' for future migrants and refugees.

3.3. Citizenship at the border

Finally, I consider how the multiplicity of borders in European asylum and migration policies has affected the interpretation of citizenship. For Nash (2009), citizenship depends on a legal status that brings along rights and responsibilities in relation to the state, as well as on more spontaneous 'acts' of citizenship that open up opportunities for political participation. Building further on Pallister-Wilkins' understanding of borderscapes as zones where inside (self) and outside (other) are constantly (re)produced, they can also be considered spaces where "gradients of [...] citizenship and non-citizenship appear especially sharply" (Walters, 2011, p.146). Menjívar (2014) adds to this by treating internalized border enforcement in particular as fertile ground for a reconfiguration of citizenship. In her opinion, migrants and refugees, i.e., the targets of such enforcements, are not only threatened with confinement or deportation, but also forced into a state of suffering and precarity. Consequently, receiving nation states resort to more 'subtle' (administrative) practices, "that in effect delink territorial presence and citizenship, as states can also exclude through redefining laws that govern citizenship" (Menjívar, 2014, p.361). Altogether, matters of citizenship, inclusion and exclusion can therefore be perceived as political strategies and calculations at the border (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012). First, I look at the mechanisms of differential inclusion and exclusion and their

effects on citizenship at the border (3.3.1.). Following, I elaborate on how illegality can condition citizenship (3.3.2.). Lastly, I discuss the notion of critical citizenship vis-à-vis both migrants and humanitarian actors (3.3.3.).

3.3.1. Differential inclusion and exclusion

Acknowledging the contingent, fluid and omnipresent character of borderscapes, both Pallister-Wilkins (2017) and De Genova et al. (2015) understand borders and borderscapes as 'citizenship regimes' that work as "differentiation machines, [actively creating] a relational field of subject positions through processes of selective and differential inclusion" (p.84). Following these authors, the emergence of new citizenship statuses illustrates the contingency of citizenship, which is reinforced by performative practices like deportation or other actions of sovereign state power, i.e., 'technologies of citizenship'. Accordingly, processes of differential inclusion and exclusion in Clastres' (1995) understanding determine a hierarchical structure of conditions under which migrants and refugees may or may not be included.

Contemporary European asylum and integration policies justify these on grounds of 'the limited capacity argument'. Collyer et al. (2020) conceive them as essential parts of integration policies as they determine "set[s] of requirements for the attainment of certain rights, including citizenship" (p.1). The 'limited capacity argument' legitimizes limited integration based on the presumption of limited resources, facilities and public acceptance. Along with processes of differential in- and exclusion, criteria such as 'value', 'contribution' and 'merit' determine people at the border. As the 'deservingness' argument stems from a neoliberal conception of individual responsibility (Collyer et al. 2020), the disintegration of certain groups or individuals contributes to a kind of nation-building. Accordingly, Nyers (2003) argues how excluded migrants and refugees become part of a bigger 'abject cosmopolitanism', referring to the political practices and debates that stem from migrants' and refugees' resistance against exclusionary border policies.

3.3.2. Citizenship and illegality

Regarding so-called technologies of citizenship, De Genova (2002) has identified 'inclusion through illegalization'. Mezzadra and Neilson refer to De Genova's idea of 'the legal production of illegality', reasoning that inclusion through illegalization "creates the conditions under which a racial divide is inscribed within the composition of labour and citizenship" (p.68). Therefore, illegality and citizenship can be considered inseparable (De Genova, 2002). Moreover, his emphasis on race is recovered in Kalir's (2019) work on 'Departheid'. For Kalir, nation states' engagement in fortifying its borders, containing vast amounts of migrants, as well as deporting some when possible, is narrowly related to deeper-lying racism and sentiments of 'white supremacy' within Western culture. Therefore, he argues that the processes of racialised

discrimination and stigmatization aim at stripping migrants and refugees of their citizenship, reducing them to 'noncitizens' without legal rights.

3.3.3. Critical citizenship

Alternatively, migrants can also defy their enforced state of precarity by 'acts of citizenship' and 'acts of integration', something which Collyer et al. (2020) have named 'critical citizenship'. These acts or 'migrant struggles' can be regarded as "efforts that are made by migrants with uncertain status to achieve equality of access or inclusion" (Collyer et al., 2020, p.5; De Genova et al., 2015). Jørgensen and Schierup (2016), inspired by Butler's (2012) understanding of the term, see precarity as a potential catalyst for change, for it can become "a rallying point for mobilization that builds alliances across ethnic, racial and class-based divisions [...] and defines wider strategies for resistance and the claiming of rights" (p.950). Accordingly, these authors argue that migrants and refugees can mobilize through 'mobile commons' and challenge the hegemonic notions of rights and access to citizenship. The 'micropolitics' in which they then engage connect to Vandevordt's (2020) and Rancière's (2010) understanding of politics, in which illegalized migrants resist policing and engage in reclaiming the rights of which they are stripped. The same political engagement is true for solidary citizens and humanitarian actors that mobilize support for migrants (Vandevordt, 2020). A prime example of critical citizenship is Bouchani's (2018) discerning account on the border externalization of Australian asylum and migration policies, with which he, as a then confined asylum seeker, was eventually granted with citizenship.

This understanding of critical citizenship relates to the earlier mentioned notion of 'abject cosmopolitanism'. Whereas 'abject' implies exclusion, 'cosmopolitanism' goes against the logic of nationalism and "follows its own categorical imperative, taking all humanity, irrespective of place, along for the ride" (Nyers, 2003, p.1072). Altogether, abject cosmopolitanism refers to the political practices and debates that stem from migrants' and refugees' resistance against exclusionary border policies. Here, Nyers (2003), inspired by to Isin (2002), stresses the importance of spatial practices as constituents for citizenship, for "space is a condition of being political" (p.1080). Correspondingly, people's access to certain buildings or spaces can be regarded as an expression of citizenship. For illegalized migrants, however, such spaces are mostly restricted to what Nyers calls "mezzanine spaces of sovereignty", i.e., "spaces which are in-between the inside and the outside of the state" (p.1080).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research questions

Applying the insights of my conceptual and theoretical framework to the context of the online preregistration procedure (OPRP), I wondered what impact it might have on the (type of) borders standing between applicants for international protection (AIPs) and their actual registration for IP. My main research question therefore is the following:

- What impact did the interim online preregistration procedure of Belgium's Immigration Office have on the borders that stand between applicants for international protection and (the asylum registration procedure of) the Belgian state?

By looking at the OPRP's impact on borderwork, I aim at gaining a better understanding of how the Belgian state and its representative administrations have (or not) deployed its sovereign power during the covid-19 crisis. Moreover, I wonder what the introduction of the OPRP might teach us about the relation of the state vis-à-vis its noncitizens in times of crisis. I thereby wonder at how this interim decision has impacted AIPs and thus encouraged (or not) civil society to intervene. Lastly, I hope to delve deeper into the impact of the OPRP on AIPs' experience of applying for international protection. As a result, I formulate the following sub-questions:

- What impact did the online preregistration procedure of Belgium's Immigration Office have on the sociolegal positionality of applicants for international protection?
- What influence did the introduction of the OPRP have on the duration of AIPs' intended asylum registration procedures? How does this relate to politics of suspension and exhaustion?
- How has Brussels's civil society tried to mitigate the effects of the online preregistration procedure (OPRP) and thereby responded to AIPs' needs? Which civil actors have thereby played a prominent role in doing so? How has this influenced civil society's position vis-à-vis 'the state'?

Following, I will introduce the methodological approach by means of which I have tried to answer my main research and sub-questions.

4.2. Ethnographic fieldwork in and around Brussels

4.2.1. Methodology

The primary focus of my ethnographic fieldwork was gaining a better understanding of the effects of the online preregistration procedure (OPRP) on the stakeholders involved. Therefore, I organized ethnographic fieldwork with three different groups of respondents. As

of January 2021, three months after the OPRP's end, I started doing interviews with, chronologically, civil society actors (i.e., Flemish Refugee Action (Startpunt) and Pigment), state actors (i.e., Fedasil and Infopunt) and applicants for international protection who preregistered during the OPRP. In aggregate, this fieldwork included ten semi-structured interviews with four NGO workers, four public servants and two AIPs. As my interviewees ranged in procedural expertise from badly informed AIPs to engaged volunteers and knowledgeable public servants, I gained multiple vantage points from which to learn about the OPRP's influence. Among my interviewees, there were nine women and only one man. Because of the variety of respondents' backgrounds, I conducted interviews in English, French and Dutch. Furthermore, the length of the interviews varied strongly; while some only lasted twenty minutes, others took more than one hour. When informed consent was given, I audio recorded and then transcribed the interview. In some cases, however, I only took extensive written notes.

Due to the covid-19 health measures that were in force at the time, most of the interviews happened through an online platform. On some occasions like with Pigment and the open reception centre for AIPs in Zaventem, however, I was able to do interviews on the spot. This allowed me to learn, see and experience the field myself. This is something I hoped to repeat with two moments of participant observation in early April 2021 with Flemish Refugee Action's Startpunt team and Fedasil's Infopunt, once outside and once inside the walls of Little Fortress's arrival centre. With the former, I participated in one of their 'morning shifts' talking to, informing and advising queuing AIPs at Little Fortress's gate. With the latter, I was only able to closely follow the employees' interactions with AIPs because participating (and giving advice on asylum procedures) was beyond my capacity. Altogether, I gained rich qualitative data with the interviews and participant observations in and around Brussels throughout the first four months of 2021.

4.2.2. Data collection

Through interviewing and doing participant observation, I also gained access to additional documentation of civil society actors in the field, including informative leaflets, official (and anonymized) e-mail correspondence, screenshots and multilingual manuals of the online pre-registration procedure. Furthermore, the proximity of the NGOs and state actors vis-à-vis one another enabled me to, also locationally, familiarize with the field. As the different groups of respondents partaking in my research therefore proved an interconnected network of people, this allowed me to find further respondents through snowball sampling. Furthermore, it enabled me to, during participant observation for instance, expose interactions, conflicts and convergences between the different groups of respondents.

I complemented my empirical data with a number of policy reports from both the European Asylum Support Office (EASO, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), the independent federal migration centre (Myria, 2020a, 2020b) the Belgian Immigration Office (IBZ, 2020) and the CGRS (2020). EASO published several policy reports falling under their 'practical guide series' in which they formulated recommendations for the implementation of emergency and interim solutions in asylum policies of EU member states throughout the first year of the covid-19 pandemic. Myria published reports of their multiple contact meetings with the Immigration Office, in which the numbers, challenges and perspectives of the OPRP were critically discussed. Finally, the annual reports of both CGRS and the Immigration Office included specific numbers on covid-19's impact on backlogs, workload fluctuations, and registered as well as rejected AIPS. This share of documents provided additional (sometimes nuanced) perspectives on my research topic in numbers and statistics.

4.2.3. Reflections

Given the covid-19 crisis and my own positionality, my process of ethnographic fieldwork proved complicated at times. First, in my contacts with open reception centres for AIPs, other than those in Zaventem and Etterbeek, the pandemic was mentioned as one of the main reasons for not wishing to collaborate. Together with this, my constructive contacts with a G4S-led reception centre in Etterbeek were abruptly interrupted by a bedbug plague and an unexpected shutdown. Furthermore, the covid-19-related health measures that were in force during my entire fieldwork restricted the spontaneity and personal contacts with my respondents, and denied me from going to places and have (more) real-life experiences. Second, my positionality as a white, Belgian student-researcher may have facilitated access to civil and state actors, but has surely hampered my contacts with AIPs. Accordingly, my linguistic capacities (and the lack of interpreters) proved unfit to appeal to a more diversified set of AIP respondents, both in terms of origin and vulnerability. When finally interviewing two female AIPs, it proved hard to remain critical and neutral while not searching for the preferred answers, as well as to react properly to their personal stories. Only practicing such encounters could compensate my personal lack of connection with AIPs' networks, situations and profiles.

4.2.4. Data analysis

Despite the interviews being transcribed in Dutch, French and English, possible quotes from the transcripts are translated to English throughout this dissertation. The information and impressions I got from the two participant observations are processed in narrative reports. To guarantee anonymity to all my respondents, I make use of pseudonyms. For an in-depth analysis of all my empirical and secondary data, I have used NVivo as a qualitative data analysis software. Departing from the 'grounded theory'-approach (Charmaz & Belgrave,

2007), I have initially engaged in open coding to determine the emerging themes from my data in a bottom-up way. By followingly doing axial coding, I have tried to identify relationships between these different themes, combining the interview transcripts, participant observation reports and secondary data documents. Instead of preparing codes on beforehand, I have identified them in the process of analysing my data. This way, some codes were changed or grouped under new codes, while others in the end proved irrelevant and were left out of the analysis.

5. Context: Applying for international protection in Belgium, a brief overview

In this chapter, I provide a contextual and technical framework that is crucial for the remainder of this dissertation. First, I give an historical overview of Belgian asylum and integration policies until early 2020, right before the covid-19 virus forced the country into a national lockdown (5.1.). With this, I aim at contextualizing recent asylum policy developments, such as my research topic, as well as familiarizing the reader with the key institutions, (state and civil) actors and tendencies in the field. Subsequently, I briefly discuss how migrants could apply for international protection prior to covid-19 (5.2.). This is, once again, vital for a better understanding of the Belgian asylum organigram, the procedural specificities and institutional complexities that appear in my data analysis.

5.1. From past to present

The organigram of Belgium's asylum- and integration has developed over several decades. In the 1950s and 60s, when Mediterranean guest workers arrived in Belgium, necessary social support was provided by local initiatives while a clear political vision on the federal level towards asylum- and integration policies was still lacking (Vandevoordt, 2019). It wasn't before the 1980s that Belgium's asylum and integration policies underwent a 'devolution' and were transferred to the regional governments (Adam, 2013). Here, in turn, funds for citizen initiatives, NGOs and local governments were freed up to develop local integration policies, resulting in a close and formalized corporation between civil and state actors, befitting the corporatist-democratic tradition of the Belgian welfare state (Vandevoordt, 2019). To date, the regional governments of Flanders and Wallonia are responsible for integration matters, while the federal government deals with the procedures of nationality, deportation and asylum.

Essentially, the regional organisation of integration in both Flanders and Wallonia implied a strong (regional) professionalization and specialisation of civil actors' services from the 1990s onwards. This, however, wasn't the case for the region of Brussels where the increasingly diverse character of the capital exposed the maladjustment of the Flemish and Walloon policies (Bousetta et al., 2018). Whereas these two regions only decided over integration, the Brussels region, with its complex multilevel governance structure encompassing no less than 19 municipalities, was charged of both asylum and integration policies. Because of the traditional omnipresence of the socialist parties, the Brussels region proved fertile ground for the development of civic associations, explaining their high concentration to date. Their development within Brussels's organisational complexity, however, has proven considerably different from their Flemish and Walloon counterparts (Vandevoordt, 2019). Apart from that,

more recent political developments have triggered their further growth and complicated position vis-à-vis the Belgian state.

On Flemish level, however, neoliberal measures have increasingly aimed at a centralisation of power, reducing governmental support to civil actors whilst increasing control on their work. This policy shift towards centralisation was backed by the impression that the overload of civil actors' services overlapped with those of state actors (Groffy & Debruyne, 2014). Rather than maintaining the corporatist-democratic tradition of political partners in the welfare state, civil actors now became increasingly regarded as "contracted service providers" (Vandevoordt, 2019, p.109). According to Adam (2013) and Martiniello (2013), these shifts in Flemish integration policies should be regarded as the result of state- and nation-building processes. In sum, the neoliberal approach to Flemish integration policies have reduced government-provided services, decreased the (financial) support towards Flemish civil society and increased the responsibility of migrants and refugees, whose "citizensation", in line with the "rising popularity of neoliberal discourses across the European continent", has become increasingly dependent on meritorious aspects (Vandevoordt, 2019, p.19).

Together with Flanders' liberalisation, policies on the federal level have taken a repressive turn. The sudden increase of arriving migrants and refugees during the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 caught De Block's administration off guard and developed into a twofold crisis of slower integration and legal statuses. While the capacity in both state-led reception centres and local accommodation initiatives, led by Fedasil and its partners, appeared insufficient, civil society proved essential by actively filling the (policy) gaps produced by the national governments. Despite civil society's structural and professionalized working methods, however, an unfriendly political environment thwarted their activities (Vandevoordt, 2019, 2020). Accordingly, the 'burden' of increasing numbers of 'transmigrants' dwelling in Brussels wasn't answered by governmental action, but instead passed to (new) citizen initiatives like 'Plateforme Citoyenne'. Whereas civil actors were met with political severity on the federal level, citizen associations and NGOs in Brussels received local political support for the professionalization of their services. Still, federal political discourse accused volunteers offering stranded refugees a place to sleep of 'smuggling', threatened them with lawsuits, and called them 'extreme-leftist' and 'unlawful'. Consequently, the civil 'stopgap help' was strongly disincentivized (Vandevoordt, 2019). Because of this increasingly constrained wiggle room for civil society, refugees had to fend for themselves (Groffy & Debruyne, 2014). In the end, reports of police brutality towards transmigrants and involved citizens triggered "disobedient, symbolically contentious acts of solidarity" by civil society, and pushed them towards their "gradual politicization" in response to the repressive (border) policies at the time (Vandevoordt, 2020, p.9).

In the years following the ‘refugee crisis’, federal asylum and integration policies under Secretary of State Theo Francken (N-VA) became increasingly discouraging vis-à-vis migrants and refugees. Apart from decisively reducing the reception capacity for AIPs by closing temporary reception centres in 2018 and temporarily downscaling registration capacity in the arrival centre of Little Fortress, Francken also pushed for the introduction of technical and administrative adjustments, such as CGRS’s access to online data (profiles) of AIPs (Lambrechts, 2021). Later that same year, the N-VA questioned the engagement of the federal government in the then called ‘Marrakesh Pact’ (‘Regering die naar Marrakech gaat’, 2018).⁶ In the light of these events, the N-VA launched a controversial social media campaign against this pact, using photoshopped images, sketching the stereotypical picture of the threatening ‘islamization’ of Europe and freeloading immigrants (Verstraete, 2018). Not much later, the government of Prime Minister Michel fell, Francken demised as Secretary of State and caretaking Minister Maggie De Block stepped in. With Francken in office, civil society had felt left out, because his discouraging policies had proved at their expense: Whereas federal policies created a favourable environment for civil mobilisation to fill in the policy gaps, their institutionalisation was hindered by repressive discourse and practice at the same time (Vandevoordt, 2019).

Under the caretaker government of Prime Minister Wilmès, De Block remained in office until October 2020. During her tenure, the discourse around migration softened whilst her policy remained “firm but fair” (‘Opnieuw asiel en migratie’, 2018). As an indication of this, De Block focused on tightening up Belgium’s return policies while holding on to the slogan “voluntary if possible, forced if needed” (Rombaut, 2020; Willems, 2019). It was also during De Block’s tenure that a first (covid-19-related) national lockdown mid-March 2020 announced a challenging year for Belgian asylum- and migration policies.

5.2. Applying for international protection in Belgium prior to covid-19

Third-country nationals who risk persecution or severe injuries back in their home country can apply for asylum or international protection in Belgium (Belgium.be, n.d.). Having arrived on Belgian territory, a person must register their wish for international protection with the Immigration Office, either at the borders (e.g., airport) or in the arrival centre Little Fortress in Brussels. A registration of such request proceeds according to the so-called ‘flow system’, which normally includes a security check and a formal identification with a public servant of the Immigration Office (incl. fingerprints, photo), followed by a social and medical screening done

⁶ The ‘Marrakesh Pact’ or the Global Pact for Migration is a pact made by heads of state and government within the UN General Assembly. With the Pact, the “need for a comprehensive approach to human mobility and enhanced cooperation at the global level” was addressed (IOM, n.d.).

by Fedasil. At the end of the day, the requester receives a so-called 'annex 26', i.e., the document that proves their formal registration for international protection and simultaneously grants them the right for shelter and material assistance (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2019). At this point, the person in question is initially accommodated in the arrival centre of Little Fortress, managed by Fedasil.

After the Immigration has verified the validity of the asylum request and the applicant has made an initial interview with the IBZ, averagely comprising a week, Fedasil's dispatching service allocates the applicant a place in one of the 80 individual or collective centres in Belgium's reception network, managed by Fedasil itself or outsourced to one of its partners like the Red Cross, G4S and the like (Fedasil, n.b.). Yet, nobody is obliged to be sheltered in such a facility. When the Immigration Office positively validates the request, the application for IP is officially filed and sent to the Commissioner-General for Refugees and Stateless Persons or CGRS. Subsequently, the applicant continues their procedure and is prepared with the support of social assistants for upcoming interviews with the CGRS. Here, the CGRS investigates the motivations behind the application and finally decides on whether the person concerned is recognized as refugee, is granted subsidiary protection⁷, or rejected and urged to leave the territory (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2019). In case of a positive decision, however, the AIP receives a residence permit and can start searching for their own accommodation. In case of the latter, an applicant is stripped of all material assistance and the right for shelter, but can still lodge appeal with the Council for Alien Disputes or CAD. When such a profile wants to be reintegrated in Fedasil's reception network, or when they have questions around a more complex procedure (e.g., in case of the Dublin III-regulation), they can go to Fedasil's 'Infopunt' to gain adequate advice on (re)starting their procedure (VVSG, 2021).

⁷ The status of 'subsidiary protection' is granted to asylum applicants who cannot meet the criteria for international protection, but who find themselves in a situation in which returning to their home country would entail serious risks (Fedasil, n.d.).

6. Findings

After this extensive thematical, theoretical and contextual introduction, the following chapter provides the most relevant findings of my ethnographic fieldwork and consists of a thematical reconstruction of how the online preregistration procedure (OPRP) impacted Belgian asylum policies and the actors involved. With this, I gradually work towards finding adequate answers to my research questions (cf. 4.1.). To begin with, I comment upon the closure of Little Fortress and the OPRP's introduction in the light of the first national lockdown in Belgium due to covid-19 (6.1.). Following, I provide a detailed description of civil society's engagement in response to these events (6.2.). Third, I critically address civil society's position vis-à-vis the state and its institutions, as well as the implications of the former's humanitarianism for this position (6.3.). Fourth, I zoom into how AIPs' sociolegal positionality was affected by highlighting some of the most influential aspects of the OPRP (6.4.). Finally, I take a zoomed-out perspective to discuss the role and impact of increasing digitalisation with the OPRP and in the future (6.5.). Throughout all these subsections, I engage in finding connections between my empirical data and the earlier mentioned theoretical insights concerning borders, temporality and citizenship (cf. 2. & 3.).

6.1. Top-down decision-making: A thematical reconstruction of Belgian asylum policies during the covid-19 crisis

In this first subchapter, I elaborate on the Belgian asylum policies during the covid-19 crisis by highlighting the closure of the arrival centre of Little Fortress (6.1.1.) and the subsequent introduction of the interim OPRP (6.1.2.). For this purpose, I mainly draw upon the experiences of different state actors because they highlight the complexity that emerged with these interim emergency decisions. The complexity of Little Fortress, as a location, will feature here as the common thread.

6.1.1. The closure of Little Fortress for new applicants for international protection

The first national lockdown in Belgium⁸ and the corresponding emergency health measures convinced the then (caretaking) Minister for asylum and migration De Block, in agreement with the Immigration Office, to pause all new registrations for international protection. Consequently, the doors of Little Fortress's arrival centre were closed and as of 17 March 2020, newly arriving AIPs couldn't register their IP request or find accommodation there anymore. Personnel of both Fedasil and Infopunt in the arrival centre called this decision

⁸ The first national lockdown in Belgium was officialised by Belgium's Department of Internal Affairs on March 13, 2020 (Binnenlandse zaken, 2020).

“sudden” and “unpopular”. Whereas word reached some by e-mail, others were informed of it directly:

“And so initially, there were the Immigration Office and the employees, and [...] the responsible [...] who says, right I won't be able to let in more than 60 people because I don't have the personnel. [...] You don't want to believe it, *quoi*. Come on, we cannot do that! That's not possible! And then finally, she comes back saying, no it's not 60, it's 40. Because in fact, I have another co-worker that has gotten sick. [...] But everyone is afraid, everyone is stressed. [...] The Immigration Office, they're in total panic! And so that day we let in 43 people. But it was horrible, *quoi*. Also, how to count those 43? And then we close[d] the door. And the next day, in fact nobody of the Immigration Office wanted to work.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

For those of my respondents working in Little Fortress, the closure caused desperation and panic (Esmé, 01-04-2021; Nina, 30-03-2021; Veerle, 01-04-2021). As no new AIPs were allowed in, some of Fedasil's employees felt as if they lost their job and as if the absence of the IO's staff made them useless. As the staff of both the Immigration Office and Fedasil (including Infopunt) were temporarily dismissed and obliged to telework, the latter seemed very worried about this decision: “And if they [Immigration Office] are not there, we cannot do our registration job! In fact, we couldn't do anything.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

Without any alternative provided, Little Fortress's doors eventually remained closed for new AIPs for three weeks straight, a period in which Fedasil's forcedly shifted their full attention towards the arrival centre's 750 residents. More specifically, Fedasil had to increase the arrival centre's health measures and the residents' awareness around them. After having implemented temperature tests for AIPs in February already, now “people weren't allowed anymore to go to the playgrounds, they had to respect the rules, washing their hands, [...] wearing masks, not wearing masks” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). Whereas Infopunt's employees were committed to support the monitoring of the reception centre (Esmé, 01-04-2021), others' mandates were “ready to be thrown into the bin” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). As one of Fedasil's coordinating employees summarized it:

“We had to organize a specific zone for people who are covid-positive or had symptoms. Because there were very few or no tests. And so, *voilà*, that was our priority. First communicating to the employees, and second, organizing our collective centre with covid in mind. [...] You know, in organisational terms it was easier for us not to have any new residents. But just to have the residents that were already here, and that were a big bubble of 500 people. [...] And it also bought us some time to, you know, get the organisational aspects on point. And afterwards we have also, you know, sat together with the IO to look, how can we start up again?” (Marian, 16-03-2021; translated from Dutch).

As illustrated, both the IO and Fedasil could use some time to reorganize because, due to the unprecedented scale of this lockdown, a prompt resolution like with previous crisis (e.g., the Ebola epidemic) was lacking. Although the discontinuation of activities enabled the employees in Little Fortress to focus on the residents' needs, the situation outside didn't seem under full control:

“Yes, it was very chaotic, *hein*. Because, if you like, people outside were multiplying in front of the Infopunt. [...] For me, it was horrible. I don’t want to live through that ever again. Those doors closed, and preventing people from requesting protection. In fact, that’s legally not even possible. [...] And everyone was there! So, we had to organise with the security agents to close the gates, for people were gathering there in large numbers. Yet, they didn’t understand why they couldn’t ...” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

As these same respondents said there was no communication towards AIPs, it took a while before the situation got quiet and newly arriving AIPs realized what had happened: “So, it was very tense. Very tense, *quoi*. It was tense for days and days. Until word, until the information went round, until the people understood and said to themselves, well, in fact it’s not possible, *quoi*.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). Simultaneously, the duration of Little Fortress’s closure wasn’t determined yet: “Because we were just afraid, because we had asked them until when we would be closed. And they [Immigration Office] couldn’t tell us some deadlines.” (Esmé, 01-04-2021; translated from French). Therefore, some of Infopunt’s employees were pessimistic of the closure’s impact on AIPs. As Veerle (01-04-2021) thought it would threaten to “make the vulnerable even more vulnerable”, another staff member admitted:

“And we said to ourselves, be careful, there are no deadlines. Ok, but just beware ... The people, they will still come, *quoi*. And even when you tell us that we will be closed for an undetermined period of time, yes, there will be people at the gates.” (Esmé, 01-04-2021; translated from French).

These reactions illustrate the preoccupation of Fedasil’s and Infopunt’s employees with Little Fortress’s closure. Having no immediate alternative at hand, the IO’s decision was (internally) seen as everything but a solution and didn’t prevent new AIPs from coming to Little Fortress’s gate (Veerle, 01-04-2021). From all the staff’s experiences combined, the common feature of Little Fortress’s complexity surfaced, being a shared location for agencies like Fedasil and the Immigration Office.

6.1.2. What’s in a name? The birth of the online preregistration procedure (OPRP)

Already in May 2020, the European Asylum Support Office or EASO (2020a) reported on how governmentally imposed health measures ‘forced’ many immigration administrations to briefly suspend asylum registration activities in March 2020. Yet, for a gradual reprise of the activities, EASO emphasized the need for interim, innovative solutions in the form of online or remote registration. As EASO (2020b) itself conceived the management of covid-19 through such alternatives as examples of “good practice”, its recommendations and practical guidelines for procedural changes were closely followed by Belgium and other EU member states (CGRS, n.d.).

As explained under (5.2.), the responsibility for AIPs’ registration, which in its first phase (normally) takes place inside Little Fortress, lies with the Immigration Office. Before the covid-

19 pandemic, newly arrived AIPs usually entered in the morning and were spread over different waiting rooms. With no social distancing rules in place, the normal capacity was higher: “Before covid, we had 250 people in front of the gates that we let in into our waiting rooms every day.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). Yet, as people-to-people contact in enclosed spaces raised covid-19 contagion risks, the IO felt compelled to rethink and strengthen its registration system to mitigate virus spread with both staff and AIPs. In contrast to France and Greece, where asylum registrations were suspended (EASO, 2020c), the IO finally preferred the possibility of organizing registrations by scheduling online appointments without physical contact:

“Because in the end, the appointments are there for what? They’re there because of covid. [...] In the end, I want to say, this system of appointments, it was never imagined before we had to decrease, in fact, the occupation of the waiting rooms, and we had to decrease the number of people at the same time. And so, that’s the solution they [IO] have come up with”. (Nina, 30—03-2021; translated from French)

Thus, from 6 April 2020 onwards, De Block’s and the Immigration Office’s OPRP looked like returning AIPs their access to asylum procedures (Delepeleire, 2020c). Throughout my fieldwork, various alternative names for this procedural adjustment occurred, including ‘online form’, ‘online application form’, ‘online system’, ‘system of online registration’, ‘system of online appointment’, ‘system of online subscription’, and the like. Yet, only calling it ‘online preregistration procedure’, and thus adding the prefix ‘pre-’ to ‘registration’, covers the necessary ground (EASO, 2020b).

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ONLINE PREREGISTRATION PROCEDURE (OPRP)

Since the OPRP had already been taken offline at the time of my fieldwork⁹, I first gained access to it when, in the aftermath of our interview, Vera printed out an incomplete Dutch version she had saved on her laptop (see 10.1.). Luckily, I found screenshots of a more complete copy in French on the website of Flemish Refugee Action (see 10.2.), who together with the NGO Ciré had created multilingual manuals for the OPRP.

In essence, the OPRP in its then and only form required a detailed preregistration of one’s personal data and documents. As both the versions in Dutch and French show, it consisted of different subsections. In the Dutch version, however, the last section is missing. Under section A “Identity information of the requester on Belgian territory”, applicants were asked to give their basic identity details, provide an e-mail address and confirm to possess a passport (see fig.1). Furthermore, they had to upload a copy of their passport (see fig.2), indicate any (if applicable) previous contacts with Belgian authorities and, finally, upload a photo (see fig.3).

⁹ The OPRP was available on this website: <https://www.fedasilinfo.be/nl/registreer-online-uw-afspraak-voor-het-aanmeldcentrum>, yet is not anymore.

Figure 1: section A of the OPRP

Figure 2: upload section of the AIP's passport

Figure 3: history of the AIP and upload section of the AIP's photo

In section B “Family composition of the requester on Belgian territory”, the applicants were asked to provide details on their partner, marriage and underaged child(ren) (if applicable) (see fig.4 & 5). Also here, a photo of the child(ren) had to be uploaded (see fig.6). In the remainder of this section, applicants were also further questioned about potential children of age (see 10.2.).

Figure 4: section B of the OPRP

Figure 5: family composition of the AIP

Figure 6: information of the AIP's children and the upload section of their photo

In section C “Spoken languages”, the applicants had to list which languages they could speak (see fig.7). With section D “Remarks”, they were asked for their statement of assurance regarding the provided information in the previous sections (see fig.8). Finally, the OPRP also featured the possibility for applicants to disclose a possible vulnerability under section E “Point of attention to report” (see fig.9). The OPRP concluded with the AIPs’ obligatory authorisation

for the use of their personal data (see fig.10). In attachment, there was also a PDF-file “Information in relation to the use of personal data”, which provided the conditions of the General Data Protection Regulation (see fig.11). Moreover, the three footnotes at the end of the OPRP stated that all individuals who wished for an appointment should include a photo in digital format. In addition, all individuals were required to attach, also in digital format, all identity documents in their possession. Finally, in case the applicant was married, cohabiting or accompanied by any child(ren), they should present themselves altogether at the same time for an appointment (see fig.11).

Figure 7: section C of the OPRP

Figure 9: section E of the OPRP

Figure 8: section D of the OPRP

Figure 10: the AIP's authorisation for the use of personal data

Figure 11: footnotes of the OPRP

As displayed above, the OPRP's first step consisted of filling in this online form. Thereafter, the AIP in question would, sometime, receive a confirmation e-mail by the Immigration Office. After getting hold of such an e-mail through Vera, I discovered that it entailed some important conditions for the AIP to comply with. Here, my observations are based on an e-mail sent by the Immigration Office to an anonymized adult man on July 17, 2020 (see 10.4.). As the e-mail reads, the applicant is summoned to present themselves at the arrival centre Little Fortress for the Immigration Office on the date and time of appointment, following their demand for an appointment for an IP request. Further on, the AIP in question is reminded to bring along a printed version of the convocation, all identity documents, passport, travel documents, foreign residence permit and the like. If the AIP complied with this second step of the OPRP, and thus showed up at the IO's prescheduled invitation, their formal registration was launched in Little Fortress's arrival centre. If not, for example when the AIP did not show up, and thus became considered a so-called 'no-show', the preregistration procedure remained incomplete. Depending on the AIP's profile and vulnerability, the confirmation e-mail and corresponding

appointment could expire, obliging them to start a new preregistration (Myria 2020, 2020b). Compared to the procedures before covid-19, applying for IP through the OPRP implied more steps and different new requirements to comply with.

Like the Immigration Office's physical registration procedure, the OPRP also required the applicant's identity details and their reveal of possible medical and social vulnerabilities. Yet, since the OPRP could not include any fingerprinting, nor the usual medical and social check, it did not cover the normal registration's ground. Therefore, it was meant as a mere steppingstone towards the formal registration of the IP request. Hence, the subtle additional meaning of the prefix 'pre-' in its nomenclature. Whereas the formal registration of a request for IP granted the applicant with certain rights, the preregistration did not. Differentiating between the two, both conceptually and linguistically, is key to gain a better understanding of the OPRP's impact on my respondents. Nevertheless, my fieldwork exposed how this difference was prone to confusion with both AIPs and NGOs in the field. The fact that the OPRP was, both in official reports and informal interviews or documents, referred to as an online 'registration' procedure, did not help.

This carefully illustrates that complying with the OPRP came with administrative complexity for both the AIPs at the receiving end and the state institutions at the steering wheel. Accordingly, EASO (2020a) reported an overall 43% drop in asylum applications on the European continent by May 2020. With asylum-related migration on the rise since 2019, and more rapidly in early-2020, this sudden decline unquestionably related to the covid-19 crisis and the large implementation of emergency measures in EU member states. As a result, immigration administrations shifted focus towards case closures and eliminating backlogs of unprocessed dossiers (EASO, 2020a, 2020b). According to a Myria report (2020), this was also the case for Belgium's CGRS, which by May 2020 saw its workload reduced from 12.370 unresolved dossiers to a 'mere' 10.671, the first decline in more than two years' time. Accordingly, the CGRS made more decisions than it received new applications until October 2020 (CGRS, 2020; Myria, 2020a). Although advantages of CGRS's teleworking and digital interviews were raised as the main reasons, the initial suspension of IP registration and subsequent introduction of the OPRP remained unaddressed (Myria, 2020a). Following, I illustrate the OPRP's part in this workload reduction with official numbers.

6.1.3. The OPRP's impact in numbers

As the Asylum Procedures Directive¹⁰ firmly states, 'effective access' to asylum procedures should be guaranteed and "people seeking international protection need to be able to reach the authorities of a Member State and they must be granted access to a fair and efficient process" (EASO, 2020d, p.116). Accordingly, EASO (2020d) considers such an asylum process consisting of three steps: Making, registering and lodging an application for international protection. While 'making an application' is understood as a person's expressed wish to request IP, 'registering' is regarded as the official recording of this person's application by an authority. Finally, an application is lodged when the whole administrative process has been completed.¹¹ When applying this to the Belgian context, the OPRP could pass for EASO's first step of the asylum procedure process, i.e., making an application.

Although EASO considered this an accessible step, the numbers provided in the reported contact meetings between Myria and the Immigration Office in June and October 2020 show a less rosy picture. When examining the following chart (see fig.12), it is striking that in the first four months of the OPRP, only little over 49% of all preregistrations was met with an invitation for a (physical) registration appointment by the Immigration Office (see second column).

	Aantal aanvragen (dossiers) om een afspraak (zonder aanvragen die meerdere malen voor dezelfde persoon zijn gedaan)	Aantal uitnodigingen (dossiers) voor een afspraak, verzonden door de DVZ	Aantal geregistreerde personen (eerste en volgende verzoeken) (1)	Personen die een VIB hebben gedaan en voor wie de procedure in België werd verder gezet (2) - Dublin wanneer België verantwoordelijk wordt voor de behandeling van de aanvraag na een 26quater	Totaal tabel (1) + (2)	Vershil In (aanvragen afspraak) /Out (verzonden uitnodigingen)	Blijven effectief te behandelen na onderzoek van de aangevraagde afspraak (onderzoek van het administratief dossier voordat de uitnodiging wordt verstuurd). Merk op dat in sommige gevallen, er geen uitnodiging zal worden verstuurd*
April	907	256	236	19	255		
Mei	991	532	389	61	450		
Juni	1.431	739	623	109	732		
Juli	1.618	1.022	810	218	1.028		
Aug	1.928	1.699	1.238	447	1.685		
Sept	2.005	2.594	1.954	255	2.209		
Okt (01/10 tot 18/10)	1.423	1.314	1.002	120	1.122		
Totaal	10.303	8.156	6.252	1.229	7.481	2.147	154

* hangende gehoren bij de DVZ/CGRA – hangende beroep in behandeling bij een rechtbank - termijn voor de Dublin-transfert is nog steeds geldig - verzoek gelinkt aan een andere procedure.

Figure 12: The IO's numbers on the OPRP from April until mid-October 2020

¹⁰ The Asylum Procedures Directive is a supporting organ of the European Commission that "creates a coherent system to ensure that decisions on applications for international protection are taken efficiently and fairly" (European Commission, n.d.).

¹¹ Although 'lodging' can also mean 'accommodation' or 'housing', 'to lodge' here refers to submitting or filing an application (EASO, 2020d).

Especially in April, when the system was brand-new, a mere 28% of the applicants received an answer, despite the relatively low number of 907 sent preregistrations (IBZ, 2020; Myria, 2020b). Though, it is key to comprehend how almost 24% of the sent invitations did not result in an officially registered IP request. Of course, this can be ascribed to so-called ‘no-shows’ and incomplete preregistrations, as well as to procedural complexities in case of so-called ‘Dubliners’ and the like (Myria, 2020b). Until July 2020, the unbalance between the number of received preregistrations and sent invitations remained conspicuous. According to the IO, a catch-up was done in the months that followed, like in September 2020 when the number of sent invitations largely exceeded that of received applications (Myria, 2020b). Altogether, however, a total of 2,147 out of 10,303 applications done through the OPRP remained unanswered over a period of six and a half months, matching almost 21% (see fig.12).¹²

A chart from October’s report (Myria, 2020b) shows a sharp increase in filed requests for international protection in the arrival centre Little Fortress, going from 614 to 1.945 in less than four months (see fig.13). Looking at figure 13, these numbers represent the numbers of officially registered IP requests. Yet, when comparing these numbers to those of the year prior, it appears how the Immigration Office had, for months, processed asylum applicants at half-strength, averaging a mere 41% of its 2019 capacity for the months June, July and August 2020. It wasn’t until September 2020 that the IO, with its 1,961 registered applications, processed little over 75% of its 2019 capacity of 2,607 registered applications (see fig.13). These tendencies within the IO corresponded to the CGRS’s communication on their workload. Although the increased capacity and output of the IO had enabled the CGRS to ‘recover’ its previous workload level from June 2020 onwards, the annual balance still depicted a significant drop in IP requests in Belgium, going from 27,742 in 2019 to 16,190 in 2020, i.e., a 42% decrease, mainly caused in the period from mid-March until July 2020 (CGRS, 2020).

Verzoeken internationale bescherming	Juni 2020	Juli 2020	Augustus 2020	September 2020
Op het grondgebied (Aanmeldcentrum*)	614	803	1.257	1.945
In de gesloten centra, gevangenissen en woonunits	9	7	10	9
Aan de grens	0	10	3	7
Totaal	623	820	1.270	1.961
Totaal september 2019	2.058	2.262	2.185	2.607
Aantal werkdagen	21	21	21	22
Verzoeken per werkdag (Pacheco)	29,67	39,05	60,48	89,14

Figure 13: Overview of the requests for IP from June until September 2020

¹² As the report mentioned that possible ‘double applications’ were already not included in the chart, this total of 10,303 online preregistrations represents the number of individual preregistrations (Myria, 2020a, Myria, 2020b).

The reason why these numbers matter has been critically pointed out by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), i.e., an international catholic organisation accompanying, serving and advocating for refugees' and FDPs' rights. As JRS (2021) recently reported on the problems coming forth from administrations' interim solutions by early-April 2020, they also questioned how AIPs in Belgium had received a 'certificate' (or confirmation) of their asylum application. Since the preregistration alone meant no official registration, it didn't grant AIPs with the right for shelter and material assistance (JRS, 2021). While only a handful of EU member states eventually resorted to a (remote) preregistration procedure, EASO (2020b) noticed that the absence of the notion of 'preregistration' in the Asylum Procedure Directive meant that timeframes on actual registrations and opportunities for lodging hadn't changed. Accordingly, the preregistration followed the Dublin III-regulation which stated that "time elapsing between the statement of intention and the preparation of a report should be as short as possible" from the moment that a written document, or form, reached the authorities (EASO, 2020b, p.10). According to this regulation, the preregistration therefore could be equal to a 'lodging' (EASO, 2020b). Yet, the OPRP hardly constituted such 'lodging', because AIPs who didn't receive either answer or invitation basically were left to their fate (Delepeleire, 2020). This was (certainly) the case for a few hundred AIPs until September 2020 (see fig.12). Yet, since these reports and charts don't include estimates on the number of failed preregistrations, it remains unknown how many AIPs in total were condemned to a similar fate.

6.2. Forced into the frontline: The OPRP and civil society's mobilization

In this subchapter, I want to illustrate how and why AIPs struggled, and sometimes failed, to comply with the OPRP. I do so by an extensive breakdown of civil society's engagement in Brussels throughout the duration of the OPRP. Specifically, I focus on the practices and experiences of two Dutch-speaking associations, i.e., Flemish Refugee Action (incl. Startpunt) and Pigment. By means of the testimonies and paperwork of these NGOs, I try to map the challenges that emerged, and where, when and how solutions were provided (6.2.1.). Finally, I use the outline of civil society's engagement as a steppingstone towards Menjívar's (2014) concept of the insourced or internalized border(scape) (6.2.2.).

6.2.1. Flemish Refugee Action (incl. Startpunt) and Pigment

As JRS (2021) recently reported, the covid-19 lockdowns and their consequences for the asylum policies of EU member states have pushed civil society towards providing information, social assistance and accompaniment to the affected population(s). The fact that JRS thereby considered these NGOs to have operated in the "frontline" of the covid-19 crisis, corresponds to the experiences of both Pigment and Flemish Refugee Action (incl. Startpunt) themselves. Although having both supported AIPs with the OPRP, we must differentiate between the two.

The Startpunt team describes itself as a relatively small, yet diverse assemblage of volunteers and employees of Flemish Refugee Action (FRA) whose main task is “being present at the gate [of Little Fortress] every day to provide asylum seekers with information on the asylum procedure, the Dublin Regulation, everything related to their rights” (Hana, 07-01-2021). Apart from that, Startpunt members, in a covid-19-less world, organize trainings for new volunteers and weekly legal desks where AIPs can have an individual consultation on their procedure. Having become an established actor at Little Fortress’s gate, both AIPs and members of Fedasil or Infopunt are said to sometimes rely on their extensive linguistic and procedural expertise. Nevertheless, FRA’s Startpunt team itself remains very wary about its own positionality, making sure that are not associated with ‘the state’ and showing so by means of raincoats and vests with their logo and name (Participant observation, 29-03-2021). For consistency, I will refer to Flemish Refugee Action (or FRA) in the remainder of this dissertation instead of its Startpunt team. Since both cannot be disconnected from one another, it seems more logical to talk about the NGO than one of its teams alone. Yet, when the former is mentioned, the latter is always subtly implied.

Different from Flemish Refugee Action, Pigment is one of the seven organisations in Brussels where ‘the poor’ take the floor. Since Pigment believes that lacking the legal right to stay impacts every aspect of life, it focusses particularly on the issue of undocumented migration (Vera, 18-02-2021). Together with three other projects including ‘Meeting’, Pigment resides in the House Voyaach under an eponymous partnership. Whereas Meeting organizes weekly sociolegal permanencies for AIPs (Tom, 09-02-2021), Pigment tries to encounter and mobilize undocumented migrants in a so-called ‘open reception’, where they invite these people to just be, make use of certain services, have a talk, etc. Pigment’s main idea is to create awareness around the structural and contemporary phenomenon of undocumented migration both with its target group and the broader public. In doing so, it tries to mobilize undocumented migrants as volunteers in its own working, granting them the opportunity to build a network of their own, bring out their stories and influence policymakers (Tom, 09-02-2021; Vera, 18-02-2021). The open reception then serves as a kind of living room: “[A] moment or an opportunity [...] to create proximity in an informal way” (Vera, 18-02-2021). The close vicinity of Little Fortress to House Voyaach made FRA even store its everyday equipment (e.g., folders, coats, etc.) here, making them already familiar with Pigment prior to the covid-19 crisis. In the absence of many other NGOs due to the lockdown, Pigment, similar to FRA, made the explicit decision to continue their support and provide “continuous proximity” to its target group (Tom, 09-02-2021).

6.2.2. To the rescue: Civil society's improvised response

6.2.2.1. Humanitarian stopgap help

As mentioned (cf. 6.1.1.), the authorities didn't inform civil society and AIP stakeholders on Little Fortress's temporary closure. For civil volunteers, the implementation of the OPRP in early-April 2020 almost passed unnoticed:

“Like we discovered from a day to another that there was something going on with an online system because like they wrote on the door. [...] You know, the paper with the website where like ... If you want to ask for an appointment, you have to go on this website [...]” (Hana, 07-01-2021)

As Esmé (01-04-2021) later confirmed, she and other Infopunt staff had indeed decided to put tear-off papers on Little Fortress's closed gate with a hyperlink to the OPRP. The fact that civil society missed out on further instructions or information from the authorities, forced them into a bottom-up approach. While they had to learn to provide the adequate support by doing, civil society was unable to work on structural solutions. Therefore, their support could be considered 'stopgap help' (Vandevoordt, 2019).

TECHNICAL ISSUES

To start the asylum procedure, one first had to complete the online preregistration form (cf. 6.1.2.) and then go through a (physical) registration appointment. FRA alone helped about 290 AIPs to fill in the form from early-April to late-September 2020. Importantly, this number does not include AIPs supported by other NGOs (e.g., Pigment) or AIPs who completed it on their own or had a network to rely on (Hana, 07-01-2021). Due to contagion risk of covid-19, physical contact, in terms of exchanging pens and phones, was thereby out of question. Therefore, the priority was “to be as careful as possible, but to not leave this people alone or behind” (Hana, 07-01-2021; Katrien, 07-01-2021). Yet, the non-inclusiveness of the OPRP strongly complicated this ambition: “[P]eople were left really with no tools at all. Like many of them don't even have a phone or if they have a phone, I mean, they have problems with connection, or ...” (Hana, 07-01-2021). Step by step, the OPRP's technical requirements appeared inadequate regarding the target group (Veerle, 01-04-2021). Besides a phone or laptop to fill in the online preregistration, AIPs also required access to internet, a Belgian phone number, an e-mail address, a camera or decent photo, and a printer. Apart from material requirements, an AIP could neither do without a minimum of literacy and (written) knowledge in either French or Dutch, because the OPRP was only available in these two languages (cf. 6.3.2.).

Undoubtedly, both state and civil actors among my respondents acknowledged the burdensome nature of these demands. As the lockdown inhibited civil actors from offering their everyday services and material to AIPs, some returned to Little Fortress each day to help fill in the forms. Since AIPs often lacked, though required, an e-mail address, civil volunteers

initially used their own or those of their organizations. Yet, as the follow-up on these cases proved everything but practical, the Startpunt members made new e-mail addresses, so “the person [could] also access it on other devices”. Nevertheless, many people still required weekly appointments to have their e-mail accounts opened on volunteers’ work phones (Hana, 07-01-2021). Besides FRA, Pigment had to deal with similar problems:

“Initially, as an aid worker, you make the mistake, ah I let that be sent to my e-mail address. [...] That means, the eventual invitation [from the IO] comes about three months later. At that moment, you don’t take that into account. If I’m on leave, I have the obligation to continuously check my e-mail. Because one day, there is an e-mail saying that these people have to present themselves at Little Fortress within two days. So, in the end, you realize, ah fuck, this really is the wrong way.” (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch).

As evidenced by this statement, the increased waiting times occasionally rendered the follow-up on individual cases unfeasible. The fact that some AIPs did not receive a confirmation e-mail from the Immigration Office anytime soon, made them, often supported by evenly unaware volunteers, file a second preregistration soon after. Yet, only later did civil actors learn that by doing so the waiting time of this person’s first preregistration was erased, generating a so-called “swipe-out” and restarting the clock back from zero (Hana, 07-01-2021; Vera, 16-02-2021). Even the Infopunt’s employees were unaware:

“Yeah in fact, they don’t inform you. If there are errors or something, no name or date, the application actually passes and does a swipe-out? But they don’t inform you that there is a mistake. And so, there were also people who were very stressed because, you know, one day they apply but there’s no news, so they redo the application and then the Immigration Office will classify it as a duplicate. [...] And sometimes, you don’t know either. So, we as well, in fact, we completed some [preregistration] applications. [...] Yeah. And then afterwards, in fact, we realized that Refugee Action had already helped them, *quoi*. [...] So, you want to do good, but in the end you punish them.” (Esmé, 01-04-2021; translated from French).

Here again, the yawning gap in governmental communication rendered civil actors’ stopgap help self-destructive at times. For that reason, providing structural solutions to the OPRP’s challenges proved impossible and both clueless NGOs and desperate AIPs seemed trapped in a maze of untenable technical requirements. As such, the OPRP put both AIPs and aid workers in a vicious cycle: “I think that back then, the tough thing was when we saw that, in fact, the online system was vicious. And it didn’t get to the most vulnerable.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

INCREASED WAITING TIMES

Adding to that, AIPs had to sit through increased waiting times before receiving a confirmation and invitation for an official registration appointment. Nevertheless, the real problem lied in the absence of shelter and material assistance for AIPs bridging these delays (Delepeleire, 2020). Particularly for the most vulnerable without relatives or a network in Brussels, this meant increased precarity. According to Fedasil’s staff, the long delays were partially due to the decreased capacity of both desks and waiting rooms (Marian, 16-03-2021). Furthermore,

appointments were scheduled according to the (scarce) availability of interpreters. But with less interpreters at work due to the lockdown, people with 'uncommon' or rare languages were disadvantaged. Another rather surprising reason was that the OPRP burdened the IO with an increased amount of administrative work in the back-offices (Marian, 16-03-2021).

To make these concerned delays or waiting times more tangible, I refer to a reported contact meeting between Myria and the Immigration Office in June 2020. As the IO confirmed there, the average delays between the submission of the online preregistration form and the actual appointment stood, two months after the OPRP's introduction, at seven, 12 and 14 days for respectively UNAM, families with children and other applicants, like single men, of first or subsequent request (Myria, 2020a, p.3). Since the IO, still to date, prioritised the invitation of UNAM, families with children and people with specific (social or medical) vulnerabilities (Participant Observation, 29-03-2021), the more disadvantaged AIPs were likely to be single men who under almost no circumstances enjoy prioritization in asylum procedures (Marian, 16-03-2021; Myria, 2020a). In a reported contact meeting from October, the Immigration Office confirmed that waiting times had drastically dropped in comparison to those mentioned in the earlier report while numbers actually proved the opposite. Accordingly, UNAM, families with children and single adults had to wait respectively 11, 20 and 23 days on average for an appointment of physical registration in Little Fortress (Myria, 2020b, p.6). Yet, for there were many factors at play here (e.g., no-shows, people who were invited a second time, etc.), the IO considered these numbers unrepresentative compared to the real average waiting times (Myria, 2020b).

LACK OF SHELTER

Since disadvantaged AIPs lacked the technical means to stay reachable, the big delays on their registration invitations made some go off the radar. Due to the lack of shelter or a fixed residency during their queue time, it proved very challenging for NGOs to keep track of the people they had helped preregistering and inform them on the received confirmation e-mail (Vera, 18-02-2021). Aid workers thereby confirmed to have lost overview of AIPs' applications, for they had helped so many and their mailboxes were flooded (Hana, 07-01-2021). To retrieve the concerned AIP, aid workers therefore sometimes took a (profile) picture of these people which they saved on their laptops and with which they could try to track them down. Except that this proved a cumbersome process, it also exposes civil actors' unpreparedness vis-à-vis the OPRP (Vera, 18-02-2021). Luckily, there was also a range of emergency shelters organised by Brussels's civil society:

"Like [...] for example Plateforme des Citoyennes but also Red Cross or ... Like many organizations have for example opened, I don't know, a shelter, an emergency shelter for the people that were staying in the street. Like Samusocial as well. [...] And all the organizations were working together." (Hana, 07-01-2021)

According to what the numbers show (cf. 6.1.3.), these emergency shelters were indeed very welcome. Nevertheless, the ever-increasing number of those in need of shelter exceeded the places available (cf. 10.5.): “Like there was no capacity, so after a while people didn’t really have even that choice anymore, or that possibility.” (Hana, 07-01-2021). Together with overcrowded emergency shelters, the occupation rate of Little Fortress’s arrival centre had plummeted (Myria, 2020a). From early-April to mid-June, (only) 510 AIPs had been received. Although Little Fortress’s capacity had not shrimped – instead, the centre was strictly organized according to possible covid-19 health measures (Marian, 16-03-2021) –, Fedasil reported an occupation rate of 59% in June, with (only) 496 of the 839 places occupied (Myria, 2020a). For an Infopunt staff member, this complicated things even more: “It was even more difficult for us to say ... You have to tell these people to wait while there are 550 empty places.” (Esmé, 01-04-2021). This tendency was confirmed in AIPs’ integration into Fedasil’s nationwide reception network, seeing a drop of 50 intakes a day on average, compared to 2019 (Myria, 2020b).

6.2.2.2. Civil society cooperation

The abovementioned issues hindered civil society to work towards structural solutions, but compelled them to stopgap help instead. The unpredictable duration of both the OPRP and covid-19 did not simplify things. Yet, the concerned NGOs joined forces and found ways to make their (emergency) service provision more efficient, as well as to prevent duplicate work.

CORONA-ACTORS LIST

With the needs of AIPs becoming increasingly apparent, Flemish Refugee Action generated their so-called ‘corona-actor list’, i.e., a list that specifically addressed problems regarding shelter, nutrition, sanitary necessities, medical help, as well as legal, social and psychological assistance (cf. 10.5.). With this list, FRA could refer disadvantaged AIPs to other civil society associations that provided services FRA could not organize itself (Hana, 07-01-2021). In total, the included version of the list referred AIPs to almost 30 initiatives, i.e., NGOs and emergency services spread all over Brussels. For each of these, the list included some basic contact details (e.g., address, opening hours, telephone number and e-mail address if applicable) and an attached link to the specific location on Google Maps.

As mentioned in the corona-actors list (cf. 10.5.), Flemish Refugee Action added a translation of the OPRP in Farsi after another NGO called Ciré had already provided translations in English, Spanish and Arabic. The provision of these manuals¹³ partially remedied the fact that the OPRP was exclusively available in French or Dutch. Similar to the corona-actors list, Startpunt members also produced a list of lawyers, with which 250 AIPs from July to late-

¹³ The manuals with Arabic, English, Spanish and Farsi translations of the OPRP are still accessible through this link: <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be/onlineasiel>.

September had been helped (Hana, 07-01-2021). Although AIPs are normally informed on their right for a lawyer in the beginning of the procedure, this wasn't straightforward with the OPRP: "It was really hard because everything was closed, or it was really impossible to just go and ask for a lawyer." (Hana, 07-01-2021).

OPEN RECEPTION KAAITHEATRE

As House Voyaach was not recognized as a day centre, and thus not considered essential, the covid-19 lockdown in mid-March made Pigment continue their activities outside. For they lacked air-conditioning and sufficient space to guarantee social distancing, Pigment felt compelled to provide "continuous proximity" to their target group in the growing absence of many other NGOs (Tom, 09-02-2021; Vera, 18-02-2021). Only in early-July, an alternative solution was found and Pigment was allowed by the Kaaithéâtre to organize its open reception in an unused kind of foyer, opening onto the Akenkaai where it is still located to date (Participant observation, 29-03-2021). As people from the Kaaithéâtre preferred a social project like Pigment to make use of their unused spaces, the open reception resulted in a close collaboration of Pigment, external volunteers and weekly volunteering staff members of the theatre itself (Vera, 18-02-2021). Although Pigment was still focussing on undocumented migrants in general, the new location of the open reception, close to the Maximilian Parc and Brussels's northern train station and quaysides, appealed to new profiles like newly arriving AIPs, so-called 'Dubliners' and 'transmigrants' (Tom, 09-02-2021; Vera, 18-02-2021).

Since this 'new' target group differed from Pigment's "habitués", the NGO encountered new challenges and changed its approach to, as well as its interpretation of the open reception. More and more, it shifted towards a space where its altered target group could carefully prepare their preregistration procedure (Tom, 09-02-2021). Suddenly, Pigment was closely confronted with the OPRP's functioning and complexities. In response, they acquired a printer to print AIPs' confirmation e-mails. Other than that, they also tried to provide a welcoming space where undocumented migrants of all types, now including unregistered AIPs, could consume food and drinks, take a shower, search for clothes, etc. Because of their services, Pigment's open reception was later also included into the corona-actors list (Vera, 18-02-2021).

INCREASING 'CROSS-FERTILISATION'

The arrival of AIPs in Pigment's open reception, however, confronted the staff with their linguistic shortcomings to help everyone. The procedural and linguistic expertise of Flemish Refugee Action therefore proved welcome to Pigment (Vera, 18-02-2021). Furthermore, FRA could not only help with the interpreting part, but also with streamlining both their and Pigment's service provision vis-à-vis the OPRP. As two Startpunt members wrote me:

“We’ve worked closely together with Pigment, referring people to them for the printing of documents and as a place where people can check their email if they haven’t got a phone. Sometimes we’ve shared names of people that we’ve filled in the form for, or referred to them, or people that we are looking for but are difficult to reach without a phone. But we couldn’t share more info for privacy issues. It also happened they sent us e-mail to check on someone they couldn’t reach anymore.” (Hana & Katrien, 01-03-2021)

To avoid duplicate work, Pigment and Flemish Refugee Action started converging. While increasingly cooperating, combining their expertise and informing one another on AIPs’ procedures, both NGOs’ pragmatic and chaotic stopgap support from before now progressively gravitated towards a better organised and structured service provision. Initially, AIPs had hopped from one volunteer to another, unconscious of the inert processing of their preregistration and the risk for a swipe-out. Often, this led to erroneous impressions with AIPs, blaming civil volunteers for not doing a proper job (Vera, 18-02-2021). Now, however, Pigment and FRA averted these same mistakes by making one and the same password for every e-mail account they created. This allowed both NGOs to access AIPs’ e-mail addresses, avoid double preregistrations and monitor AIPs’ procedures trouble-free.

In the light of their increasing cooperation, Flemish Refugee Action and House Voyaach, together with other NGOs in Brussels, launched a campaign in October 2020 called “I am solidary” to raise awareness with the broader public on the issues of (undocumented) migration and asylum in covid-19 times.¹⁴ Among their demands to the government, they insisted on more inclusive and culture-sensitive communication by the authorities. In the aftermath of the OPRP, these cases of civil society cooperation were experienced by the employees of Pigment and Flemish Refugee Action as a strong convergence. The “mutual cross-fertilisation” between both NGOs still has its effects to date, “not only on an organisational level, but also just interpersonally” (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch). The relatively new daycentre of the Red Cross across from Pigment’s open reception illustrates nicely how civil society still combines its strengths today:

“While they have the accommodation, they can let people in, we have the knowhow. So why not join forces? [...] And now Flemish Refugee Action also organizes one weekly reception in the Red Cross’s daycentre. So, we really have a mix now of, ok both Flemish Refugee Action and we bring in our expertise and they offer us the accommodation.” (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch).

By joining forces in certain areas, these NGOs displayed the need and willingness to harmonise their activities and thereby pursue mutual strengthening, something persisted to date (Participant observation, 29-03-2021).

¹⁴ Visual and textual information on the campaign “I am solidary”, as well as all the civil partners involved, can be found through the following hyperlink: <https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be/ikbensolidair>.

6.2.3. The OPRP as a step towards an internalized borderscape

As described in the previous, the OPRP confronted AIPs and NGOs, as well as public servants with challenging administrative, technical and ethical thresholds. Since the OPRP consisted of a procedural adjustment, and didn't imply the emergence of a physical barrier, I consider it to be an internalized, administrative border. According to Menjívar (2014) and Godin and Donà (2020), such border internalization, similar to border externalization, is just another way of securitizing migration management. Accordingly, border internalization through the OPRP contributes to an inward expansion of borders, albeit in a less visible way compared to deportation and detention practices for instance (Menjívar, 2014, p.361).

Furthermore, I argue that, by extension, the OPRP has given rise to an internalized 'borderscape'. Following Pallister-Wilkins (2017) and Godin and Donà (2020), using the concept of 'borderscapes', instead of 'borders', better grasps the complexity, contingency and fluidity of contemporary border zones, which can be understood as processes, rather than mere sites of crossing, where experiences of 'immobility' and 'stuckedness' proliferate both temporally and spatially. Accordingly, the OPRP with its impediments has forced AIPs into a state of protracted immobility and precarity. As such, the complexity and dynamicity of the OPRP's technological and digital nature have partially reconceptualized the interactions, meanings and identities within this borderscape: While AIPs were confronted with unattainable requirements, Brussels's civil society was forced into the frontline, providing improvised stopgap help without information nor governmental support. Structural solutions from their side only appeared through cross-fertilisation within civil society itself.

In essence, the OPRP turned Brussels into internalized borderscape, where, above all, experiences of immobility and precarity emerged (cf. Godin & Donà, 2020) and the interactions between AIPs and civil society on the one hand, and civil society and the state on the other were altered. Recognizing the OPRP as an important constituent of this internalized borderscape also allows us to analyse how practices and relationships within, shaped by the OPRP, have (re)produced AIPs' in- or outsider position.

6.3. A cat and mouse game: Civil society vis-à-vis 'the state'

The vest with the logo and name of Flemish Refugee Action remained quite uncomfortable as I felt sandwiched between the queueing people in front and the committed volunteers behind me. At 8:10 am sharp, one volunteer's off-going alarm indicated that we were allowed to head for the opposite sidewalk and approach queueing AIPs, surrounded by middle-height fences. While I followed a young intern in her tracks, the rigorous time constraints made her hasten through her obligatory-like talk. Meanwhile, I noticed how some queuers were only nodding cluelessly, mumbling something indecipherable while flipping

through the folders, while others timidly asked questions. After less than a half an hour, we got the signal that the queuers could enter Little Fortress in groups. We, however, were obliged to return to the opposite sidewalk where we waited to do some last talking and round off 'the morning shift'. Finally, one young man reappeared. Without talking, we quickly recognized some uncertainty in his eyes. "What is going to happen today? What is there inside? What will they ask me?". Although we tried to comfort him, I had no idea how to answer these questions (Participant observation, 29-03-2021).

Although this anecdote dates from a period in which the OPRP entered its sixth month of being buried, it taught me on how aid volunteers of FRA's Startpunt, (queuing) AIPs and public servants of Little Fortress interacted with one another. The earlier agreement between FRA and the IO's security coordinator for instance, which compelled the former to wait before being allowed to approach queuing AIPs, corresponds to an observation of JRS: Although the wide range of non-governmental service providers in Belgium forcedly intensified their efforts under the OPRP, they often remained "without formal endorsement or logistic and financial support for the responsible authorities" (JRS, 2021, p.10). In fact, JRS found evidence of these NGOs being heavily restricted and controlled, while the governments' implementation of the covid-19 measures in the federal reception facilities went without monitoring. Pigment, for instance, never received specific guidelines on how to go about its service provision during the covid-19 lockdown. Nevertheless, it had to provide playbook of their corona-proof organization and downscale its services after having launched their open reception in Kaaitheatre (Vera, 18-02-2021).

Likewise, Flemish Refugee Action was completely self-reliant because of lacking governmental communication and support. Yet, this didn't prevent them from communicating their reports and complaints together with a team of lawyers to the authorities (Hana, 07-01-2021; Katrien, 07-01-2021). Nevertheless, the added restrictions and controls on civil society's initiatives were an eyesore. As Vera described it accurately, civil society and the state got entangled in a kind of "cat and mouse game": "Every time we found a loophole, the Immigration Office created a new obstacle. [...] We find a new loophole? Another obstacle. And after a while, you really got the feeling, but this is really absurd!" (18-02-2021; translated from Dutch). This dynamism between state and civil actors weighed heavily on Startpunt's volunteers too, making them feel "helpless", "hopeless" and generally overwhelmed (Hana, 07-01-2021). Accordingly, they repeatedly referred to the absence of 'the state' or 'the government'. Yet, as already referred to previously (cf. 5.1., 5.2. and 6.1.), the internal dissent within the organisational structure of Little Fortress makes talking about 'the state' (vis-à-vis civil society) slightly inadequate.

In the following, I first elaborate on how the OPRP has exposed differences and dissent within the arrival centre of Little Fortress, as well as on how interactions and dynamics between federal agencies and NGOs have changed (6.3.1.). Together with this enhanced understanding of ‘the state’, I comment upon how these NGOs’ humanitarianism has affected the internalized borderscape shaped by the OPRP (6.3.2.).

6.3.1. Understanding ‘the state’

Early on, my fieldwork exposed how the Immigration Office, Fedasil and Infopunt were not on the same page since the start of the covid-19 crisis. The dissent inside of Little Fortress’s walls made me consider ‘the state’ as a heterogenous entity. Of course, such dissent cannot be separated from the distinct mandates of these agencies. First, the Immigration Office is considered the more powerful agency within Little Fortress, responsible for making decisions on the access of third-country nationals to Belgian territory, their possible residence and eventual removal. In doing so, the IO cooperates with the CGRS, the police, the IOM and others. Fedasil, however, is in charge of the organisation and coordination of the reception network for AIPs (Vandevoordt, 2017). Concerning the registration of AIPs, Fedasil is only accountable for a medical and social check, while the Immigration Office organizes such registration as a whole. Yet, vis-à-vis the Immigration Office, Fedasil bears a kind of cultural autonomy. With its (self-declared) humanitarian orientation, Fedasil is therefore concerned with the wellbeing of its target group. Although Infopunt’s mandate must be situated between that of Fedasil and the IO, their orientation ties in with that of Fedasil.

For outsiders, differentiating between these agencies’ partly overlapping mandates and diverging convictions proves difficult. Moreover, their sharing of Little Fortress as a location is most confusing: “From the first entry door into the network. The applicants for international protection, they can’t do otherwise than to enter through our [Fedasil’s] door, in fact. And so, as a result, everything [the confusion] starts from there” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). Back in 2018, former Secretary of State Francken (N-VA) decided to transfer and gather both the IO’s registration service and Fedasil’s dispatching and Infopunt to Little Fortress. Yet, despite the official ‘egalitarianism’ between the two, the former’s employees still witness a kind of internal hierarchy: “Well, we need them more than they need us, that’s clear. [...] Well, whenever a change is made with them, whether in the arrival centre or in Pacheco, it has an impact for us.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). This disequilibrium in the organisational structure of Little Fortress is key to understand how its closure has impacted Fedasil, Infopunt and the IO very differently. As one employee shared:

“So, indeed, the possibility to do whatever they [IO] want, hein. That’s why the relationship can be very, very tense. And it’s for two years, in fact, that we struggle with them so that they might consider, in fact, that their flowerbed is part of a big garden, in which we are

as well, and that it's important to be able to cultivate the whole garden and not only their little flowerbed. But it can be very complicated for the Immigration Office because we do not always share the same beliefs and objectives." (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

Despite civil actors' outcries about the long waiting times and precarious circumstances for AIPs, the Immigration Office stubbornly stuck to the OPRP, stating that the then circumstances like the nationwide ban on assembly did not allow for a reprise of the previous registration system (Myria, 2020a). As Fedasil's remarks before the OPRP's actual implementation had fallen into deaf ears (Marian, 16-03-2021; Nina, 30-03-2021), it decided, together with Infopunt, to take matters into their own hands. Here, however, the mandates within Little Fortress conflicted once again:

"We, we [Fedasil] have jurisdiction over the requesters of international protection. But you're not asking for international protection unless you have presented your request. So, it must be officially presented. And it's there that, in fact, we enter that jurisdiction. The problem, in fact, is that the people weren't defined by nobody. They were nobody. That was the horrible side of it, you see? It's just that we, with the humanitarian mandate that we have, have shown that we couldn't watch the misery without acting. For we, in fact, asked the Immigration Office to act, but they refused. And so, at a certain point, in fact, you just take up your responsibility because, in fact, the people are there. You see, Lukas? They are there! (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French)

Fedasil and Infopunt also observed how civil society was struggling to work under such complicated circumstances. Marian remembered how civil society had "employees who were positive or had symptoms", remained "without a desk" and struggled to be at Little Fortress's gate "with people [AIPs] who were really pushing" (16-03-2021; translated from Dutch). Towards the summer of 2020, however, the situation further deteriorated with more AIPs finding their way towards Little Fortress due to the reopened borders and the loosened covid-19 health measures. Compared to earlier months, when AIPs were already "there" but remained more "invisible" (Marian, 16-03-2021; translated from Dutch), Fedasil saw the time right to come up with interim solutions for the Immigration Office's OPRP; ironically, an interim solution in itself.

Infopunt's staff had experienced first-hand how the interaction with AIPs exacerbated as the OPRP remained in force: "[T]hey [AIPs] were frustrated, they were stressed. They did not understand, you know?" (Esmé, 01-04-2021; translated from French). By consequence, Infopunt's employees started feeling increasingly sandwiched between their humanitarian orientation and their position within the IO's migration management. That is why, towards the summer of 2020, an unofficial cooperation started with Rue de Trêves, i.e., a reception centre for people without shelter. Moreover, Infopunt had come to an agreement with Immigration Office in mid-June to start registering AIPs' requests immediately. That way, Infopunt composed a list of mostly vulnerable profiles that, after the completion of their form, were granted shelter straightaway (Esmé, 01-04-2021). Since this interim solution proved insufficient to curb the pressure, however, other initiatives followed. Accordingly, Fedasil

organised a so-called ‘pre-reception’ (translated from ‘*pré-accueil*’) in partnership with Samu Bégard, i.e., a homeless shelter organised by Samusocial. Roughly, this pre-reception implied a ‘fast-track’ procedure compared to the inert preregistration:

“And so, at the end of the day, you have a list, and you send it to the [Immigration] Office and you say, *voilà*, these people have registered their request today. They are housed in Samu Bégard, they await their ... [...] So you register yourself, you await your invitation for the Office for your registration with the annex 26 and in the meantime, Fedasil accommodates you already.” (Esmé, 01-04-2021; translated from French).

As the name suggests, the pre-reception was in line with the online *preregistration* procedure, and signified a ‘mere’ steppingstone towards the official registration with the Immigration Office. Yet, opposed to the OPRP, the pre-reception was a Fedasil- and Infopunt-led initiative and facilitated AIPs’ access to shelter. Despite not falling under their mandate, Fedasil employees felt like fulfilling their presupposed role: “If Fedasil are humanitarian, we organise it [...] to, if you like, avoid incidents, to provide at least a quality of reception. Even though very very little, it is at least something.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). By establishing partnerships with civil actors, Fedasil and Infopunt engaged in a kind of “immunisation from the values, practices and subject definitions through which nation-states operate” (Vandevordt, 2017, p.1915). As a result, Fedasil and the concerned civil society organisations could be perceived as “allies on either side of the border between civil society and government – rather than competitors or challengers” (Vandevordt, 2017, p.1918).

With pressure on the OPRP mounting and while feeling increasingly co-responsible for maintaining the OPRP, both civil society and dissatisfied state actors started to strongly express their concern: “[W]e decided to stop working. There was a day when we were sick of it. We said to ourselves, yeah we go on strike.” (Esmé, 04-01-2021; translated from French). Subsequently, civil society organized itself in a court case against the Immigration Office, Fedasil and the caretaker cabinet of Minister De Block (De Jaegere, 2020). Anyway, this decisive intervention was preceded by a long-standing process of complaints and one-sided communication towards these authorities:

“But for corona [...] we really had to work on very detailed reports. So, you know, really collecting data. Like we had an excel file on our server with the list of people that we supported, the nationalities, the names. [...] So, the policy team, of course, and the production team work on like, you know, officialising it and sending it to the cabinet. So, it was [...] officialised by our policy and protection team. But it was really based on the data that was collected by the Startpunt team.” (Hana, 07-01-2021).

As Hana and Katrien (01-03-2021) wrote me in the aftermath of our interview, the “situational reports” in which these data were processed gave Flemish Refugee Action the necessary leverage to start a court procedure. Even though the Tribunal had ordained the Immigration Office early-July to recover the system of physical registration without delay, rapid response failed to materialise and the intended dialogue remained unanswered. In Myria’s report

(2020b), it comes forward how the Immigration Office did not want to go into details on this topic, and mostly elaborated on how the abovementioned interim solutions of pre-reception managed by Fedasil and Infopunt already provided a partial solution. Accordingly, the IO managed to dodge the bullet until the accumulation of fines, ordained by the court, made Mahdi's cabinet budge and restart physical registrations from early-November (Myria, 2020b).

6.3.2. Civil society and the OPRP: Towards a humanitarian borderland?

With the OPRP in force, civil society actors felt compelled to continue their service provision towards AIPs. As such, Brussels's "very strong civil society" looked like substituting the government (Hana, 07-01-2021). Their conviction to do so, however, went hand in hand with profound concerns:

"What I want to say is, you don't agree but you obviously want to help people. From one human to another, you want to help. But if you help these people, you actually help the system to work. And you don't agree with that. [...] So, by helping these people, the system succeeds and you maybe contribute to its prolonged existence? Or to the government saying, yeah but it works, no?" (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch).

By helping AIPs to comply with the OPRP, civil society indeed contributed to a minimum of asylum applications that otherwise might have lacked. Becoming gradually aware of their contradictory and ambivalent positionality, these NGOs were confronted with a harsh ethical dilemma, because "every human being that we help with making an online appointment is an extra argument you give to the Immigration Office to continue it [the OPRP]" (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch). This dilemma also troubled NGOs' communication towards AIPs: "Sorry, we don't agree with the system, and by helping you, we only cause it to exist longer." (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch). By pursuing this course of providing stopgap help, both NGOs were fearful of making this a precedent for future asylum procedures: "The Immigration Office will really think that this is the new thing. This works. Requesting asylum, [...] yeah it was safe, they had everything more under control, the numbers of asylum applications had really dropped as well" (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch).

Earlier examples of the corona-actors list, translations and manuals of the OPRP and information campaigns from civil society illustrate how the government refrained from responding to its responsibilities. As such, I pretend that civil society, motivated by a strong feeling of humanitarianism¹⁵, indeed replaced the government on multiple domains, mostly in creating an adequate environment for AIPs to prepare their preregistration. Yet, this goes against the guidelines that EASO (2020a) published, in which they stated how (asylum) administration should involve relevant stakeholders, counselling organisations and civil society

¹⁵ Humanitarianism in Fassin's understanding is the pursuit of "a higher moral principle which sees the preservation of life and the alleviation of suffering as the highest value of action" (Walters, 2011, p.143).

associations in the organisation of remote registration procedures (e.g., OPRP). Furthermore, EASO (2020b) stressed the authorities' exclusive responsibility of providing such information, even in case of formal partnerships between them and civil stakeholders. Accordingly, EASO's report expected the concerned administrations to launch information campaigns of all sorts to reach third-country nationals more adequately, considering "the special needs and individual circumstances of applicants" (EASO, 2020b, p.9). More specifically, this implied non-technical and clear information, preferably in languages the applicants understood. As such, this would answer to AIP's entitlement to be informed on the procedure's specifics, their own rights and obligations, possible consequences of not complying and the applicable timeframes. Essentially, third-country nationals would be provided with the necessary means to fulfil "the obligation to submit the elements needed to substantiate the application", as well as the opportunity to indicate any specific needs (EASO, 2020b, p.8). When considering the preregistration procedure as a form of 'remote data collection', this would ideally go hand in hand with possible "interactive support tools" (e.g., chatbox, online chat) to assist applicants with the online forms (EASO, 2020b, p.15).

Although Fedasil highlighted the necessity of the abovementioned conditions to the Immigration Office, the implementation of the OPRP didn't correspond to EASO's recommendations. As everything concerning the (pre)registration of an IP request fell under the IO's mandate, Fedasil could only stand on the side-line and watch:

"We, we have [...] asked them, could you not organize points of information, dispatch a bit all over Brussels where there are people of yours that can help? You see? In the end, we have actually thought about everything. But we always ran into a no-way, in fact." (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

It is here that NGOs like Flemish Refugee Action and Pigment have filled in the vacuum left by the IO. Together with putting pressure for change and improvement, they provided services which they described as "not our job" (Hana, 07-01-2021). Comparatively, both Fedasil and Infopunt engaged in self-organized initiatives out of their self-proclaimed humanitarian mandate. Yet, "caught between their own imperative to improve immigrants' well-being and their funders' attempts to restrict migration" (Vandevoordt, 2017, p.1907), illustrates their ambivalent and puzzling position.

Unwillingly maintaining the OPRP through their stopgap support also prevented civil actors from providing structural solutions. The tensions induced by the OPRP between the interventions by civil and the Immigration Office's border policy restrictions, relates to what Walters (2011) has called the 'humanitarian border'. As Pallister-Wilkins (2017) argues, humanitarian borderlands can emerge wherever humanitarianism is operationalized to manage a political crisis, and wherever politics of alienation and care conflate or, more specifically, wherever mobile and suffering populations are present. In line with this definition,

NGOs like Pigment and Flemish Refugee Action have engaged in humanitarian borderwork, acting in spaces where AIPs' existence became entangled in a paradoxical dynamic of threat and preservation at the same time. The fact that AIPs' fate ended up in the hands of the voluntary aid workers of Brussels's NGOs illustrates this even better. With the OPRP, the Belgian government clearly failed to meet their responsibilities vis-à-vis AIPs. Like in other examples of humanitarian borderlands, such failure "to exercise or even recognize their legal and/or moral responsibilities" is a typical feature for governments in such border regimes (Walters, 2011, p.151).

Similarly, governments' failure to comply with their responsibilities shows how 'governmental practices' do not always emerge from a centre of official authority, but in contexts of contestation and politicization as well. As Brussels's NGOs like Pigment and FRA have contested and politicized the impact of the OPRP, their humanitarian acts have been in a "permanent state of co-option, infiltration but also provocation with the state" (Walters, 2011, p.149). Yet, when looking at the role of Brussels's civil society in the Belgian asylum and integration policies over the last years (cf. 5.1.), this might not come as a surprise. Quite the opposite, the intensified nature of borderscapes according to Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) threatens to "crystallize relations of domination and exploitation, subjection and subjectivation, power and resistance". It's all the more interesting that the several civil and state actors involved in my fieldwork were fully aware of the ambiguity of their humanitarian orientation. All these elements combined, together with examples of the recent history (cf. 6.1.), show how the OPRP's introduction by the Immigration Office, and the response of Brussels's civil society to it, make a strong case for Brussels as a humanitarian borderland.

6.4. Increased and differentiated precarity: The impact of the OPRP on AIPs' sociolegal positionality

In this subchapter, I discuss to what extent the OPRP has affected the sociolegal positionality of applicants for international protection within this humanitarian borderland. To do so, I look at how AIPs' legal rights and social being-in-the-world have been affected in the period of the OPRP (6.4.1.). Following, I comment upon how processes of differentiation have altered the OPRP's implications according to different AIP profiles (6.4.2.). Third and last, I link back my empirical findings to theory around (asylum) policies in which time, vulnerability, dependency and discouragement play an important role (6.4.3.).

6.4.1. Sociolegal implications of the OPRP

After months of covid-19-related lockdowns, measures and relaxations, EASO (2020c) acknowledged that the measures taken in almost all EU member states took a heavy toll on AIPs' fundamental rights and freedoms. Likewise, the lockdowns of 'non-essential' economic

sectors forced undocumented migrants, whose blue-collar-jobs were threatened, to apply for international protection in order to gain access to, amongst others, healthcare (EASO, 2020; Katrien, 01-07-2021). Comparing EASO's (2020b) previous recommendations on governments' organization towards stakeholders in the field to my own fieldwork, it appears how AIPs have been bypassed by the authorities. Apart from the initial tear-off papers with hyperlinks hung up on Little Fortress's gate (cf. 6.2.2.), governmental communication towards AIPs remained practically non-existent and violated AIPs' entitlement to it. As demonstrated earlier, this went hand in hand with an alarming lack of material support and shelter, partially due to the legal grey area in which the OPRP found itself (cf. 6.1.2., 6.2.2.). While several state actors looked at each other to intervene (cf. 6.3.1.), the fate of AIPs increasingly ended up in the hands of voluntary aid workers for further technical and procedural support (cf. 6.3.2.). Since the Immigration Office provided no alternatives for AIPs without access to telephones, laptops or internet services (Myria, 2020b), their dependency on NGOs' services further intensified.

Even for the AIPs who failed in timely following up on their pre- and registration procedure due to linguistic or technical illiteracy (i.e., 'no-shows'), there was nothing for it but to resend the online form. While remaining without shelter, this ironically also meant the reset of the applicant's waiting time (Myria, 2020b). Reason for this was the IO's statement that any IP request should be made in person in Little Fortress (Myria, 2020b, p.7). Yet, because of the vulnerability of some, the IO promised to verify in each case whether a no-show was justifiable. If positive, a new invitation would then be sent without resetting the applicant's waiting time (Myria, 2020b). But how did the IO verify one's vulnerability? In the OPRP under section E, applicants could indicate a possible "point of attention" like "a wheelchair, specific care, etc." (cf. 10.2.). Yet, since no further information was provided, many did not realize that this section could significantly impact the AIP's chance for a quicker invitation. Particularly mentioning one's precarity together with the legal support of a lawyer proved effective to speed things up: "After a while you learn that you can ask for a lawyer, so you just only have to wait ten days instead of three months. And so, that they can enter into the system after ten days already." (Vera, 18-02-2021; translated from Dutch). Though it could help, the problems weren't solved. It even feels alarming that mainly the AIPs with lawyer support were said to gain quicker access to their entitled rights. Furthermore, for one to expose their vulnerability proved less straightforward than section E suggested:

"During the registration, the agent at the desk actually asks the person, do you have vulnerabilities? [...] And sometimes it's very complicated for the person to, in fact, be able to expose that. [...] Pregnant is easy, the other vulnerabilities are complicated. Certainly, [if] it is not very well organized from the GDPR perspective. Who reads this form? What did we do with their data? You see? In fact, that wasn't considered at all, *quoi*." (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

Second, the OPRP hindered newly arrived AIPs from finding shelter, food and access to sanitary as well as technical services (cf. 6.2.2.), some of which in the IO's eyes might not have counted as a "point of attention" and thus did not justify possible no-shows. The fact that only one third of the AIPs received an invitation for an appointment in the early stages of the OPRP (IBZ, 2020) indicates how large proportions were potentially exposed to increasing vulnerability. Accordingly, employees of both Infopunt and Fedasil saw how AIPs at the gate were in desperate need of medical aid while they suffered from skin diseases like scabies:

"And they begged us to help them [...]. Because the possibility of registering wasn't there yet. There were people who had medical problems. You see what I mean? And [people] who were there and begged us, help me, I have medical problems [...]. In fact, we didn't know what to do. We didn't know! Because we said to ourselves, if we open up the gates to that, it's finished, *quoi* ! [...]. And that in the midst of covid, having 750 residents. [...] We didn't know what to do, *quoi*." (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

In essence, the OPRP proved "a system that [made] the vulnerable even more vulnerable" (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). Others considered the OPRP to be "a catastrophe" because excluding the already vulnerable AIPs "impacted them twice", subjecting them to "hypervulnerability" (Esmé, 01-04-2021; translated from French). Crucial in understanding AIPs' increased vulnerability is to acknowledge their intensified dependency on voluntary aid workers. Being dependent, however, also meant that AIPs progressively lost control over their own procedures and were stripped of the possibility, in terms of time and space, to comprehend the OPRP's requirements and details (Tom, 09-02-2021). Arguably, AIPs' compelled dependency-relationship vis-à-vis NGOs was negatively impacted by the improvised stopgap help to which these same NGOs were condemned. More specifically, those AIPs who preregistered through an aid worker's e-mail address became dependent on the availability, efficiency and skill of that same aid worker. As aid workers also went on leave, important e-mails remained unopened or ended up in aid workers' spam boxes unnoticed (Vera, 18-02-2021).

6.4.2. Differentiated precarity among AIPs

In essence, AIPs were stripped of their legal right to accessible registration procedures for international protection, material assistance and shelter, as well as adequate information provision on these matters. Only through lawyers and NGO support did they (partially) regain access to these rights. Furthermore, this legal deprivation of AIPs extended to their social deprivation, for they increasingly turned into subjects of asylum policies, dependent on the goodwill of engaged aid workers, lawyers and humanitarian public servants (e.g., Fedasil and Infopunt). Therefore, AIPs have been subject to what one respondent called "hypervulnerability" in confrontation with the OPRP. Though, measuring all of them by the same standards would be short-sighted. As already indicated (cf. 6.2.2.1.), asylum procedures

tend to prioritise women, families and unaccompanied minors, while single men without specific (acknowledged) vulnerability remain last in line. The numbers on the OPRP have indicated a similar trend regarding the longer waiting times for single men compared to other groups (Myria, 2020a, 2020b). This points out an important nuance in my fieldwork, namely that not everyone experienced the same degree of vulnerability, precarity and dependency.

Butler (2012) recognizes how, in politics, precarity¹⁶ (in terms of working conditions, housing, health, education, culture, mobility, etc.) is tactically distributed unequally among various groups, depending on “whose life is grievable and worth protecting and whose life is ungrievable, or marginally or episodically grievable” (p.148). As Turner (2019) has demonstrated with Syrian refugees, humanitarianism (in migration and asylum policies) is often related to women and children, while (single) men refugees hold “an uncertain position as objects of humanitarian care” (p.597) for refugeehood in general is considered “passive, feminized and politicized” (p.602). Accordingly, I argue that such unequal distribution of precarity was reproduced by the IO’s OPRP and its differentiated treatment of AIP profiles. In sharp contrast, women and families with children ‘enjoyed’ shorter waiting times and quicker integration into Fedasil’s reception network. During my interviews with two female AIPs who arrived during the OPRP, for instance, it appeared how their preregistrations were quickly confirmed and how they were relatively soon received in Little Fortress’s arrival centre (Dorothee, 08-04-2021; Francine, 09-04-2021). Importantly, these respondents admitted having relied on social networks, i.e., relatives, in Brussels. Without generalizing this to all female AIPs, their testimonies carefully confirm the tendencies observed with the waiting times (Myria, 2020a, 2020b). Furthermore, they confirm the assumption that AIPs with social networks were less affected by the OPRP’s technical demands:

“I didn’t know about online. And I was waiting for the lockdown to finish to go and apply. [...] But then I hear news that it is possible to do it online. Yeah, I do it. [...] In Halle. [...] In my cousin’s home.” (Dorothee, 08-04-2021).

“Online? It was ... I upload pictures, where I’m from ... Yeah. (laughs) They ask me my name, my nationalities, my picture, passport. I think that is only that. [...] He [her cousin] speaks French.” (Dorothee, 08-04-2021).

“So, like that, I’ve told my friend that I had to search someone with whom I could stay. Or if I could stay with her ? Because it was cold. [...] I have to ask my husband if he can accept you. And then we left. I was there with her kids, in the room of her kids, *quoi*. So, her kids moved to another room. And so there I’ve stayed. Then we made an appointment.” (Francine, 09-04-2021; translated from French).

The fact that both female applicants experienced their application through the OPRP as “good” and “normal” here merely serves as a nuance to my earlier mentioned findings. It shows how the differentiation of AIPs’ vulnerability ran along lines of material and social resources. With

¹⁶ In general, ‘precarity’ with AIPs can be understood as their social exclusion and disadvantage in terms of the lack of “security, protection or predictability” (Schierup & Jørgenson, 2016, p.948).

these AIPs, the two went hand in hand: A social safety net provided the necessary space, support and tools to preregister.

The (disproportionate) subjection of single men and AIPs without social networks to greater sociolegal precarity isn't necessarily a systemic error, but could rather be regarded as a purpose instead. Single men's discrimination and forced stuckedness in illegal(ized) conditions has exposed them to "a constant reification of vulnerability and precarity" (Schierup & Jørgenson, 2016, p.952). It also hints at their perceived status as people whose life in the eyes of the sovereign state is less grievable and whose exclusion therefore more legitimized (Butler, 2012). In accordance with Castles' (1995) understanding of the notions of differential in- and exclusion, this non-prioritisation of certain people reproduces the categorisation of groups of people based on their nationality, vulnerability and victimhood. Since I relate differential exclusion mostly with the issue of undocumented migrants (De Genova et al., 2015), I focus here on its counterpart.

Accordingly, differential inclusion describes "how inclusion in a sphere, society or realm can involve various degrees of subordination, rule, discrimination, racism, disenfranchisement, exploitation and segmentation" (De Genova et al., 2015, p.79). Yet, inclusion doesn't necessarily lead to belonging (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012). Instead, it can lead to a multiplication of statuses and strategies that aim at controlling migration and creating different and hierarchized degrees of precarity, vulnerability and freedom (De Genova et al., 2015). This overall understanding of differential inclusion is partially in line with the differentiation of AIPs' precarity level by the OPRP. As women, families and UNAM were prioritised, they were confronted to (generally speaking) less precarity and vulnerability than single men, who, in contrast, were condemned to more precarity. When considering processes of differential in- and exclusion as technologies of citizenship, we see how they are meant to subject and discipline illegalized and future migrants and refugees (De Genova et al., 2015).

6.4.3. Politics of exhaustion and deterrence

According to authors like Hage (2009) and Bagelman (2016), such technologies of citizenship also include the institutional management of speed and time, like forcing AIPs into immobility, stuckedness or a state of waiting. As Hage thereby argues, good citizenship is defined by enduring this stuckedness and static waiting in times of crisis. Since the OPRP confronted AIPs with unexpected extensions and resets of their waiting times, it corresponds to Bagelman's (2016) 'politics of suspension'. De Vries and Welander (2016) also conceptualize the temporal-spatial problems of waiting (for migrants and refugees) with their 'politics of exhaustion', which is a political technology that aims at deterring migrants and refugees both mentally and physically. They argue that while these people become 'trapped' in border zones,

they are purposefully restricted in their movement(s), whether physically or technologically. Moreover, they pretend that the hopelessness stemming from the uncertainty of (asylum) procedures is translated into a prolonged 'state of limbo', in which suffering becomes an essential governmental tool of discipline. Combined with repeated displacements and rejections, as well as forms of structural and slow violence, the politics of exhaustion imply a total abandonment of the migrant by the state and even engage in criminalizing the humanitarian actors who support migrants and refugees (Vandevoordt, 2020). Such politics of exhaustion apply well to the OPRP's context:

“And in fact, [...] it was also a bit a system of appointment that didn't always work. In the sense that there were people that never received an appointment. So, [people] that came after three weeks and that were exhausted. [People] that said, but when will I be invited ?” (Esmé, 01-04-2021; translated from French).

By looking at the OPRP through the lens of exhaustion, it allows for a better capture of “the felt effects of the stretching over time of a combination of fractured mobility, daily violence and fundamental uncertainty” to which AIPs have been exposed (Godin & Donà, 2020, p.3).

The AIPs who suffered from non-prioritisation and protracted exclusion experienced desperation and exhaustion because of the OPRP. Andersson (2014, 2018) makes an addition to De Vries and Welander by seeing this excluded population morphing into disciplinary tools or livings tools for a state's deterrence strategies. In this economic perspective on migration management, Andersson argues how migrants' waiting condition is used in a 'bioeconomy of waiting', both as an exploitable surplus resource for labour and as a discouragement for future migrants. Accordingly, the OPRP could be considered a governmental deterrent strategy that has created a conditioning phenomenon of protracted waiting and stuckedness, mainly preoccupied with discouraging future migrants:

The problem, in fact, is that the people weren't defined by nobody. They *were* nobody. That was the horrible side of it, you see? [...] They don't understand why it is a system that works like that and that is unreachable for them. And you know what happens then? [...] [Y]ou, in fact, discourage people to try it.” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French).

Just like any other form of politics that is based upon the temporality of control, the OPRP was justified within a broader integration framework in which discourse plays an important role (cf. 5.1.). Regarding the OPRP's aspects of exhaustion and deterrence, I dwell in the following on how digitalisation (e.g., OPRP) has potentially contributed to Brussels as a 'techno-borderscape'.

6.5. Losing control: The OPRP as an example of digitalization

Throughout the previous subchapters (cf. 6.1.-6.4.), I have demonstrated how the Immigration Office has lacked an adequate approach to AIPs and refrained from providing this same group with an adequate environment to, even in times of crisis, enable a continuation of IP

applications, irrespective of AIPs' profile, age, gender or vulnerability. While digital procedures on policy level are increasingly considered efficient cures for reducing backlogs and increasing control vis-à-vis fluctuating migratory movements (EASO, 2020b), I here explore the ways in which digitalisation has been and is currently considered by asylum administrations for future use (6.5.1.). Following, I relate this digital turn to the concept of 'techno-borderscapes' (6.5.2.).

6.5.1. Recent and future use of digital tools

Despite the Tribunal's conviction of the OPRP (cf. 6.3.1.), its overall image has remained glossed over in political discourse. In the aftermath of the OPRP's withdrawal, the new-fangled Secretary of State Mahdi (CD&V) didn't renounce his plans for increasing e-services, prioritising the digitalisation, optimisation and acceleration of asylum procedures. Since the OPRP had supposedly enhanced the Immigration Office's capacity in terms of planning, clustering, timing and control of IP requests, it was made conceivable for future use (*Asielzoekers kunnen weer terecht*, 2020). These perspectives correspond to EASO's (2020b, 2020c) recommendations on the future formalisation and implementation of interim practices like the OPRP. In accordance with the contemporary modernising trend of asylum infrastructures, the introduction of online practices could be a steppingstone towards more efficiently organized registration procedures (EASO, 2020b). For such purpose, however, the technical impediments and legal weaknesses of the OPRP would still have to be resolved.¹⁷ Certainly vis-à-vis the target group, much work on digital procedures' accessibility remains to be done:

“So, the idea is not bad. But it has to be adjusted to the target group. The target group doesn't speak French, doesn't speak Dutch and lacks access to internet. So, the problem was the accessibility of this system.” (Marian, 16-03-2021; translated from Dutch).

The digitalized OPRP proved problematic for its already vulnerable target group, for it wasn't equally accessible for everyone, but only good “for those who are already well integrated in society” (Nina, 30-03-2021; translated from French). For the most vulnerable AIPs, the digitalized procedure posed a threat of increased vulnerability. Apart from lacking the necessary tools, resources and networks, AIPs also lost control over their personal data and were forcedly made dependent on humanitarian actors (cf. 6.2.2.). In this regard, the OPRP was preceded by former Secretary of State Francken (N-VA) in 2017, who proposed an adjustment to the Foreign Law with which he tried to grant the CGRS legal access to AIPs' mobile phones, laptops and social media profiles. Although AIPs could still refuse access to

¹⁷ In accordance to European legislation, Belgium's so-called Reception Law ('Opvangwet'), provides legally defined minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers. By consequence, applicants for international protection, are entitled to material support, including shelter, provided by the Belgian state (*Wettelijk kader*, 2020).

their data, this could negatively impact their application (Lambrechts, 2021). Although not yet approved to date, the CGRS is already linking AIPs' stories to their (public) social media profiles. This is in line with the EU's plans for broadening the scope of EURODAC's fingerprinting procedures, aiming at a more extensive data collection on AIP profiles to generate in-depth statistics for policy makers (Lambrechts, 2021).

6.5.2. The OPRP as a step towards a techno-borderscape

The increasing importance and presence of digital technologies for AIPs, both as a tool and a threat, relate to Godin and Donà's (2020) concept of 'techno-borderscapes'. Elaborating on the concept of borderscapes, Godin and Donà echo Appadurai's (1996) understanding of a 'technoscape' that describes the fluidity of technologies and grasps the speed at which they move across all kinds of boundaries. Turning 'technoscapes' into 'techno-borderscapes', these authors argue that zones of transit are increasingly characterized by migrants' encounters with mobile technologies. Although digital tools might enable migrants to establish networks of transnational interconnectivity and information exchange, this doesn't really apply to AIPs' experiences with the OPRP here described. On the contrary, digital tools like the OPRP, as well as the digital tools required for it, have raised an internalized border for AIPs and simultaneously provided the Immigration Office with new means of control. Paradoxically, the means of empowerment (and mobility) that digital technologies potentially provide migrants with, are met with means of disempowerment (and immobility) in the hands of governments.

Since the differentiation between 'haves' and 'have-nots' is said to be an inherent and unavoidable evil of digital procedures and technologies, Godin and Donà (2020) argue that their presence drastically reshapes the dynamics between migrants, state and civil actors. First, it gives rise to new technologically sophisticated practices at the disposal of state actors. Second, the proliferation of mobile technologies tends to interfere with migrants' trajectories and mobility, which in turn compels migrants to search for access to electricity and Wi-Fi, something which became very clear with the OPRP. Third and last, activists and other civil actors are triggered to use and familiarize with digital services, and to possibly resort to 'digital activism' in response to the "technologically secured borderscapes" (Godin & Donà, 2020, p.4), something which NGOs like Pigment and Flemish Refugee Action have surely done. In sum, the emergence of digital technologies not only provides the different actors with new means of action, but also reshapes their social relations within borderscapes. We could argue that by the illegibility of its interim OPRP, the Belgian state created its own margins in which AIPs have encountered digitalized state power. Through its procedural arbitrariness and illegibility, the state has been constantly experienced and undone at the same time (Asad, 2004).

7. Conclusion

After having outlined the findings of my ethnographic fieldwork (cf. 6.), I use this conclusory chapter to bring these together and answer my central research question and corresponding sub-questions (cf. 4).

During its seven months-long duration, the online preregistration procedure raised an internalized, administrative border that complicated AIPs' access to Belgium's asylum registration procedure. As a result, the OPRP's rigorous requirements confronted vulnerable and unprioritized AIPs, often single men just arrived, with increased precarity and dependency on humanitarian support (cf. 6.2-6.4.). Given the intensified presence of humanitarian actors around this issue, the OPRP raised a humanitarian borderscape (cf. Pallister-Wilkins, 2017; Walters, 2011), in which civil and state actors got bogged down in a cat and mouse game and sustained each other's (destructive) activities for months on end (cf. 6.3.). As a result, the advisory and advocating role of NGOs like Pigment and Flemish Refugee Action from before the covid-19 crisis increasingly shifted into one of emergency stopgap support at the frontline (cf. 6.2.).

As the OPRP's digitalized nature thereby confronted AIPs with immobility and precarity, it has contributed to the emergence of a techno-borderscape (cf. Godin & Donà, 2020). Whereas digitalisation provided Belgium's Immigration Office with new means of control and efficiency, it caused AIPs to lose control over their procedures and personal data (cf. 6.2.-6.3.). For AIPs, overcoming the multiplied borders standing between them and registering for international protection thus became more complicated and increasingly dependent on individual skill and capacity. Furthermore, the OPRP further vulnerabilized already vulnerable AIPs, who ended up homeless, alone and in illegalized living conditions, without recognized status nor legal entitlement to shelter and material assistance (cf. 6.4.-6.5.). I therefore argue that the OPRP in its form of an internalized and administrative border increasingly hindered vulnerable AIPs from (a chance of) entering the Belgian reception network. Here, the growing importance of digitalization has proven key to understand why and how.

The OPRP thereby illustrates how, by digitalizing a part of its administrative borders, state sovereignty can be used to protect the state's borders from noncitizens in an efficient way. As such, the OPRP has generated a temporality of control at Belgium's borders, in which increased waiting times and procedural illegibility have forced AIPs into exhaustion, a temporary strangle hold and a legal state of limbo. Temporality here can be understood as the change of speed that concerns both mechanisms of control and asylum procedures (cf. Tazzioli, 2018). Consequently, time has been used as a tool for discipline, in which waiting then illustrates sovereign power par excellence, exposing AIPs to stuckedness and protracted

temporality. Simultaneously, the temporality of control in the OPRP's case has retained AIPs in illegality for extended periods of time, forcing them into a kind of nonexistence (Coutin, 2000) characterized by experiences of forced exclusion, subjugation and repression, as well as social death and legal illegibility (De Genova, 2002, p.427). By legally producing illegality (cf. De Genova, 2002), I argue that the OPRP has operated as a deterrent for future AIPs (cf. Andersson, 2014) and as a differentiator between vulnerable and invulnerable AIP profiles at the border (cf. Clastres, 1995).

In general, digitalization, here inherent to the OPRP, was meant to enhance Belgium's border securitization against both the virus and noncitizens, as well as the country's planning and efficiency of its migration management. Yet, this research has laid bare the contradictory outcomes of this digitalisation: While it was to the advantage of the state, it also proved to the detriment of AIPs, depriving their sociolegal positionality and registration capacity. Here, however, talking about 'the state' as a homogenous entity has proven inadequate. Given the OPRP's contested working, it (temporarily) generated (or underlined) a dividing line between the Immigration Office and the more humanitarian-oriented Fedasil (incl. Infopunt) within Little Fortress's arrival centre. The IO's top-down decision-making, lack of clear communication and support, as well as its contested prolongation of the OPRP pushed Fedasil (incl. Infopunt) towards an exploration of their own (humanitarian) orientation and position as state actor (cf. 6.1.-6.3.).

8. Discussion

To round off this dissertation, I wonder how my findings can contribute to past and future scholarly debate on asylum procedures, the future of procedure digitalisation and the political and societal climate that surrounds AIPs in Europe and Belgium.

As one NGO respondent argued, the fact that the OPRP denied AIPs' of controlling their own procedure and data is yet another display of how Belgium's migration management undervalues the importance of providing AIPs with a suitable environment to carefully prepare their request for international protection (Tom, 09-02-2021). Despite this being a crucial step in their lives, the OPRP has stripped some AIPs from their capacity of accessing, learning, understanding and completing the asylum (pre)registration procedure. The increased dependency on civil society has further aggravated and perpetuated this tendency. According to some, the solution lies in guiding AIPs through a pre-reception phase, something which even before covid-19 remained underexposed. The outcomes of my research provide a new argument in favour of a better pre-reception environment, something which can be addressed in future research.

Following Godin and Donà (2020), the presence of digital technologies in borderscapes is a double-edged sword that both threatens AIPs and opens up spaces for collaborative opportunities. Through my fieldwork, I observed how NGOs did create online manuals, shared OPRP screenshots and personal AIP data, homogenised e-mail correspondence and their service provision. Here, however, collective action by AIPs through digital tools against the OPRP has, as far as I'm aware, remained absent. Likewise, opportunities for what Schierup and Jørgensen (2016) call 'e-resistance' (in response to 'e-precarity') have remained undiscovered with the OPRP. Nevertheless, the "rebellious politics of informal people" that these authors connect to such 'e-resistance' are very likely to emerge in the future, because digital tools, according to EASO (2020b, 2020c) at least, will constitute the soon-to-be new reality for first instance asylum procedures and, who knows, other aspects of Belgium's migration management.

Moreover, a future reintroduction of the OPRP has, despite its contested and convicted functioning, been everything but sworn off by the new Secretary of State and his cabinet (cf. 6.5.1.). Comparable to Francken's earlier proposal of 2018 to grant CGRS access to AIPs' online profiles and digital activity (cf. 5.1.), the OPRP's introduction and future use of digital procedures and tools have raised and will raise issues about who gets access to these online data and for what purposes these data are used. Yet, these examples of digitalisation still fit within a broader tendency on the European continent which focusses on turning people on the move into measurable and trackable pieces of data (Lambrechts, 2021). My fieldwork has

demonstrated how the ill-treatment of AIPs' personal data is not restricted to governments and asylum administrations, but trickles down to all stakeholders instead. The fact that AIPs' data ended up in the hands of external (civil) actors who, with best intentions, shared and used these data, is worrisome at best. Therefore, it might be interesting for future research to keep track with the changes in Belgium's migration management that concern the use of AIPs' data, the expansion of the state's data control and the hazard that lies in sharing this data between civil actors. Together with previous examples (cf. 5.1.), the OPRP can be considered a risky precedent that one way or another will be echoed in the years ahead.

Here, future research might also focus more on AIPs' lived experiences of these increasingly digitalizing policies. Especially the impersonal and detached nature of the OPRP make me wonder what influence digitalized asylum policies might have on AIPs' lived and somatic experiences in terms of time, space and belonging (cf. Willen, 2007), something which has unfortunately remained underexposed in my fieldwork. The variation within the AIP population with regards to gender, nationality, social networks and vulnerability then proves another interesting issue to address, for it, as carefully illustrated in my fieldwork, strongly determines AIPs' responsiveness to asylum policies. Yet, the fact that this research population is not easy to reach and already over-questioned complicates such research for the future. For researchers who share my positionality for instance, doing such research will remain challenging and entail a constant exploration of the ethical boundaries that surround it.

Finally, this dissertation has demonstrated how Brussels's civil society has played a key role in supporting AIPs in (pre)registering for international protection. Although their actions prove the value and importance of solidary humanitarianism, this tendency is above all worrisome and gives cause for thought. As European nation states increasingly prefer impersonal and rigorous asylum policies over humanitarian and solidary ones, people at their borders must overcome inhumanities and complexities. The fact that aid volunteers and NGOs are given space to fill in the gaps left by the government, and are almost expected to do so, is the world upside down. Instead of normalizing this trend, I join authors like Benhabib (2007, 2008), Nash (2009) and Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) in their call for changing the notion of 'citizenship' in order for it to meet the new realities of globalization, large-scale migration and settlement and counteract the solidification of nation states' ill-treatment of third-country nationals at the expense of their human rights. Accordingly, I join these authors in their claim for extending justice and legal entitlements to state benefits to noncitizens.

9. References

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10. Appendix

10.1. Scan of the online preregistration form in Dutch (incomplete version)

**Uw aanvraag tot afspraak is in behandeling,
gelieve de Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken niet te
contacteren. Wij zullen u zo spoedig mogelijk
contacteren.**

Ingezonden op do, 05/14/2020 - 09:54

ID :

Ingezonden waardes:

A. Identiteitsgegevens en burgerlijke staat van de verzoeker op het Belgisch grondgebied

Na(a)m(en)

Voornaam

Geboortedatum

Geboorteplaats

Nationaliteit

Geslacht

E-mail

Bent u in het bezit van een paspoort ?

Bent u al in contact geweest met een Belgische autoriteit (bijvoorbeeld: ambassades, consulaten, gemeentes,...) ?

Beschikt u reeds over een dossiernummer bij de Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken ?

Gelieve uw dossiernummer te vermelden

Gelieve uw foto op te laden

B. Samenstelling van de familie van de aanvrager op het

10.2. Screenshots of the online preregistration form in French (complete version)

Formulaire de demande de rendez-vous au centre d'arrivée

A. Données d'identité du demandeur sur le territoire belge

Nom *

Nom à la naissance

Prénom *

Date de naissance *

Ville de naissance *

Pays de naissance *

Nationalité *

Sexe *

Homme Femme Indéterminé

E-mail *

Etes-vous en possession d'un passeport ? *

Oui Non

Etes-vous en possession d'un passeport ? *

Oui Non

Veillez charger ici une copie de votre passeport *

No file chosen

1 seul fichier.

Limité à 200 Mo.

Types autorisés : txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp.

Avez-vous déjà été en contact avec une autorité belge (par exemple : ambassades, consulats, communes, ...) ? *

Oui Non

Avez-vous déjà un numéro de dossier à l'Office des étrangers ? *

Non Oui J'ai un numéro mais je ne m'en souviens plus

Veillez envoyer ici votre photo *

No file chosen

1 seul fichier.

Limité à 200 Mo.

Types autorisés : txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp.

B. Composition de famille du demandeur sur le territoire belge

1. Etes-vous accompagné de votre partenaire ? *

Oui Non

1. Etes-vous accompagné de votre partenaire ? *

Oui Non



Veillez compléter les informations relatives à votre partenaire

Nom *

Prénom *

Relation *

Marié (mariage légal) Non marié

2. Etes-vous accompagné de votre (vos) enfant(s) ? (-18 ans) *

Oui Non

Veillez compléter les informations relatives à votre (vos) enfant(s) (-18 ans)

Nom *

Prénom *

Nationalité *

Date de naissance *

Lieu de naissance *

Veillez mentionner la ville de naissance ou le village de naissance

Sexe *

Féminin Masculin Indéterminé

Veillez envoyer ici la photo de votre enfant *

No file chosen

1 seul fichier.

Limité à 200 Mo.

Types autorisés : txt pdf doc docx tiff pg jpeg bmp.

Avez-vous un autre enfant ? *

3. Etes-vous accompagné de votre (vos) enfant(s) ? (+18 ans) *

Oui Non

Veillez compléter les informations relatives à votre (vos) enfant(s) (+18 ans)

Nom *

Prénom *

Avez-vous un autre enfant ? (+18 ans) *

Oui Non

C. Langues parlées

1. *

2.

3.

4.

10.3. Flemish Refugee Action's English manual for the OPRP

<p>Formulaire de demande de rendez-vous au centre d'arrivée</p> <p>A. Données d'identité du demandeur sur le territoire belge</p> <p>Nom * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Nom à la naissance <input type="text"/></p> <p>Prénoms * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Date de naissance * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Ville de naissance * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Pays de naissance * <input type="text" value="- Sélectionner -"/></p> <p>Nationalité * <input type="text" value="- Sélectionner -"/></p> <p>Sexe * <input type="radio"/> Homme <input type="radio"/> Femme <input type="radio"/> Indéterminé</p> <p>E-mail * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Etes-vous en possession d'un passeport ? * <input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p>	<p>Arrival Centre Appointment – Request Form</p> <p>A. Identity data of the applicant on Belgian territory</p> <p>Family name: Family name at birth: First name: Date of birth: City of birth: Country of birth: (select from list) Nationality: (select from list)</p> <p>Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Man <input type="checkbox"/> Woman <input type="checkbox"/> Other</p> <p>E-mail address: (If you don't have any, you may create one here: https://www.google.com/gmail/)</p> <p>Are you in possession of a passport? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>Etes-vous en possession d'un passeport ? * <input checked="" type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p> <p>Veuillez charger ici une copie de votre passeport * <input type="button" value="Choose File"/> No file chosen 1 seul fichier. Limité à 200 Mo. Types autorisés : txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp.</p>	<p><i>If you clicked "Yes" to the previous question ("Are you in possession of a passport?")</i></p> <p>Please upload a copy of your passport here 1 single file Limited to 200 MB Allowed formats: txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp</p>
<p>Avez-vous déjà été en contact avec une autorité belge (par exemple : ambassades, consulats, communes, ...) ? * <input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p> <p>Avez-vous déjà un numéro de dossier à l'Office des étrangers ? * <input type="radio"/> Non <input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> J'ai un numéro mais je ne m'en souviens plus</p> <p>Veuillez envoyer ici votre photo * <input type="button" value="Choose File"/> No file chosen 1 seul fichier. Limité à 200 Mo. Types autorisés : txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp.</p>	<p>Have you previously been in contact with a Belgian authority (e.g: embassies, consulates, municipalities, ...)? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Do you already have a file number at the Immigration Office? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> I have a number but I can't remember it</p> <p>Please upload your picture here 1 single file Limited to 200 MB Allowed formats: txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp.</p>
<p>B. Composition de famille du demandeur sur le territoire belge</p> <p>1. Etes-vous accompagné de votre partenaire ? * <input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p>	<p>B. Family information of the applicant on Belgian territory</p> <p>1. Are you accompanied by your partner? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>1. Etes-vous accompagné de votre partenaire ? * <input checked="" type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p> <p>Veuillez compléter les informations relatives à votre partenaire</p> <p>Nom * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Prénom * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Relation * <input type="radio"/> Marié (mariage légal) <input type="radio"/> Non marié</p>	<p><i>If you clicked "Yes" to the previous question ("Are you accompanied by your partner?")</i></p> <p>Please fill in the information about your partner Family name: First name: Relation: <input type="checkbox"/> Married (legal marriage) <input type="checkbox"/> Not married</p>
<p>2. Etes-vous accompagné de votre (vos) enfant(s) ? (-18 ans) * <input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p>	<p>2. Are you accompanied by your child(ren)? (under 18 years old) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

<p>Veuillez compléter les informations relatives à votre (vos) enfant(s) (-18 ans)</p> <p>Nom * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Prénom * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Nationalité * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Date de naissance * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Lieu de naissance * <input type="text"/></p> <p><small>Veuillez mentionner la ville de naissance ou le village de naissance</small></p> <p>Sexe * <input type="radio"/> Féminin <input type="radio"/> Masculin <input type="radio"/> Indéterminé</p> <p>Veuillez envoyer ici la photo de votre enfant *</p> <p><input type="button" value="Choose File"/> No file chosen</p> <p><small>1 seul fichier. Limité à 200 Mo. Types autorisés : txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp.</small></p>	<p><i>If you clicked "Yes" to the previous question ("Are you accompanied by your child(ren) (under 18 years old)?)</i></p> <p>Please fill in the information about your child(ren) (-18 years old)</p> <p>Family name: First name: Nationality: Date of Birth: Place of birth (<i>please mention the city of birth or village of birth</i>):</p> <p>Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Man <input type="checkbox"/> Woman <input type="checkbox"/> Other</p> <p>Please upload your child's photo here 1 single file Limited to 200 MB Allowed types: txt pdf doc docx tiff jpg jpeg bmp.</p>
<p>Avez-vous un autre enfant ? *</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p>	<p>Do you have another child (under 18 years old)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><i>The details to provide for that other child are the same than for the first child (and so on, if you have other children)</i></p>	
<p>3. Etes-vous accompagné de votre (vos) enfant(s) ? (+18 ans) *</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p>	<p>3. Are you accompanied by your child(ren)? (over 18 years old)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>Veuillez compléter les informations relatives à votre (vos) enfant(s) (+18 ans)</p> <p>Nom * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Prénom * <input type="text"/></p>	<p><i>If you clicked "Yes" to the previous question ("Are you accompanied by your child(ren) (over 18 years old)?)</i></p> <p>Please fill in the information about your child(ren) (over 18 years old)</p> <p>Family name: First name:</p>
<p>Avez-vous un autre enfant ? (+18 ans) *</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Oui <input type="radio"/> Non</p>	<p>Do you have another child (over 18 years old)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><i>The details to provide for that other child are the same than for the first child (and so on, if you have other children)</i></p>	
<p>C. Langues parlées</p> <p>1. * <input type="text"/></p> <p>2. <input type="text"/></p> <p>3. <input type="text"/></p> <p>4. <input type="text"/></p>	<p>c. Spoken languages <i>(it is better to only mention the ones you speak fluently)</i></p> <p>1. 2. 3. 4.</p>

<p>D. Remarques</p> <p>J'ai pris connaissance des explications et déclare que mes données et celles des membres de ma famille sont correctes *</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Oui</p>	<p>D. Remarks</p> <p><i>I have read the explanations and declare that my data and those of my family members are correct.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p>
<p>E. Point d'attention à signaler</p> <p>(par exemple: chaise roulante, soins spécifiques, etc.)</p> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 60px; width: 100%;"></div>	<p>E. Point of attention to signal</p> <p><i>(e.g: wheelchair, special care, etc.)</i></p>
<p>J'ai pris connaissance des informations relatives aux traitements de mes données à caractère personnel *</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Oui</p>	<p>I have taken note of the information relating to the processing of my personal data</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p>
<p>INFORMATIONS RELATIVES AU TRAITEMENT DES DONNÉES À CARACTÈRE PERSONNEL – ARTICLE 13 DU RÈGLEMENT GÉNÉRAL DE PROTECTION DES DONNÉES (O ANËNË - R/19.)</p> <p>1. Dans le cadre de l'identification au centre d'arrivée, il est nécessaire que chaque personne qui a demandé un rendez-vous se munisse d'une photo (en format électronique) (en ce inclus les enfants mineurs, qui vous accompagnent).</p> <p>2. Il vous est également demandé d'attacher (sous format électronique) les documents d'identité en votre possession (les documents de chaque demandeur doivent être attachés).</p> <p>3. Si vous êtes marié, cohabitants et/ou accompagné de vos enfants, chaque membre de la famille qui a demandé un rendez-vous, doit se présenter au centre d'arrivée. Vous devez vous présenter ensemble.</p>	<p>INFORMATION RELATING TO THE PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA – ARTICLE 13 OF THE GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (HEREINAFTER "GDPR")</p> <p>1. For identification at the arrival centre, it is necessary that each person who has requested an appointment is in possession of a photo (digital format) (including the minor children accompanying you).</p>
	<p>2. You are also required to attach (digital format) the identity documents in your possession (the documents of each applicant must be attached).</p> <p>3. If you are married, cohabiting and/or accompanied by your children, each family member who has requested an appointment must show up at the arrival centre. You must show up together.</p>
<p>Envoyer votre demande</p>	<p>Submit your request</p>

10.4. Confirmation e-mail of the Immigration Office



Service public fédéral Intérieur
Direction générale Office des Etrangers
Département Protection Internationale
Cellule Enregistrement

[REDACTED]

Votre personne de contact WINNEPENNINCKX, Vera	T	-	Votre référence	-
Email rendezvous.alk@ibz.fgov.be	F	-	Notre référence	Bruxelles 17.07.2020

Convocation

Monsieur,

Suite à votre demande de rendez-vous afin de faire une demande de protection internationale, j'ai l'honneur de vous prier de vous présenter le **23/07/2020**

à l'Office des Etrangers, Centre d'arrivée PeIR Château,
2, Rue de Passendale, 1000 Bruxelles

à **11 :00** hrs précises.

Vous êtes tenu(e) d'y présenter cette convocation, toutes vos pièces d'identité, passeport, titre de voyage, titre de séjour étranger et autres documents.

Avec ma haute considération,
Pour la Ministre des Affaires sociales et de la Santé publique, et de l'Asile et la Migration


WINNEPENNINCKX Vera
Collaborateur administratif/Administratie medewerker

3 AVRIL 2020. — Annexe à l'Arrêté ministériel modifiant l'arrêté ministériel du 23 mars 2020 portant des mesures d'urgence pour limiter la propagation du coronavirus COVID-19 - Commerces, entreprises et services privés et

Boulevard Pacheco 44
1000 Bruxelles

T 02 793 80 00

infosuk@ibz.fgov.be
www.dof.fgov.be

www.ibz.be 



publics qui sont nécessaires à la protection des besoins vitaux de la Nation et des besoins de la population : les services d'asile et migration

10.5. Startpunt's corona-actors list



- **Existing list of actors & activities**

There are already two initiatives which provide a list of social services in Brussels during the corona crisis. These lists are also being kept up to date. We strongly advise you to take a look at them.

<https://solidair.brussels/article/hbvi6NdPm6crWl5woLD4/YPH8dR3cvs9aD6uGCufP>
<https://medimmigrant.be/nl/publicaties/meertalige-fiches-voor-mensen-zonder-wettig-verblijf-of-in-een-precaire?lang=fr>
<https://www.ama.be/coronavirus-etat-des-lieux-du-secteur-sans-abri-2/>

- **How can I apply for asylum?**

Since the 6th of April it is possible again to apply for asylum through an online application form.

You find the application form here: <https://arrivalcenterappointment.ibz.be/>

Attention for people who don't understand Dutch or French Ciré has translated the online application form to Arabic, English and Spanish. You may consult those translations while making your online application on their website:

<https://www.cire.be/office-des-etrangers-introduction-de-demande-de-protection-internationale-en-ligne/>

However, **remember that you have to submit the application form in Dutch or French**. Please visit the website of Ciré for more information and read the guiding translations of the application form.

Translations online application form:

- Arabic: [\(AR\) Help tool for online application form in Arabic version](#)
- English: [\(EN\) Help tool for online application form in English version](#)
- Spanish: [\(ES\) Help tool for online application form in Spanish version](#)

- **Where can I find shelter?**

Unfortunately, many of these shelters are not accessible anymore because the situation is changing all the time. We will try to update this document as regularly as possible to provide you with the correct information.

Pierre d'Angle

- **Rue Terre-Neuve 153, 1000 Bruxelles** (<https://bit.ly/3bMFSKS>).
- These places will be intended for the vulnerable public.
- They provide shelter for 30 people.

Croix - Rouge

- **Rue de Trèves 82, 1040 Brussels** (<https://bit.ly/3aCMThts>).
- They provide shelter for 250 homeless people.

Porte d'Ulysse and Sister's House

- **6 rue de planeur, 1130 Haren** (<https://bit.ly/341nzPJ>).
- Sister's House for women: open 24/24h.
- Porte d'Ulysse for men: 325 places, open 24/24h.

Ariane - Centre d'accueil d'urgence

- **Avenue du Pont de Luttre 132, Bruxelles 1190** (<https://bit.ly/2w6wfr0>).
- **Tel: 02 346 66 60**

Maison d'accueil des Petits-Riens

- **Tel: 02/5411396**
- For men only.

• Are there open daily-shelters?

Jacques Brel Day Center / Médecins du Monde

- **Rue de la Sablonnière 30, 1000 Brussels** (Metro stop: BOTANIQUE) (<https://bit.ly/2RSTUmT>)
- Open **from monday until friday** between **09:00-17:00**
- **Hot meals** between **11:30-12:30** and **13:00-14:00**
- **Laundry** between **9:00-15:30** (Time allowed per person: 1h30)
- **Showers** between **9:00-16:00** (Time allowed per person: 30 minutes; Maximum 45 persons per day)
- **Nap area** between **9:00-4:00** (10 beds available)

Day center HOB0-CAW

- **Kogelstraat 24, Brussels** (<https://bit.ly/3aCrsMu>)

- **Tuesday, thursday and Saturday between 9:00-16:00**
- They provide:
 - Coffee, tea or soup.
 - Meals at **12:30** !
 - Access to a toilet and possibility to wash your hands.
 - Phone chargers and lockers.
 - Mouth masks.
 - Food packages.
- They will provide more services in the future, such as showers.

HOBO-CAW BRUSSEL

- **Rue du Boulet 24, Bruxelles (<https://bit.ly/3bHwMiE>)**
- Open **every day** between **9:00-13:00**.
- **Specifically, for the sans-abri.**
- They provide soup, coffee and fruit.
- People can also wash their hands, have access to soap and tissues and charge their phone.

Jamais Sans Toit

- **Rue de Villers 43, 1000 Bruxelles (<https://bit.ly/2UysdBA>).**
- Open **every day** between **9:00-17:00**.
- They let 1 or 2 people in for 10 minutes.
- They provide showers, space for a nap, charging portals for phones and food.

• Where can I find free food?

Jacques Brel Day Center / Médecins du Monde

- **Rue de la Sablonnière 30, 1000 Brussels (Metro stop: BOTANIQUE) (<https://bit.ly/2RSTUmT>)**
- Open **from monday until friday** between **09:00-17:00**
- **Hot meals** between **11:30-12:30** and **13:00-14:00**
- **Laundry** between **9:00-15:30** (Time allowed per person: 1h30)
- **Showers** between **9:00-16:00** (Time allowed per person: 30 minutes; Maximum 45 persons per day)
- **Nap area** between **9:00-4:00** (10 beds available)

Quai des Péniches 8

- Open **every day** between **12h00-14h00** and **18h00-20h00**.

Espace Social- Tele Service

- **27-28 Boulevard de l'Abattoir, 1000 Bruxelles** (<https://bit.ly/39FIZnl>).
- **Tuesday** between 10h00-12h00 and 14h00-16h00.
- They provide "Coli'Bri" packages.

Nativitas

- **Rue Haute 116, 1000 Bruxelles** (<https://bit.ly/3dNyKzX>).
- Take-away soup between 12h00-13h30.

Resto du Coeur de Saint-Gilles

- **Rue de Bosnie 22, 1060 Saint-Gilles** (<https://bit.ly/2wYZYTs>).
- To receive an emergency package you have to call: **02 538 92 76**.
- They provide food packages 5 days a week for people who are on their list.

RestoJet

- For urgent questions call: **0496 267 868**
- **Place Cardinal Mercier, n° 36, 1090 Jette** (<https://bit.ly/2xJLcA0>).
- They provide take-out meals between 12:00-14:00.

Protestant social centre

- **Tel: 02 251 280**
- **Rue Cans 12, 1050 Ixelles** (<https://bit.ly/2wcn492>).
- They provide food packages on **Monday and Friday** between 9:00-13:00 and 14:00- 16:00.

For more places: RÉPERTOIRE DE L'AIDE ALIMENTAIRE EN BELGIQUE
Visit this website:
<https://www.fdss.be/fr/repertoire-de-l-aide-alimentaire/>

• Where can I take a shower?

Jacques Brel Day Center / Médecins du Monde

- **Rue de la Sablonnière 30, 1000 Brussels** (Metro stop: BOTANIQUE) (<https://bit.ly/2RSTUmT>)
- Open from **monday until friday** between 09:00-17:00
- **Hot meals** between 11:30-12:30 and 13:00-14:00

- **Laundry** between **9:00-15:30** (Time allowed per person: 1h30)
- **Showers** between **9:00-16:00** (Time allowed per person: 30 minutes; Maximum 45 persons per day)
- **Nap area** between **9:00-4:00** (10 beds available)

Espace social tele-service

- **27-28 Boulevard de l'Abattoir, 1000 Bruxelles** (<https://bit.ly/2JwcooD>).
- "La Consigne" will be open on **Monday's, Wednesday's and Friday's** between **8:00-13:00**.
- They provide access to showers and lockers (One person at a time).

Doucheflux

- **Rue des Veterinaires 84, 1070 Anderlecht** (<https://bit.ly/398h2fj>).
- From **Monday to Friday** between **8:30-14:00** and on **Saturday and Sunday** between **10:30-14:30**.
- All other services are interrupted (day reception, activities, laundry).
- Max 12 people at the same time.

La piscine de Saint-Josse

- **Rue Saint-François 27, 1210 Saint-Josse-ten-Noode** (<https://bit.ly/34ab5oT>).
- **For men:** on **Tuesday and Thursday** between **09:00-10:00**.
- **For women:** on **Wednesday and Friday** between **09:00-10:00**.
- They provide shampoo and shower gel.

RestoJet

- **Place Cardinal Mercier, n° 36, 1090 Jette** (<https://bit.ly/2JzsUo0>).
- Showers are accessible between **10:00-12:00**.

• Where can I wash my clothes?

Jacques Brel Day Center / Médecins du Monde

- **Rue de la Sablonnière 30, 1000 Brussels** (Metro stop: BOTANIQUE) (<https://bit.ly/2RSTUmT>)
- Open **from monday until friday** between **09:00-17:00**
- **Hot meals** between **11:30-12:30** and **13:00-14:00**

- **Laundry** between **9:00-15:30** (Time allowed per person: 1h30)
- **Showers** between **9:00-16:00** (Time allowed per person: 30 minutes; Maximum 45 persons per day)
- **Nap area** between **9:00-4:00** (10 beds available)

Espace social tele-service

- **27-28 Boulevard de l'Abattoir, 1000 Bruxelles** (<https://bit.ly/2JwcooD>).
- From Monday to Friday between 08:00-13:00.
- Max 8 kilos.

• Where can I get clothes?

Solidarité Grands Froids

- **74 rue du Danemark, 1060 Bruxelles**
- **Thursday** open between **10h-16h**
- Clothing, toys, childcare products, hygiene products (limited availability)
- Send an email before **Wednesday 18h** to cynthia.simpson@skynet.be
- You will receive an appointment hour.

• How can I get medical help?

If you think you might have Coronavirus, you can contact the reference doctors made available via Bruss'Help.

- covid19pro@brusshelp.org
- **Tel: 02 880 86 89 (from 8.30 am to 7 pm)**
- This centre is located on **rue de Trèves, Bruxelles** and managed by the Belgian Red Cross (<https://bit.ly/3423QiG>).
- These doctors are the only ones authorised to refer people to the reception centre (with a capacity of 15 places) guaranteeing the conditions of isolation and protection.

Centre Athéna ASBL

- **0494/18.90.24**
- **Rue Jean de Brouchoven de Bergeyck 2, 1000 Bruxelles** (<https://bit.ly/3bJKXUj>).

- Open **every day** between **09:00-18:00**.
- You can call or directly go to the centre.

Médecins du Monde

- The **Medibus** service is active.
- The locations it visits:
Monday : Gare centrale / Botanique (Central Station/ Botanical garden)
Tuesday : Gare du Midi (South Station)
Thursday : Quai des Péniches 8 (location of food distribution) + maraude
gare du Nord

Médecins Sans Frontière

- **Avenue du Port 100, Brussels** (<https://bit.ly/2wMjhQ8>).
- They provide 200 beds for vulnerable and sick people.
- The referral is going to be through HUB.

Le Méridien Service de Santé Mentale

- **Tel: 02 218 6 08**
- Consultations with a doctor, a psychiatrist or a psychologist, only by phone.
- e-prescription for medication.

• Where can I get legal or social consultation?

CAW BRUSSEL

- **Tel: 0800 13 500 (free)**
- All services which were provided before are still provided now by phone, mail or chat (social and psychological assistance, legal assistance).

Espace social tele-service

- **Tel: 02 548 98 00**
- The first line social permanence will be by telephone from **Monday to Friday** between **9:00-13:00**.

Ciré

- **Tel: 02 629 77 23** (between **9:00-12:30**)
- **cire@cire.be**

La Plateforme citoyenne de soutien aux réfugiés

- **Tel: 0488133269** (sending a text message is possible)
- **aidesociale@bxlrefugees.be**
- **Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday** between 14:00-17:00.

Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen

- You may send your questions, as detailed as possible, to **info@vluchtelingenwerk.be**

• Where can I get Psychological Assistance?

Solentra

- **Tel: 0800-35247 (free number)**
- **Only by phone.**
- They provide assistance in Arabic every weekday between 15:00-17:00.
- They provide assistance in Farsi and Dari every weekday between 10:00-12:00.
- WhatsApp is also possible.

Ulysse Service de Santé Mentale (SSM)

- **Tel: 02/ 533 06 70**
- Permanency every day between **09:00-17:00**.
- They answer questions and provide counselling by phone when needed.

• Are there any leisure activities?

<https://solidair.brussels/article/FNLrenPj41W5vMkXMEAk/N2ITifezaxZUmVbaWhwu>

Culture Quarantaine

- https://www.facebook.com/pg/culturequarantaine/community/?ref=page_internal
- Culture Quarantaine is a support platform for artists in this period of isolation. You will find online performances, as well as solidarity ideas to help artists.

APAR

- <https://www.apar.tv/cinema/85-000-films-historiques-totalement-gratuits-disponibles-ici-et-maintenant/>
- They provide rare films you can access for free and legally.