

FLEMISH MEDIA PERSPECTIVES ON SURGES IN MIGRATION: A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

ANALYSING NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 2015 'REFUGEE
CRISIS' AND THE ARRIVAL OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN 2022-2023

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Abstract

This thesis conducts a comparative critical discourse analysis of Flemish newspaper coverage during the 2015 'refugee crisis' and the influx of Ukrainian refugees in 2022-23. It aims to explore the evolution of media representations of migration over time and in response to different migration contexts. Employing the discourse-historical approach (DHA) as the guiding theoretical framework, this study analyses articles from five prominent Flemish newspapers to uncover changing media portrayals of refugees. The methodology involves content analysis, identifying key themes such as asylum policy/accommodation, integration, criticism/political debate, and flight, as well as comparing them between the two periods. Additionally, discursive analysis examines verbal processes, while textual analysis explores nomination, predicative, and argumentative strategies employed in the newspaper articles. The analysis reveals a shift towards more informative journalism, characterised by heightened visibility of refugee experts and a growing demand for their analysis to provide context and insights to the public. Significant disparities in media discourse between the two periods emerge, particularly in the portrayal of non-European refugees, who are depicted more negatively compared to Ukrainian refugees. We contend that these differences in media representations reflect changes in public perceptions, societal attitudes, and policy priorities in response to different refugee surges, as well as the influence of Eurocentrism and 'othering' mechanisms.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach, Flemish newspapers, media representation, refugees, RASIM, migration

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Introduction

Refugees and migration have emerged as dominant themes in contemporary politics, and their significance is poised to endure in the foreseeable future. UN reports (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022) underscore this reality, highlighting the unprecedented scale of migrant and refugee movements currently underway. The past decades have borne witness to unparalleled human migrations driven by conflict, persecution, and insecurity, often labelled as migration 'crises'. Within Europe, the influx of refugees from Syria and Ukraine, for instance, has left a profound impact on various regions, including Flanders. Extensive media coverage surrounds refugees and migrants, reflecting varying narratives that both shape and are shaped by political debates. Conflict and migration routes have been extensively covered in Flemish newspapers, with events such as the high number of drownings in the Mediterranean in 2015 and the mass exodus of Ukrainians in 2022 holding significant news value.

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and discourse surrounding migration surges, exerting influence on societal attitudes, policy agendas, and integration efforts. This dissertation seeks to explore the portrayal of refugees, with a particular focus on those from Ukraine compared to non-Europeans, in Flemish media. Understanding media representations of refugees and discerning potential disparities between different refugee surges is crucial for comprehending public perception and discourse surrounding migration issues. While media representations of refugees have been extensively studied, discrepancies between various refugee surges persist, and specific research on the Flemish media context remains scarce.

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine media framing dynamics surrounding the Syrian and Ukrainian migration surges in Flanders, spanning from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015, and 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023. Utilising critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the methodological framework, we delve into the ways in which media narratives construct and represent refugees from Syria and Ukraine. We seek to uncover underlying themes, discursive patterns, and ideological nuances and how they impact public perceptions and might contribute to the polarisation of societal attitudes towards migrants in Flanders.

The study aims to address the following research question:

How do Flemish newspapers frame and represent the Syrian and Ukrainian migration surges in Flanders during the periods of 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015, and 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023, and what discursive strategies do they employ to shape public perceptions of refugees?

To answer this question, Flemish newspaper articles from five different newspapers (i.e. De Morgen, De Standaard, De Tijd, Het Laatste Nieuws, and Het Nieuwsblad) were selected for analysis following predefined criteria and a comprehensive search strategy, ensuring relevance and representativeness. Keyword searches related to the migration surges in 2015 and 2022-23 facilitated data collection, with systematic mechanisms in place to manage data influx and ensure dataset coherence. The subsequent analysis adopts the discourse-historical approach (DHA), a strand of CDA, as its guiding theoretical framework, providing a systematic methodology for analysing discursive formations.

Conceptual framework

‘Othering’ and the ‘European identity’

The concept of ‘othering’, as first articulated by Edward Said (1978), provides a crucial lens through which to analyse media framing of refugees. ‘Othering’ is a social and cognitive process that involves the act of differentiating and, more significantly, stigmatising a group perceived as distinct. This process frequently unfolds within identity formation dynamics, where an ingroup establishes its identity in contrast to an outgroup (Paré, 2022). In essence, the construction of the ‘Self’, as posited by social identity theory, inherently involves the construction of an ‘Other.’ This ‘Us’ (the ‘Self’) and ‘Them’ (the ‘Other’) characterisation relies on criteria that divide humanity into two categories. One group embodies the norm, with its identity esteemed, while the other group is delineated by perceived shortcomings, devalued, and susceptible to discrimination (Staszak, 2009).

The European project, originating at the Copenhagen European Summit of December 1973, aimed to articulate a distinct and influential European identity that would transcend national affiliations, binding together member states and their populations. This identity was founded on a principle of ‘responsibility towards the rest of the world’, rooted in the Christian tradition. The crucial (supra-) national myth shaping the European Community and its identity was an ideal of solidarity, unity, and cosmopolitanism, combined with pride in scientific and technical progress. Simultaneously, the aspiration towards democratic and humanistic values reinforced a belief in Europe’s (moral) superiority (Paré, 2022). However, there’s considerable uncertainty as to what ‘Europeanness’ truly embodies (Passerini, 2012). In the case of European identity, this dichotomy has historically been shaped by notions of superiority, particularly in relation to non-European cultures. As such, Said contended that Western societies actively ‘other’ Eastern cultures by internalising and expressing negative convictions about them, thus extending their colonial domination (1978). While there may be an apparent appreciation for the ‘other’, as seen in instances of exoticism, it often takes on a stereotypical and reassuring form that aims to provide comfort to the ‘self’ by reinforcing a sense of superiority (Staszak, 2009). In times of perceived crisis, such as the refugee influx of 2015, the dynamics of ‘othering’ become particularly salient (Paré, 2022). They act as ‘open moments’ that intensify the construction of ingroup-outgroup distinctions, fostering a sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ (Laffan, 2019).

Understanding how media engages in this process of ‘othering’ is vital for deciphering the intricate dynamics shaping public perceptions and attitudes. Mass media actively constructs and disseminates narratives and representations that contribute to hegemonic discourse about migration. The framing of refugees in media narratives often reinforces stereotypes, accentuating

their abnormality and associating them with notions of threat and disorder. The migrant is portrayed as an outsider, a figure of fascination or indifference, and is often deprived of political value upon reaching Europe's borders (Paré, 2022). The Council of Europe report authored by Georgiou & Zaborowski (2017) further illuminates how the European press framed the arrival of refugees in 2015 as a 'crisis' to begin with. Despite the diversity in coverage, refugees were generally portrayed as outsiders, either vulnerable or dangerous. The framing shifted over time, indicating regional and temporal trends, yet refugees consistently emerged as an anonymous and unskilled group, reinforcing their status as the 'other' to the presumed reader. Equally important is the observation that the omission of refugees' voices in media narratives contributes significantly to the process of 'othering' (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). By limiting their characterisation to preconceived notions and stereotypes, the media can reinforce a sense of difference and maintain power dynamics that position refugees as the 'other' in the eyes of the audience. This not only influences public perception but also shapes the discourse surrounding the refugee 'crisis' for both European audiences and stakeholders (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017).

Deservingness and victimhood

Recent refugee movements to the European Union bring attention to the complex interplay of 'deservingness' and 'victimhood' within the asylum procedure, where articulating suffering is intricately tied to the acquisition of refugee status (d'Haenens et al., 2019). The prevailing archetype of a 'real' refugee often relies on the ability to convincingly demonstrate suffering and capitalise on victimhood, a process granting individuals 'the right to have rights' (Mazzocchetti, 2017, p. 111). This connection between deservingness and victimhood is further explored in critical scholarship on migration and media studies, where refugees are portrayed as figures suspended between victimhood and malevolence, simultaneously deserving protection, and perceived as threats to the host community (Moore et al., 2011). In their study of the 2015 refugee crisis, Chouliaraki & Zaborowski (2017) focused on two primary linguistic strategies in representing victimhood, namely passivisation and collectivisation. On the one hand, passivisation manifests in portraying refugees as vulnerable bodies-in-pain, highlighting their lack of basic resources for survival and contributing to their dehumanisation (Malkki, 1996). Collectivisation, on the other hand, depicts refugees as statistical percentages, part of an indistinguishable mass of unfortunates. Both strategies render refugees 'voiceless,' placing them outside the realm of reason, history, and humanity. Essentially victimhood contributes to the inherent instability of refugees as human beings. While ascribing victimhood underscores vulnerability and suffering, it simultaneously reinforces a narrative that may overlook refugees' agency and their capacity for rational decision-making (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017).

The discussion of deservingness is central to the broader question of who merits access to protection, state territory, resources, and membership. For instance, the context of the 2022

Ukrainian refugee influx reveals a complex interplay between protection entitlements, vulnerabilities, and the perceived alignment of refugees with the security, economic, and cultural norms of receiving states (Welfens, 2023). European heads of states, once perceived as hardliners during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, have notably underlined not only the protective needs of Ukrainian refugees but also their educational level, economic value, and presumed cultural compatibility. This highlights the duality of considerations in determining deservingness: one based on protection entitlements and vulnerabilities, and the other on perceived assimilability or 'fit' with the host society (Abdelaaty, 2022).

The tension arising from these contrasting deservingness requirements can be conceptualised as 'promising victimhood'. This notion captures the policies and practices demanding refugees to simultaneously demonstrate their immediate protection needs and vulnerability while also showcasing their willingness and ability to integrate into the receiving society in the future, without posing a risk to its security, economy, or cultural norms (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascreñas, 2018). Refugees often face the dual expectations of proving their immediate vulnerability to gain recognition as refugees, and subsequently demonstrating their worthiness to stay and become active members of the host society. This complex set of criteria is particularly pronounced in resettlement programs, where vulnerability and assimilability selection criteria are closely intertwined, giving rise to the concept of promising victimhood (Welfens, 2023).

Recognising the evolving and context-specific nature of deservingness perceptions, an intersectional perspective¹ becomes essential to understand the nuanced dynamics between deservingness and victimhood (Welfens, 2023). Applied to the concept of promising victimhood, the intersectional lens reveals how vulnerability and assimilability are shaped by intersecting identity markers such as gender, nationality, race, age, and social class. This understanding highlights the nuanced dynamics surrounding the criteria for deservingness within each context, especially in the context of refugee resettlement, determining who gains access to safe pathways and protection (Welfens, 2023).

Transnational humanitarianism, securitisation and 'humanitarian securitisation'

In the context of the 2015 refugee crisis, 'humanitarian securitisation' denotes the European Union's strategy to address the massive influx of migrants while balancing humanitarian concerns and sovereignty issues. Coined within critical migration and security studies, the term 'humanitarian securitisation' reflects the dual nature of framing the refugee crisis as both a humanitarian imperative and a security challenge (Vaughan-Williams, 2015). It involves a contradictory discourse

¹ Initially formulated by Black feminist scholars in the United States (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 1998), intersectionality articulates the concept that various social indicators, such as gender, nationhood, race, age, and social class, do not function independently but instead intersect and give rise to contingent positions of privilege and marginalisation.

that attempts to humanise refugees while simultaneously categorising them as an existential threat. The term encapsulates the complex interplay between care and protection in the framing of the crises, as evident in the linguistic ambivalence of the term 'refugee,' oscillating between positions of 'victim' and 'threat' (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017).

On the one hand, transnational humanitarianism, rooted in a moral duty to assist, encompasses guiding principles, emotional responses, legal frameworks, and administrative structures aimed at alleviating suffering and saving lives during crises (Ticktin, 2014). Humanitarianism can take concrete forms, such as providing shelter to those in need, and it intertwines both moral and political dimensions. Non-governmental organisations operating across borders play a crucial role in transnational humanitarian efforts, particularly in the context of refugees and migration, where the movement of people often transcends national boundaries (Gould, 2014). However, transnational humanitarianism primarily focuses on immediate responses rather than addressing long-term issues of inequality (Ticktin, 2014). This underscores the need for a comprehensive and sustained approach to address the enduring issues of inequality in the context of refugees and migration.

On the other hand, the overarching concept of securitisation can be defined as a 'speech act,' involving an intersubjective process where various actors agree on the seriousness of a threat and the need for urgent mobilisation (Karyotis, 2012, p. 391). Over recent decades, migration has become increasingly securitised, shifting gradually from 'normal' politics to a security-oriented domain (Gray & Franck, 2019). Bello (2022) argues that current migration 'crises' are socially constructed scattered reactions stemming from conflicts and instabilities since the Cold War's end, revealing a pattern of securitisation within the international system. This process, she suggests, is not linear but rather spirals, with each crisis framing migration as a security challenge. These reactions, influenced by factors, discourses, and policies, form a prejudiced narrative of migration. As human mobility is socially constructed as a threat, the interplay of prejudiced activities accelerates securitisation, pushing migration into 'a crisis to manage' and forming a migration-security nexus (Bello, 2022, p. 1328). Notably, media frames play a central role in this securitisation process, as they (re)produce constructions of migrants as people who pose a threat to the physical safety, economy, and identity of the receiving countries in the 'West' (Innes, 2010).

As we delve into the exploration of how Flemish newspapers frame the Syrian and Ukrainian migration surges in Flanders during specific time frames, we acknowledge the significance of understanding the media's role in shaping public perceptions of refugees. This inquiry delves into narratives about migration 'crises' and their implications for public discourse. In what follows, we explore framing theory, critical discourse analysis, political discourse analysis, and performative journalism as valuable frameworks for dissecting the discursive strategies employed by Flemish newspapers in framing migration surges from Syria and Ukraine.

Framing theory, critical discourse analysis, political discourse analysis, and performative journalism

Within this research, understanding the dynamics of framing theory, critical discourse analysis (CDA), political discourse analysis (PDA), and performative journalism becomes paramount. These analytical frameworks offer invaluable insights into the construction, dissemination, and reception of mediated messages, particularly pertinent in the context of issues as complex and sensitive as migration. Framing theory, fundamental in communication studies, illuminates the mechanisms through which media packages information, incorporating various framing devices to shape audience perceptions. Meanwhile, critical discourse analysis delves deeper into linguistic nuances, revealing power dynamics and societal constructs embedded within discourse. Political discourse analysis, aligned with CDA, elucidates the political dimensions of discourse, unveiling power dynamics and ideological underpinnings. Additionally, performative journalism, conceptualised as symbolic bordering, extends our understanding of media's role in constructing and perpetuating narratives that regulate who belongs in the public sphere and who does not. In what follows, we delve into the theoretical underpinnings of these frameworks.

Framing theory

In the domain of communication and media studies, framing theory has emerged as a cornerstone in the investigative toolkit, drawing the interest of numerous scholars who have made substantial contributions to both its theoretical evolution and empirical underpinnings. A key aspect of this paradigm involves understanding a frame as a comprehensive media package, which encompasses various framing devices such as metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, lexical choices, selection of sources, and stereotypes (Van Gorp, 2005). Moreover, framing theory introduces the concept of reasoning devices, which is linked to the four functions of framing: defining a problem, assigning responsibility, passing moral judgment, and proposing solutions. These devices, whether manifest or latent, play a crucial role in shaping the overall frame message within a news article. The latent message represented by a frame is meta-communicative, aiding the reader in interpreting the news message (Van Gorp, 2005). On the one hand, Entman (1993, pp. 52–53) distinguishes four locations where frames can be found. Translated into a journalistic context, these are in news stories, in the minds of journalists and news users, and in sociocultural contexts. With the latter, reference can be made to the values, norms, archetypes, myths, and ideas that are recognisable for both journalists and news users.² On the other hand, Entman (2004) identifies two classes of framing: substantive frames, which cover political events or issues by defining problems, attributing causality, making moral judgments, and proposing solutions; and procedural frames, which suggest ways of evaluating political actors' legitimacy based on technique, representativeness, and success.

² The archetype of the innocent victim is an example of such a frame. This frame can, for instance, be used to report news about refugees, poverty, or cross-border behaviour (Van Gorp et al., 2018).

Crucially, framing theory posits that frames³ are not pre-given or inherent in the events that become news; rather, news media construct and structure the chaotic world, and the framing analysis seeks to unveil the structural dimensions that align with the latent meaning of the news story (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Consequently, frames help journalists present often complex topics in an understandable way in their reporting. Each frame invites a specific understanding of topics. In introducing his framing model, Van Gorp asserts that news is not a neutral reflection of reality but a deliberately selected representation (2006). This intricate framing process involves both production and reception sides, influenced by individual characteristics, organisational levels, and ideology (Van Gorp, 2006). Despite a news medium's aim for impartiality, inherent bias exists, seeing as a frame offers just one perspective. The idea that news could be without frames is thus an illusion. What a journalist can do, however, is to be more conscious of frame selection and strive to regularly switch frames or combine them within the same news story (Van Gorp et al., 2018). Van Gorp's framing model serves as an instrumental tool for comprehending how news reports on asylum and refugee issues transcend mere event reporting, becoming selective representations that significantly influence public perception (Van Gorp, 2005).

In contemporary society, the role of media in shaping public perceptions and discourse through framing is undeniable. Journalism, according to Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, transcends a mere transmission of information and emerges as a performative practice, actively shaping societal narratives, particularly visible in discussions on refugee suffering (2017). The media's presentation of these issues, through the selection of events, opinions, facts, images, and information, moulds audience responses, promoting specific interpretations and fostering prejudice. By shaping public attitudes, the media also influences government considerations and communication of policy outcomes (Cooper et al., 2017). The power of journalism is articulated not in the literal content⁴ of news stories but in its ability to name refugees and frame our relationships with them within affective and moral dimensions (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

While framing theory sets the stage for understanding how media presents information, critical discourse analysis (CDA) delves deeper into the linguistic nuances that shape those presentations, revealing the interplay between language, power, and societal constructs. Within the CDA framework, studies on the representation of out-groups delve into conceptual notions of prejudice,

³ In alignment with Van Gorp's definition, we conceptualise a frame as "a steadfast, metacommunicative message that imparts structure and meaning to a news story. Framing, then, is the process through which the coherence and meaning of the message emerge" (2006, p. 46).

⁴ It is not the literal content of the discourse but the symbolic realm, the 'field of the perceptible,' that dictates our responses to the suffering of others, shapes our moral criticisms, and informs our political analyses (Butler, 2009).

ideology, power, and various sources of legitimation (KhosraviNik, 2010).⁵ The significance of discourse and mass media is crucial, as they not only convey potentially biased ideologies but also play an important role in shaping and reshaping attitudes and perceptions (Van Dijk, 2005). The foundational premise of CDA lies in considering discourse as both socially constitutive and socially constituted (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Language, within this framework, is not viewed merely as a reflection of external reality but as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situations, institutions, and social structures framing it. Discourse is not only shaped by these factors but also socially shapes them, sustaining and reproducing the social status quo, and transforms them, contributing to its evolution (Wodak, 2015).

The discourse-historical approach (DHA) to CDA, developed by Reisigl & Wodak (2015), contributes significantly to systematising methodologies for analysing out-groups in discourse. The DHA emphasises three key concepts: critique, ideology, and power. Critique in the DHA involves discovering inconsistencies, contradictions, and dilemmas in discourse-internal structures, socio-diagnostic critique uncovers the persuasive or 'manipulative' character of discursive practices, and future-related prospective critique aims to improve communication (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015). Language functions as an expression of power⁶ relations within society, which are omnipresent and encompasses both productive and destructive aspects. In the context of discourse, it is crucial to recognise that language is not inherently powerful; rather, it serves as a tool for acquiring and sustaining power through the actions of influential individuals. Texts, in this context, become battlegrounds that mirror ideological⁷ conflicts striving for dominance and hegemony (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015).

CDA, fundamentally concerned with language as a 'social practice', thus examines the connection between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures. It analyses news texts, political speeches, advertisements, and other forms of discourse, revealing hidden assumptions and ideologies. The goal is to denaturalise language, uncovering the ideas and assumptions in texts, ultimately revealing power interests implicit in the discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015). In the context of media discourse, newspapers, as a common form of written communication, assume a central role. Distinguished by their widespread accessibility and broad readership, newspapers significantly

⁵ Hall, p. (1989, p. 13) broadly defines discrimination in discourse and posits that discourse can be considered a 'racist' practice if it "serves to establish social, political and economic practices that preclude certain groups from material and symbolic resources".

⁶ Power is defined by Weber (1980) as the capability to impose one's will in social relationships, often against the desires or interests of others.

⁷ Ideology, within the DHA, is seen as a perspective or worldview, comprising mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, values, and evaluations shared by members of a specific social group. Fully developed ideologies include representational, visionary, and programmatic models, shaping social identity narratives and maintaining unequal power relations (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015).

contribute to the construction of ideologies. This impact is particularly evident in the deliberate framing of information, a practice especially noticeable in newspaper headlines (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015). The daily newspaper holds a prominent place in the routine reading habits of many individuals, which underscores their societal impact. With unique features setting them apart, newspaper texts can be considered a distinctive discourse, warranting dedicated study as a separate textual genre (Pajunen, 2008).

Political discourse analysis (PDA)

Political discourse analysis (PDA) unfolds as a multidimensional field interwoven with linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and various disciplines (Bayram, 2010). Fairclough (1989) positions discourse as a comprehensive process of interaction, with texts serving as fragments within a broader communicative context. Beyond linguistic expression, discourses embody power dynamics, shaping how individuals assert power, convey knowledge, resist, and critique. Speakers' ideological content becomes embedded in texts, reflecting the reproduction of learned discourses and cementing the ideological structure of specific social realms (Dellinger, 1995). Schaffner (2010) further expands the scope, characterising political discourse as both a historical and culturally contingent product of politics, fulfilling diverse functions related to political activities and ideas. Van Dijk (1997) introduces nuance in the understanding of PDA, highlighting the ambiguity surrounding the term 'political discourse'. He proposes two interpretations: one focused on analysing discourse as political and another adopting a critical approach aligned with contemporary CDA. Van Dijk underscores PDA as a political approach to discourse, integral to political action and the broader political landscape (van Dijk, 1997). This resonates with the core tenets of CDA, highlighting the interplay between language use and power dynamics within social practices. Dunmire (2012) further aligns PDA with CDA, elucidating its exploration into the language of politics and the politics of language. Going beyond a mere analysis of overtly political contexts, PDA embraces a broader critical approach to discourse. In addition, the intersection of PDA and CDA underscores the inherent political nature of discourse analysis, demanding a critical lens in the analysis process. Both PDA and CDA share a common goal: uncovering power dynamics, social determinants, and understanding how discourse shapes, maintains, challenges, and resists power in contemporary society (Dunmire, 2012).

Performative journalism as a symbolic bordering mechanism

Additionally, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski's concept of 'symbolic bordering' expands our understanding of borders beyond a restrictive conception of the border as a territorial line of separation that regulates entry into physical territories. This concept embraces a broader view of borders as symbolic practices that both include and exclude (2017). According to Vaughan-Williams, borders rhetorically identify and control the mobility of certain people, services, and goods within their jurisdiction (2015, p. 6). This 'symbolic bordering' is a linguistic practice with media and

European journalism acting as active participants, working alongside territorial borders. It involves the symbolic power to name and authorise who belongs to 'us' or shares 'our' humanity and who does not, regulating the symbolic construction of refugees as human beings. This involves practices such as silencing, collectivisation, and de-contextualisation, which collectively influence the portrayal of refugees and perpetuate stereotypes (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Symbolic bordering, as a regulative mechanism of Western journalism, systematically excludes migrant visualities from spaces of visibility, consolidating a securitising logic that mirrors geopolitical border regimes. This performative role of journalism in constructing symbolic borders extends to the ethical dimension of recognition, which highlights the importance of 'voice as narrative' in fostering a normative vision of global justice (Couldry, 2010). Through this lens, symbolic bordering becomes a crucial mechanism that regulates who appears, how, and why in the spaces of Western publicity, illustrating the interplay between journalism, borders, and the construction of narratives in today's media landscape.

Selected methodology

While each framework offers unique insights, the adoption of critical discourse analysis (CDA) within a discourse-historical approach (DHA) emerges as particularly relevant for this research. CDA's emphasis on unveiling power dynamics, ideological constructs, and linguistic nuances aligns with the complexities of media representations surrounding refugee crises. Moreover, DHA provides a systematic methodology for dissecting discursive formations, offering a nuanced understanding of how language, power, and ideology intersect within media discourse. By adopting a critical lens grounded in CDA and DHA, this research endeavours to contribute to a nuanced understanding of media representations and their broader societal implications. Further elaboration on the adopted approach will be provided in the methodology section.

Contextual framework

RASIM: refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants

The importance of language selection in discourse surrounding migration becomes paramount, particularly when categorising individuals seeking refuge. While the primary focus of this thesis centres around refugees, it is crucial to recognise the interchangeable usage of terms like migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers within media discourse. In this context, Baker et al.'s (2008) term RASIM (refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants) is used to refer to all groups together. This term offers an inclusive framework, acknowledging the diverse motivations, aims, and legal statuses among those on the move. However, within the scope of this study, the term 'refugees' is primarily used, aligning with the definition provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2019)⁸. By employing RASIM and adhering to clear definitions, we aim to mitigate ambiguity and promote a nuanced understanding of migration dynamics within the media landscape. Yet, in media narratives the distinct lines between refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers are often blurred. This interchangeability, while convenient, risks oversimplification and misrepresentation, thereby undermining the unique circumstances and rights afforded to refugees under international law. In addition, these terms carry various connotations and can evoke different societal responses (Van Gorp, 2006).

The Flemish migration debate

Belgium's migration history

Belgium's migration history unfolds against a backdrop of shifting policies responding to economic, humanitarian, and social dynamics. For nearly a century, Belgium has consistently attracted more immigrants than the number of emigrants leaving the country (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). However, before this trend emerged, over a century leading up to World War II, so-called fortune-seekers left Belgium to escape economic challenges. The United States became a key destination, drawing these fortune seekers in pursuit of the American Dream and resulting in the establishment of substantial Belgian communities there (Van der Bracht et al., 2014). In contrast, in the aftermath of the two World Wars, and more notably from the 1960s onwards, Belgium sought to attract inflows

⁸ According to their definitions, an asylum seeker, for instance, is defined as an individual seeking international protection, pending a final decision on their claim. In contrast, an immigrant is someone who establishes a new country of usual residence, while a migrant represents a broader spectrum of movement, encompassing various legal categories and reasons for relocation. Finally, a refugee, delineated by a well-founded fear of persecution, highlights the unique circumstances faced by those compelled to seek sanctuary outside their country of origin (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019).

of immigrant labour migration⁹ (Petrovic, 2015). The economic upswing of the 1960s prompted a strategic orientation toward immigrant labour to meet with its industrial demands, positioning Belgium as a temporary hub for foreign workers. This era witnessed an influx of migrant cohorts contributing significantly to the growing economy, a trend mirrored in the post-war recovery across Europe (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015).

However, a pivotal juncture emerged in 1974 after the first oil shock when the government, in response to evolving economic and political dynamics, instituted a formal cap on economic migration (Petrovic, 2015; Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). The economic recession and escalating unemployment prompted a reassessment of immigration policies, signifying the termination of the era of unrestricted labour migration and marking a critical inflection point in Belgium's migration strategy (Petrovic, 2015). However, labour immigration did not cease (Vause, 2020), and Belgium underwent a transformation from primarily serving as a temporary labour host to becoming a permanent settlement for a diverse array of migrants (Petrovic, 2015). Themes of family reunification and asylum gained prominence, reflecting a recalibration of migration policies in response to societal needs and a departure from the earlier economic-centric migration paradigm (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). Post-1984, inflows began to rise again, driven by factors beyond labour needs (Vause, 2020). The enactment of the 1984 Nationality Code played a central role in accentuating this shift. It introduced a flexible naturalisation approach, permitting approximately 30,000 naturalisations annually. This legislative adjustment acknowledged and accommodated the increasing presence of migrants seeking permanency in Belgian society (Petrovic, 2015). The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 ushered in a new era of immigration in Belgium. This period saw a surge in asylum-seekers and irregular work migration, aligning with the global 'asylum crisis' (Martiniello, 2013). The end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s thus marked a real acceleration in migratory exchanges to and from Belgium (Vause, 2020). Unlike the post-World War II era, migrant labour shifted away from heavy industries toward services, construction, and horticulture (Adam et al., 2002). By 2000, financial aid for asylum-seekers during application review was replaced with in-kind support like food and clothes to deter potential seekers (Martiniello, 2013). In 2000, of the 46,000 first-time applications only 7 percent obtained refugee or subsidiary protection status (Vause, 2020). In 2015, approximately 39,000 people filed first-time asylum applications, marking a threefold increase from the previous year (General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons). This surge, often referred to as the 'asylum crisis', led to a peak in asylum flows and administrative changes, with many applicants receiving international protection status in the following months. Despite there being more first-time asylum applications in 2000

⁹ To address the labour shortage post-World War I, the Belgian government organised recruitment campaigns through bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, Eastern Europe and Italy, with the latter being a prominent source of labour migrants (De Cleen et al., 2017; Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). Conversely, after World War II, Belgium, aligning itself with its European counterparts, transformed itself in order to address the imperatives of post-war reconstruction and economic resurgence (Kanobana, 2022).

(46,000) than in 2015 (39,000), recognition rates for refugee or subsidiary protection status were much higher in 2015 than in the early 2000s, with more than 60 percent of the applications receiving a favourable ruling (Vause, 2020).

Belgium's federal government, responsible for immigration policy, has faced many challenges in managing asylum applications and ensuring proper accommodation for asylum seekers. Persistent issues such as the lack of space in reception centres have led to legal challenges and fines, reflecting systemic shortcomings in the asylum system (Xhardez & Westerveen, 2024). Next to these policy shifts, Belgium also continues to grapple with inequalities in education and employment between individuals of Belgian and foreign origin, highlighting the ongoing challenges of migrant integration in Belgian society (Xhardez & Westerveen, 2024).

Belgium's political fabric, federal and blending territorial and non-territorial logic, introduces another complexity (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002; Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). The unique federal system, stemming from regional and linguistic divisions, coupled with cross-cutting political cleavages, creates a political environment where genuine public debate is elusive (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002). This multi-level governance is mirrored by a dual party system, where Flemish and Francophone parties compete at the regional level but form federal coalitions for national governance. The media landscape, too, follows linguistic divisions, adding another layer to the intricate political dynamics (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). The country's participative nature, characterised by the need for backstage compromises on various issues, further curtails public debate (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002).

Flemish dynamics: 'inburgering' or integration policies

Politically, immigration policy has become increasingly contentious, particularly in Flanders, characterised by its centre-right political inclination. Notably, this region has been a stronghold for the persistent rise of right-wing parties, with the electoral strength of the far-right Vlaams Belang standing out prominently (Petrovic, 2015). The consequential cordon sanitaire, a political pact isolating Vlaams Belang, has profoundly shaped the region's political dynamics, effectively preventing the integration of this far-right party into both regional and national governments (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002). The discourse surrounding the 'refugee crisis' in Flanders reflects culturalist, securitarian, and economic logics, framing migrants and asylum seekers as threats rather than addressing humanitarian concerns (De Cleen et al., 2017). Preceding Vlaams Belang's electoral victories, immigration was largely relegated to a non-issue in Flanders. However, the continuous ascent of extreme right-wing parties prompted mainstream political entities to confront immigration-related concerns. This transformative shift, particularly after the first electoral breakthrough of

Vlaams Blok¹⁰ in 1989, elevated immigration to a politicised issue, fuelled by anxieties surrounding a potential white backlash and electoral successes of anti-immigration parties (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). The resulting debates, intensified by these political shifts, prompted a critical re-evaluation of existing policies, compelling policymakers to adopt more long-term and coherent strategies in response to the nuanced challenges posed by immigration (Petrovic, 2015). Policymakers strive to strike a balance between addressing the concerns of the right-wing electorate and upholding the values of a diverse and inclusive society (Van der Bracht et al., 2014). Despite concerted efforts to depoliticise immigration, the Belgian case reveals clear instances of politicisation. This underscores an ongoing struggle between grassroots pressures and top-down resistance from established parties and state authorities, with the latter being more successful in controlling the debate (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015).

Before the 1980s, Belgium maintained a lenient stance on migrant settlement, presuming eventual repatriation, and neglecting integration as a permanent societal concern. However, the late 1980s witnessed the evolving conceptualisation of integration in Belgium, framed within the contextual dynamics of regional communities (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1994). Belgium, with its distinctive federal structure, grappled with the multifaceted challenges of integrating diverse communities characterised by linguistic and political distinctions (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). This period marked the initial acknowledgment of the significance of societal cohesion and inclusivity in the context of a shifting demographic landscape (Petrovic, 2015). Simultaneously, the political landscape experienced a shift as extreme right-wing parties, such as the Vlaams Blok in Antwerp, capitalised on anti-immigrant sentiments, compelling the government to establish the Royal Commission for Migrant Policy (KCM) to address integration challenges (Martiniello, 2013). This period also witnessed the mobilisation of second-generation immigrants against discrimination and police violence, prompting the implementation of policies aimed at fostering harmony and improving living conditions in immigrant neighbourhoods (Martiniello, 2013).

Belgium's federal structure facilitated the decentralisation of integration issues to regional and community levels, resulting in different integration strategies. Historically, Flanders preferred a multicultural model akin to the Netherlands, contrasting with Wallonia's preference for a French assimilationist approach, with Brussels serving as a nexus (Martiniello, 2013). In the 1990s, the establishment of the Interministerial Committee for Migrant Policy and the KCM aimed to address the vertical nature of migrant policy (Baele, 2022). These bodies, comprising representatives from various levels of governance, sought to harmonise migrant policies and define integration as a balance between assimilation and segregation. This definition emphasised the incorporation of migrants based on social principles aligned with the host country's culture while respecting cultural

¹⁰ In 2004, Vlaams Blok rebranded itself as Vlaams Belang and made alterations to its agenda. This decision followed a ruling by the Court of Cassation, which deemed Vlaams Blok in violation of anti-racism laws. Consequently, Vlaams Belang removed some of the more radical stances from its revised platform (Erk, 2005).

diversity (D'Hondt, 1989). The Interfederal Center for Equal Opportunities or Unia succeeded the KCM in 1993 and continued the same integration concept, as reflected in policy documents outlining comprehensive efforts transitioning towards a coordinated inclusive policy (Verstraete et al., 2000). By 1996, Belgium shifted its focus from migrant policy to ethnic-cultural minority policy, introducing a three-dimensional approach including emancipation, integration, and reception policies. In 1999, the concept of 'inburgering' (integration) was introduced in the Flemish government's agenda (Baele, 2022). The integration efforts prioritised self-reliance, aiming to ensure optimal newcomer participation in society through language acquisition, cultural familiarisation, and labour market integration (Verstraete et al., 2000). Borrowed from the Netherlands, the concept of 'inburgering' emphasised a one-sided approach, focusing on newcomers assimilating into Belgian/Flemish culture. Blommaert & Verschueren (1994) criticise this concept for being discriminatory and repressive through its asymmetrical application of the notion of 'identity'. It demands individuals or groups to adapt to societal values and socio-cultural norms, rooted in the belief that these are fundamental to the collective identity. This requirement restricts the freedom of those within the community to question or diverge from these established norms, creating a potentially repressive environment (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1994).

Following 9/11, Belgian integration debates evolved in alignment with broader European trends, emphasising nuanced approaches and cross-regional dialogue. Europeanisation of integration discussions facilitated the exchange of ideas and practices, fostering convergence in policies (Martiniello, 2013). In 2000, the integration process took shape following the introduction of the 'inburgering' concept in the Flemish coalition agreement (Baele, 2022). The period from 2003 to 2008 marked the enactment of the first Flemish integration decree, making integration programs, the Maatschappelijke Oriëntatie (MO) courses, mandatory for newcomers, albeit with exemptions based on existing skills. However, the implementation of the integration trajectory in Flanders faced challenges, especially regarding the content and execution of the MO courses. The mandatory nature of the integration trajectory caused a division within the government, and garnered significant media attention in the initial months (Baele, 2022). Critics contended that compelling lessons should only start after addressing the mechanisms of marginalisation among newcomers (Ravijts, 1999). Additionally, the lack of an institutional framework led to a structural shortage of slots for newcomers in Dutch and MO courses. Mandating a course that could not even be offered seemed absurd to many (Baele, 2022). Ongoing debates surrounded the integration trajectory's readiness and essence: defining citizenship, assessing societal membership, and questioning the goal's achievability. Critics saw the integration decree as merely a first step, advocating broader structural actions across policy levels. Some voices preferred the previous 'welcoming policy' over 'integration' due to negative connotations, seeing as it may reflect a shift towards a more individualistic, assimilative approach towards newcomers (Baele, 2022).

Regarding citizenship acquisition by migrants, the Law of 4 December 2012 introduced significant changes to the 1984 Nationality Code, particularly regarding the criteria for obtaining Belgian nationality through long-term residency. A revised Code took effect on January 1, 2013, implementing stricter regulations aimed at ensuring that acquisition is contingent upon the successful 'integration' of foreigners into Belgian society (Wautelet, 2020).

In 2013, an Agency for Integration and Inburgering (AGII) was established, which aimed at streamlining integration services and providing independence in policy execution (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering, n.d.). Despite structural reforms, substantive progress in MO policies remained elusive, with emphasis shifting towards practical aspects and administrative frameworks rather than content refinement (Baele, 2022). In 2016, efforts were made to infuse historical context into integration courses, underscoring the importance of understanding societal evolution and values (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering, 2016a). However, challenges persisted in translating conceptual frameworks into tangible educational content (Baele, 2022).

Subnational approaches to migrant integration have also evolved as historically, Francophone and Flemish political elites have taken opposing views on immigrant integration policy. However, regional policies have recently converged towards Flanders' model, which involves a strong focus on this compulsory civic integration (Xhardez, 2020). Between 2019 and 2022, Belgium witnessed a significant shift in integration policies, spurred by the rise of right-wing sentiments and a renewed focus on Flemish identity. Despite the absence of extreme-right parties in the government, the coalition, led by N-VA, Open VLD, and CD&V, adopted a significantly more 'Flemish'-oriented approach and introduced stricter measures, including fees for integration courses and a citizenship test encompassing language proficiency and societal understanding (Vlaamse Regering, 2019).

Public debate in Belgium

Public debates on migration, integration and multiculturalism within Belgium are ensnared in this web of linguistic and political divisions (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002). The absence of a unified national debate is apparent, with discussions often confined to specific, nuanced issues, which does not allow for easy engagement in an overall debate of a policy domain (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002). For instance, in the 2010s public debate on issues of integration and multiculturalism are mostly confined to specific topics, such as Muslim cemeteries, headscarf bans, or school inclusion (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015). More recently, the unexpected events of 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic and global protests by the Black Lives Matter-movement sparked by the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, profoundly disrupted social and economic structures worldwide. These events exacerbated existing inequalities faced by migrants and minorities, highlighting systemic issues of racial injustice and economic disparity (Adam et al., 2021).

In Belgium, the current discourse surrounding migration remains characterised by a focus on very specific issues. One prominent narrative revolves around the perception of Belgium being ‘full’, echoing Malthusian fears of overpopulation despite demographic evidence suggesting otherwise. This narrative often intersects with concerns about resource allocation, economic sustainability, and social cohesion, driving discussions about the capacity of Belgian society to absorb and integrate newcomers effectively (Deboosere & Majdoub, 2021). Moreover, housing policies have also emerged as a contentious topic within the migration discourse. The housing market in Belgium is characterised by a scarcity of social housing units and intense competition on the private rental market (Smits, 2019). Migrants face significant challenges in accessing housing due to discrimination and language barriers (El Moussawi, 2021). At the same time, right-wing political factions, including Vlaams Belang and N-VA, advocate for stringent measures to limit access to social security benefits for newcomers, with Vlaams Belang proposing a minimum residency of eight years and employment period of three years before access to benefits, alongside segregating contributions to a separate fund solely for migrant payouts (Haeck, 2019). The debate is further complicated by the dissemination of misinformation from political factions like Vlaams Belang, which claims that a significant portion of social housing in Belgium is allocated to foreigners, particularly migrants and refugees. They suggest that one in four social housing units is occupied by non-Belgians (Vlaams Belang, 2019). However, this assertion is misleading and not supported by the data.¹¹

Furthermore, critiques of the concentration of migrants in specific neighbourhoods highlight spatial segregation and its implications for community dynamics and social integration. For instance, Conner Rousseau's controversial statement in Humo, indicating that he does not feel like he is in Belgium when driving through Molenbeek, sparked controversy. With his statement, he wanted to underscore the importance of language proficiency and employment (Arnoudt, 2022). However, nuanced perspectives, like Johan Leman's in Knack, stress the challenges faced by low-skilled newcomers striving to survive, urging against patronisation (Leman, 2022). Moreover, recent data from De Tijd even indicate a trend of decreasing ethnic concentration over time in Belgium, although exceptions like Molenbeek exist. For example, the Marie-Joséblokken saw a significant shift from 60% to 9% purely Belgian residents from 2000 to 2020. Nevertheless, Belgium has transitioned into a more diverse society, a trend evident beyond Brussels (Roelens & Bervoet, 2022). The specificity of the migration debates mentioned thus mirrors the broader tendency among state authorities and mainstream parties to avoid engaging in long-lasting, comprehensive debates on overarching integration policies and the multicultural composition of Belgian society (Vangoidsenhoven & Pilet, 2015).

¹¹ While there is indeed a proportion of non-Belgians residing in social housing, the actual figure is around 15%, with a quarter of them being EU citizens (Smits, 2019).

From a broader perspective, the events of 9/11, the Madrid and London Al Qaeda terrorist attacks, and subsequent incidents triggered a profound shift in public opinion regarding migrants, especially those associated with Islam. They played a central role in fostering negative perceptions and stereotypes about migrants from Muslim-majority countries. The highly publicised 9/11 attacks brought global attention to terrorism and radicalisation. The identification of the perpetrators as Muslim extremists reinforced the stereotype linking terrorism with Islam, deeply embedding it in public discourse (Boesman et al., 2017). Subsequent Al Qaeda attacks in Madrid and London further fuelled prejudices against Muslims and migrants, with media often highlighting the religious and cultural backgrounds of perpetrators. The Syrian war against IS and the rise of terrorist attacks in Europe around 2016 intensified negative perceptions (Boesman et al., 2017), leading to increased fears and suspicions towards Muslim migrants in Europe (Figoureux, 2021). The convergence between discourses on terrorism and migration led to framing migration as a security threat and associating it with causes of terrorist attacks. This securitised perspective on migration contributed to the construction of a 'suspect community', particularly targeting Muslims as a stigmatised minority perceived as potential threats (Breen-Smyth, 2014). These incidents also contributed significantly to Islamophobia.¹² In 'The Islam Debate', Zemni (2009) contends that the problem does not lie in criticism of Islam per se, but rather the use of this criticism to justify discrimination, violence, or aggression. It poses a threat to democratic ideals, simplifying political, economic, and social issues into cultural ones, thereby promoting exclusionary populist movements.

Themes of migration, equal opportunities and racism have sparked intense societal and political debates for decades. Migration is a constant source of news due to its implications for sovereignty, national identity, prejudices, and inequality. Different ideological viewpoints shape how we see migrants and minorities, with some fearing they take away jobs, threaten the welfare state, and threaten the 'European way of life', while others see them as contributors to society. Racism fuels fears, as evidenced by the fact that the largest groups of migrants (Dutch and French) are not perceived as threatening or even as 'real' migrants. Despite these fears and hopes, migration persists as a fundamental part of human existence, driven by the timeless quest for better opportunities and lifestyles (Adam et al., 2021). In Belgium, the unique blend of linguistic and political factors complicates these discussions, making it challenging to promote a more inclusive and comprehensive national debate on multiculturalism and integration as a whole (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002). For instance, Van Gorp's (2005) analysis of Belgian press coverage reveals this divide between the French- and Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium, influenced by political dynamics, especially Vlaams Belang in the Flemish press. Nevertheless, he found that the victim-frame, advocating a humanitarian policy toward asylum-seekers, maintained a more dominant position in the overall Belgian press coverage, particularly in the French-speaking region (Van Gorp, 2005).

¹² Islamophobia can be defined as an unfounded enmity towards Muslims, which leads to discrimination of Muslim individuals and groups and exclusion in political and social spheres (The Runnymede Trust, 1997).

In conclusion, understanding the historical trajectory of the Belgian migration debate is necessary for comprehending the broader asylum and migration discourse in Flanders, extending well beyond the notable events of 2015 and 2022. Unravelling its origins reveals roots in the late 1990s and early 2000s when Belgium confronted evolving economic, political, and societal dynamics. Analysing these historical foundations thus enables a comprehensive examination of how discourses endure or transform over time. Despite the absence of a unified national debate, discussions centre on specific topics such as resource allocation, social cohesion, and housing policies. The discourse is further complicated by the dissemination of misinformation from political factions, underscoring the need for inclusive discussions on multiculturalism and integration in Belgian society.

The migration debate in Europe

Migration has played a pivotal role in the trajectory of European integration since its nascent stages in the late 1950s. At its core, the free movement of workers, enshrined within the Treaties of Rome in 1957, which established the European Economic Community (EEC), heralded an era of labour mobility aimed at addressing burgeoning economic needs and fostering growth across the continent. However, the free movement of workers not only facilitated the exchange of labour across national boundaries to address labour shortages and promote economic growth in a unified European market, but also fostered cross-cultural interactions, promoted social cohesion, and laid the groundwork for a shared European identity (Paoli, 2016).

The migration discourse within Europe spans a diverse array of themes and debates, resonating across national boundaries and reflecting the unique historical, cultural, and political contexts of each European nation. From the dynamics of labour mobility and social integration to the complexities of border controls and the management of migration flows, countries across the continent confront a variety of challenges and opportunities inherent in the migration phenomenon (Bello, 2022). The abolition of internal borders within the European Union marked a significant juncture in the continent's migration landscape, precipitating a paradigm shift in policy priorities. However, as the free movement of people became emblematic of European integration, the imperative of managing external borders emerged as a pressing concern. Serving as primary entry points for RASIM, the EU's external borders assumed paramount importance, necessitating concerted efforts to fortify surveillance and combat irregular migration (Paoli, 2016). Initiatives such as Frontex¹³ were implemented to bolster border security and enhance coordination among member states.

¹³ Frontex, the EU's border and coast guard agency, plays a pivotal role in safeguarding external borders, conducting surveillance operations, and combating illicit migration activities by deploying advanced technology, conducting joint patrols, and facilitating information-sharing (Paoli, 2016).

In tandem with border management, the EU endeavoured to formulate cohesive asylum and refugee policies, guided by principles of human rights and international cooperation through mechanisms such as the Common European Asylum System and the Dublin Regulation (Hampshire, 2015). Efforts to harmonise asylum procedures, establish reception centres, and distribute asylum seekers among member states underscore the commitment to uphold humanitarian values amidst the complexities of migration governance (Paoli, 2016). Despite these endeavours, the migration debate in Europe remains characterised by complexities and challenges. Criticisms abound regarding the efficacy of EU policies, with measures like heightened border controls perceived as symbolic gestures rather than substantive solutions. Moreover, debates surrounding sovereignty, identity, and national interests permeate political discourse, influencing decisions and electoral dynamics across the continent (Hampshire, 2015). Amid the cacophony of voices resonating across Europe, there is a clear and urgent call for a coherent and effective policy response to the migration crisis: to address this crisis, Europe must grasp the intricate interplay between internal movements within the EU and external migration pressures. It should prioritise establishing clear and accessible legal pathways for asylum seekers and refugees, ensuring their protection and rights. Additionally, Europe must enhance support for nations hosting large numbers of refugees, especially those facing significant migrant influxes. Equitable burden-sharing among EU member states is essential to fairly distribute responsibilities and alleviate pressure on frontline nations. By fostering solidarity and cooperation, Europe can effectively navigate the complexities of migration governance while safeguarding the rights and dignity of all individuals involved (Paoli, 2016).

The migration debate in Europe is deeply influenced by public discourse, which shapes policies, attitudes, and responses to the influx of migrants and refugees (Paoli, 2016). The securitisation discourse, fuelled by public debates framing migration as a security threat, has led to stricter border controls and the use of securitised language in policy discourse. Prejudiced narratives portraying migrants as criminals or security threats have reinforced securitisation measures, perpetuating negative attitudes towards migrants (Bello, 2022). Moreover, debates often centre on the tension between integration and exclusion, with some advocating for inclusive policies promoting social cohesion, while others prioritise national interests. Power dynamics influenced by these debates impact EU relations with third countries, with nations like Jordan and Morocco leveraging migration crises to enhance their negotiating power (Bello, 2022). Across Europe, opposition to relocation schemes and the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments also illustrate the profound impact of the migration crisis on electoral politics and national sovereignty concerns (Hampshire, 2015). These debates underscore the need for inclusive, rights-based approaches to address migration challenges effectively.

The Flemish media landscape

Media representations play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes toward immigration and refugees, as most of the population often forms cognitive frames about immigrants based on media framing (Horsti, 2009). The Flemish media landscape is intricately intertwined with Belgium's linguistic divide¹⁴, and state reforms have decentralised regulatory powers, granting autonomy to community authorities over radio and television broadcasting markets (Hendrickx et al., 2021). The absence of federal media and the linguistic separation result in limited cross-community journalistic engagement, with each linguistic community operating within its own public space (Adam & Jacobs, 2014). The evolution of the media landscape has witnessed consolidation through mergers and acquisitions, solidifying the influence of five major media companies in Flanders: VRT, DPG Media, Mediahuis, Roularta Media Group, and De Vijver Media¹⁵. This concentration has triggered concerns about its impact on pluralism and media freedom, prompting scrutiny from the Flemish Regulator of Media (VRM). However, the vibrancy of the media landscape also highlights challenges stemming from the linguistic division. Cross-community journalistic engagement is limited, reinforcing separate political agendas and discourses in Flemish and Francophone regions. The absence of federal media exacerbates this isolation, confining each linguistic community within its own public space. This linguistic and political partitioning has far-reaching implications, extending to political debates, agendas, and the quoting of politicians. In terms of refugee coverage, this media landscape contributes to localised reporting influenced by regional political debates and specific party agendas, underscoring the imperative for a nuanced understanding of how news is framed and disseminated in Flanders (Mistiaen et al., 2023).

The Syrian and Ukrainian refugee influxes

In 2015, Europe found itself grappling with a humanitarian challenge of unprecedented magnitude: the 'Syrian refugee crisis'. Fuelled by the protracted Syrian civil war, over one million refugees embarked on uncertain journeys to seek asylum within Europe, marking the largest influx of migration since World War II (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). This refugee surge marked a pivotal moment in Europe's migration landscape, exposing the flaws in the existing asylum system and triggering political and humanitarian crises. The establishment of the Schengen Area in 1995, designed to facilitate borderless travel, inadvertently intensified challenges related to asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. The Dublin Regulation, an associated policy, mandated that asylum-seekers could only apply for protection in the first EU state they entered, disproportionately

¹⁴ Belgium has three distinct linguistic communities: French-speaking, German-speaking, and Dutch-speaking.

¹⁵ Within this landscape, VRT, as the public broadcaster, stands out as a market leader in free-to-air television and radio broadcasting. Its news programs garner significant reach among the Flemish population. DPG Media, a formidable competitor, has expanded its footprint across television, radio, newspapers, mobile telephony, and streaming services, solidifying its position through the acquisition of Mediaaan. Simultaneously, Mediahuis has emerged as a powerhouse in the newspaper industry (Hendrickx et al., 2021).

burdening southern and southeastern member states (Hampshire, 2015). As the Arab Spring unfolded in 2011 and Colonel Gaddafi's fall in Libya led to increased factional violence, the EU faced escalating migration challenges. Gaddafi's cooperation with the EU in curbing irregular migration gave way to unhindered operations by human smugglers. By 2015, the Syrian civil war, along with conflicts in other regions, prompted a huge surge in migration (Hampshire, 2015). Tragedies, such as a boat sinking off the Libyan coast with an estimated 900 lives lost, compelled European leaders to act. However, disagreements over proposed solutions, including a scheme to redistribute asylum-seekers across the EU, led to tensions and delays. The political divisions deepened, with Germany and France supporting forced migrant relocation, while central and eastern European countries opposed mandatory measures, revealing an east-west rift. The EU's inadequate response to the crisis has been widely criticised as it left hundreds of thousands of refugees and other migrants increasingly vulnerable (Hampshire, 2015; Metcalfe-Hough, 2015; Scipioni, 2018). For instance, Hampshire (2015) argues that policies such as increased powers for Frontex and heightened border controls fail to address the root causes of irregular migration. Apart from this, he raises his concerns over sovereignty and identity as significant obstacles to a cohesive response, with leaders in some countries using the crisis to fuel anti-Muslim sentiments and reinforce nationalistic ideologies (Hampshire, 2015).

In contrast, the year 2022 witnessed another significant migration surge, this time triggered by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 (Opióła et al., 2022). Following an eight-year conflict marked by Russia's annexation of part of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and the occupation of the Donbas region, the 2022 invasion drew widespread condemnation for violating international law and Ukrainian sovereignty. This led to substantial sanctions, causing a severe economic crisis in Russia (Zawadzka-Palucka, 2022). Despite the initial goal of quickly overwhelming Ukraine within 72 hours, the Russian army faced strong resistance and international sanctions. By October 2022, having failed to capture Kyiv, Russia withdrew completely from the north. Since then, the situation on the ground has seen minimal change, highlighting the protracted nature of the conflict. Almost two years into the conflict, Russia currently controls around one-fifth of Ukrainian territory (BBC News, 2024). Amid this geopolitical turmoil, over 6 million Ukrainians fled the conflict, posing a considerable humanitarian challenge for European nations (UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 2023). European states, many of which were criticised for their handling of the 2015 crisis, demonstrated a notable shift in approach. Over the course of just six weeks, more than 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees were welcomed across borders, with countries providing not only immediate humanitarian aid but also instituting unique policies like the activation of the 2001 EU Temporary Protection Directive (Carrera et al., 2022). This marked departure from past practices led to criticism of a perceived 'double standard', with observers contrasting the swift and compassionate response to Ukrainian refugees with the less accommodating approach adopted during the 2015 migration crisis (Paré, 2022; Rosstalnyj, 2022; Zawadzka-Palucka, 2022).

Media framing of the 2015 and 2022 refugee influxes

In the evolving narrative of the Syrian refugee influx, media framing played a central role in shaping public perceptions and policy responses. The haunting images of overcrowded rubber dinghies, desperate individuals traversing the Western Balkans, and the tragic photograph of three-year-old Alan Kurdi's lifeless body on a Turkish beach seared into global consciousness (Gray & Franck, 2019). Therefore, the initial coverage focused on the vulnerability of those seeking refuge, underscoring the urgent need for humanitarian assistance. However, as highlighted by Gray & Franck (2019), the media narrative underwent distinct phases: 'Refugees Welcome', 'Paris Changes Everything', and 'Sexual Jihad'. These phases revealed a shift from compassion towards refugees to heightened fears of terrorism, associating the refugee crisis with security threats. The 'Sexual Jihad' phase, marked by incidents of mass sexual harassment, brought forth racialised and gendered portrayals, framing refugees as a cultural threat. This aligns with Georgiou & Zaborowski's (2017) three phases of media coverage: 'Careful Tolerance', marked by a delicate balance between humanitarian efforts and concerns over migrant violence; 'Ecstatic Humanitarianism', characterised by a shift towards assisting refugees and portraying Europe as a place of relative solidarity; and 'Fear and Securitisation', witnessing a drastic change after the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and Saint-Denis, with defensive measures dominating, negative geopolitical consequences surfacing, and refugees portrayed as contributors to Europe's shock. These phases identified by both Gray & Franck (2019) and Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) underscore the dynamic nature of media narratives. In addition, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) explored how the European press framed the arrival of refugees as a 'crisis' and how they shape public perceptions and policy responses, with linguistic nuances in the use of terms like 'migrant' and 'refugee' reflecting broader societal attitudes. They also identify the challenges faced by media in maintaining fair journalism amidst shifting narratives from sympathetic to suspicious, highlighting the need to analyse media coverage to comprehend crisis narratives, geographical trends, and policy challenges. De Cleen et al. (2017) delve into the Belgian context, with an examination of the discourse surrounding the 2015 refugee 'crisis' in Flanders. They argue that it is characterised by continuities and adaptations of existing discourses, focusing on culturalist, securitarian, and economic logics. They illustrate how right-wing parties problematised diversity based on ethnicity, culture, and religion, associating recent migrants with threats to public safety. The economic logic, driven by the needs of Belgian employers, further complicated the discourse, creating tensions between economic and culturalist logics. Additionally, Van Haelter et al.'s (2020) article provides valuable insights into the Flemish representation of refugees in the Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT) and the largest commercial broadcaster Vlaamse Televisie Maatschappij (VTM) in Flanders. Analysing news coverage of Syrian refugees in September 2015 and December 2018, the dissertation reveals a more balanced tone, with fewer explicit articulations of a negative discourse. The analysis attributes this balance to the limited use of words with negative connotations and stereotyped images. In sum, these studies underscore the challenges faced by journalists in navigating ethical considerations.

Conversely, the events of 2022 again highlighted the critical role that media plays in shaping public attitudes and policy decisions. While comprehensive studies analysing media representation during the Ukrainian migration surge are still relatively scarce, the available research indicates that early coverage was predominantly characterised by an unexpectedly positive and welcoming attitude. The media portrayed refugees in a favourable light, underscoring the compassion and adaptability of host nations. Nevertheless, these analyses also raised valid concerns regarding the potential influence of Eurocentrism on this optimistic perception (Mäenpää, 2022; Zawadzka-Paluckta, 2022). Mäenpää's (2022) research, for instance, provides a nuanced understanding of media framing during the initial days of the Russian invasion, employing a three-dimensional critical discourse analysis (CDA) on articles from DW and Aljazeera. The study unveils asymmetries in the identification of in-group (Europeans, Ukrainians, Ukrainian refugees) and outgroup (Russia, other refugees, other states) actors, revealing a Eurocentric view that extends to the identification of Ukrainians with perceived European values. This contributes to discussions in International Relations about the EU as a normative power and underscores the need for critical reflection on migration policies, particularly regarding the intertextuality between Ukrainian and Middle Eastern refugees and the double moralities of European politicians. Moreover, Zawadzka-Paluckta's (2022) study further complements our understanding by presenting initial evidence of the neutral to positive media portrayal of displaced Ukrainians. This positive construal aligns with appeals for more positive discourse analysis, suggesting that European media can influence humanitarian responses to crisis immigration. However, Zawadzka-Paluckta cautions against viewing these results in isolation from previous representations of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) refugees, who are often dehumanised in media discourse. The study raises important questions about the temporality of positive views and the potential limitations in media's capacity to portray refugees as deserving of help, especially when considering different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The examination of media representations across a longer timeframe and in diverse host and non-host countries emerges as a crucial avenue for future research, promising a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding the media framing of Ukrainian refugees (Zawadzka-Paluckta, 2022). For this reason, a comparative analysis of news coverage on Syrian and Ukrainian refugees can offer valuable insights, shedding light on potential patterns, biases, and humanitarian considerations that transcend specific geopolitical contexts.

Methodology

Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), our aim is to explore the dynamics of media framing in Flemish newspaper coverage concerning the Syrian and Ukrainian migration surges in Flanders, during the periods of 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015, and 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023 respectively. CDA provides a robust framework to examine how Flemish politicians and media outlets discuss refugee arrivals. Through detailed textual analysis, CDA uncovers underlying themes, discursive patterns, and ideological nuances in media representations. By revealing the subtle mechanisms of media framing, CDA can illuminate how it influences public perceptions, policy agendas, and societal integration efforts. The overarching aim is to provide a context for understanding how such media framing influences public perceptions and contributes to the polarisation of societal attitudes towards migrants.

The analysis covers two distinct periods: from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015, and 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023. The selection of these periods was deliberate. The first period, spanning 2015, was chosen due to a significant increase in asylum applications compared to the historically low numbers in 2014. Notably, this period also witnessed the November 2015 Paris attacks, adding complexity to the discourse in newspapers. The second period, beginning in February 2022, was selected because of the outbreak of war in Ukraine at that time, prompting a substantial influx of Ukrainian refugees. Both periods cover 12 months, ensuring consistency and facilitating comparative analysis.

The first step of the CDA involved gathering relevant data reflecting media coverage of the migration surges from Syria and Ukraine in Flanders. To achieve this, the Krantenarchief van Openbare Bibliotheken Vlaanderen, the newspaper archive of public libraries in Flanders, served as the primary source. This archive provides a rich repository of textual materials, enabling an in-depth exploration of media narratives and discursive strategies. The database was chosen because it contains a vast collection of articles from Belgian newspapers, including a blend of quality and popular newspapers. Moreover, the database allows for specific selection criteria, which streamlined the search for news articles meeting the desired criteria. Through this database, all articles are easily accessible, unlike specific news pages that may require a subscription for access, thus facilitating efficient retrieval of relevant news content.

When selecting newspapers for analysis, careful consideration was given to the characteristics of the media landscape in Flanders. To enhance the analytical framework, a balance was struck between 'quality' and 'tabloid-type' newspapers, reflecting the diverse spectrum of Flemish readership and ideological orientations. The selected newspapers are De Morgen, De Standaard, De

Tijd, Het Laatste Nieuws, and Het Nieuwsblad, representing the diverse Flemish media landscape. However, slightly more 'quality newspapers' are included because they cover more 'political' news content (Bakker & Scholten, 2009). De Standaard, De Morgen, and De Tijd are seen as the most prominent quality newspapers in Flanders. Het Laatste Nieuws was selected because it closely resembles a tabloid newspaper (Van Gorp, 2005). Het Nieuwsblad, on the other hand, is considered a midmarket daily, falling somewhere between a quality newspaper and a tabloid (De Bens & Raeymackers, 2010).

The selection of newspaper articles was guided by predefined criteria and a comprehensive search strategy. Keywords related to the Syrian and Ukrainian migration surges, such as "vluchtelingen" and "migra*", were employed to ensure relevance. Additionally, Boolean operators were utilised to refine search results, with the operator 'AND' supplemented by extra words like "Oekraïen*" to tailor searches effectively. Given the extensive coverage in Flemish newspapers during the specified periods, a large volume of articles is expected. To manage this data influx, systematic mechanisms were employed to streamline the dataset while maintaining representativeness. Random selection, facilitated by tools like randomizer.org, ensured fairness in article sampling across newspapers and timeframes. Throughout this data collection process, emphasis was placed on meticulous preparation of the articles, including the removal of non-textual elements and standardisation of formatting in Microsoft Excel. These steps ensured the uniformity and coherence of the corpus, facilitating systematic analysis of media discourse on migration in Flanders. Importantly, through rigorous documentation of the complete CDA process, we seek to ensure reliability and validity in its analysis.

The following graphs illustrate data from the corpora, including the distribution of articles from each newspaper, the time frames during which these articles were published (highlighting specific months), and the word count of each article. The objective of these graphs is to discern noteworthy disparities between newspaper sources. However, the observed differences in the number of articles and word count per newspaper across time frames are minimal. Notably, Het Laatste Nieuws and Het Nieuwsblad consistently exhibit the lowest word count, possibly reflecting their more tabloid-like nature. Overall, this suggests an acceptable distribution. The time frames during which the randomly selected articles were published exhibit considerable diversity, reflecting the prevailing news events of the moment. For instance, when significant policy decisions are made or when there is a surge in migration, the media tends to produce many articles on these topics, as evident in the graphs. For example, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, there was a notable increase in media coverage regarding the resulting influx of refugees to Belgium in March 2022. Similarly, in 2015, the months of August and September saw a surge in reporting on migration, particularly due to many refugees arriving in Europe during that period. This led to extensive coverage of their arrival, ensuing political debates, and related issues.

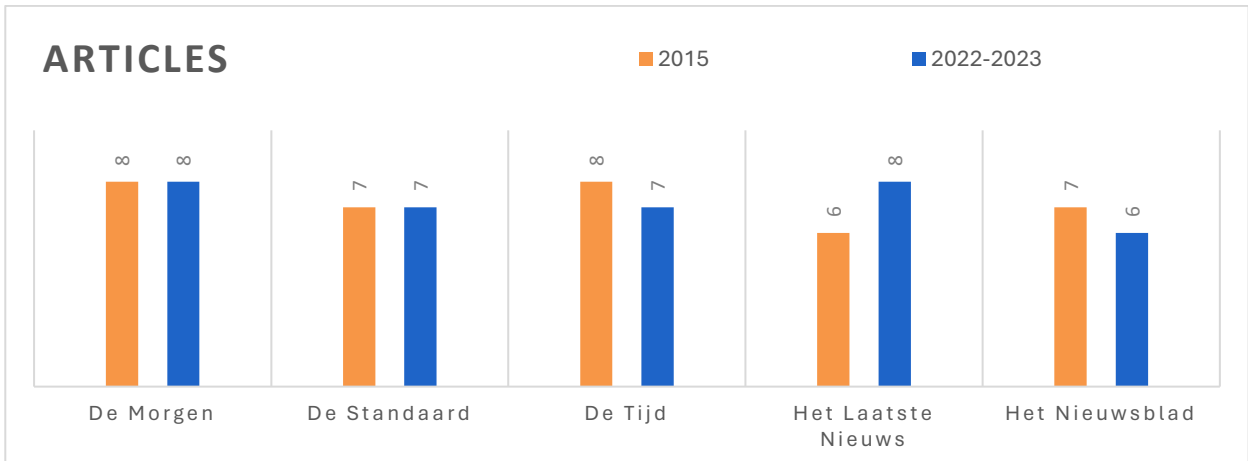


Figure 1. Articles per newspaper in the 2015 and 2022-23 corpora

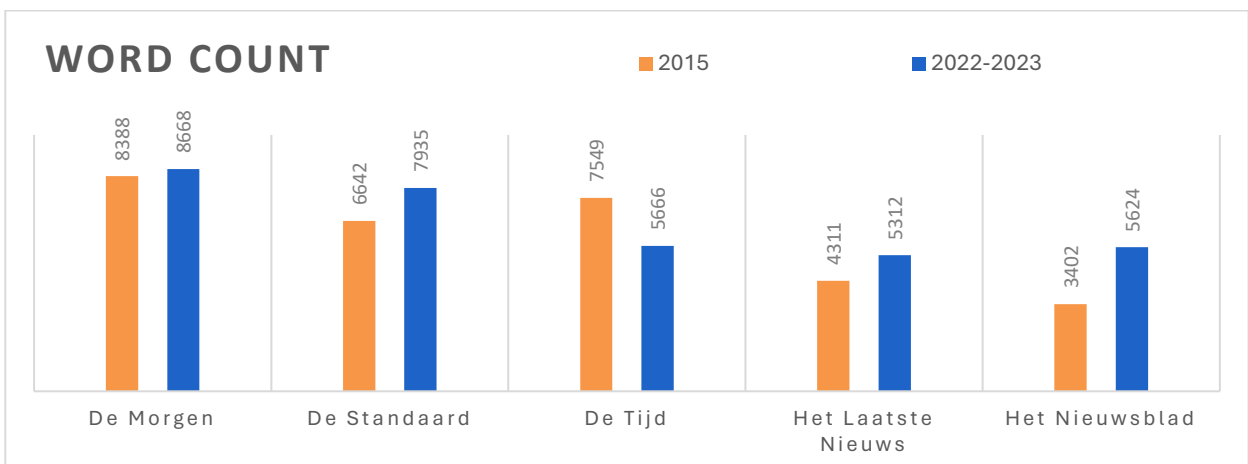


Figure 2. Word count per newspaper in the 2015 and 2022-23 corpora

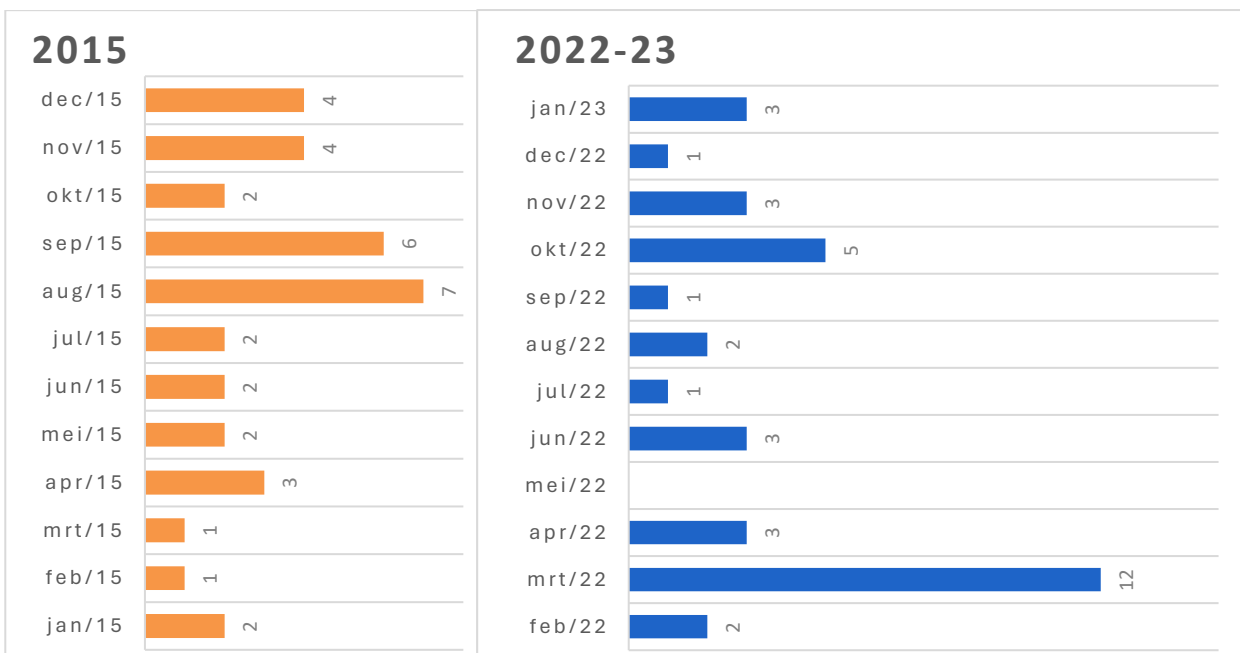


Figure 3. Distribution of selected articles by month in 2015 and 2022-23

The subsequent analysis of the articles adopts the discourse-historical approach (DHA), a strand of CDA, as its guiding theoretical framework. The DHA provides a systematic methodology for analysing discursive formations, and was adopted because of its focus on inductive, detailed case studies and the method it provides for fine-tuned textual analysis (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015). It offers a systematic framework for analysing discourse, and emphasises detailed case studies and textual analysis, which aligns well with this thesis's objectives. In examining the representation of social out-groups, we approach the analysis through five key inquiries, as articulated by Reisigl & Wodak (2015):

1. How are linguistic references made to people, objects, events, processes, and actions?
2. What attributes/qualities are ascribed to the social actors, objects, events, and processes?
3. What arguments are advanced within the discourse?
4. From which standpoint are these references, attributions, and arguments presented?
5. How are statements articulated? Are they expressed explicitly, and intensified or mitigated?

These five inquiries lead to the identification of five distinct discursive strategies, which manifest at different levels of linguistic organisation and complexity. These strategies outlined within the DHA lie at the core of our analysis, encompassing referential, predicational, argumentative, perspectivalisation, and mitigation/intensification strategies (Wodak, 2015). By employing these categories as primary focus points during the analysis, this thesis aims to comprehensively explore discourse, uncovering subtle linguistic patterns and strategies used in representing social actors and events. Subsequently, we will briefly outline the different strategies. Figure 4 concisely summarises the principal categories within the DHA. Additionally, table 1 provides a detailed overview of these strategies and their associated linguistic devices.

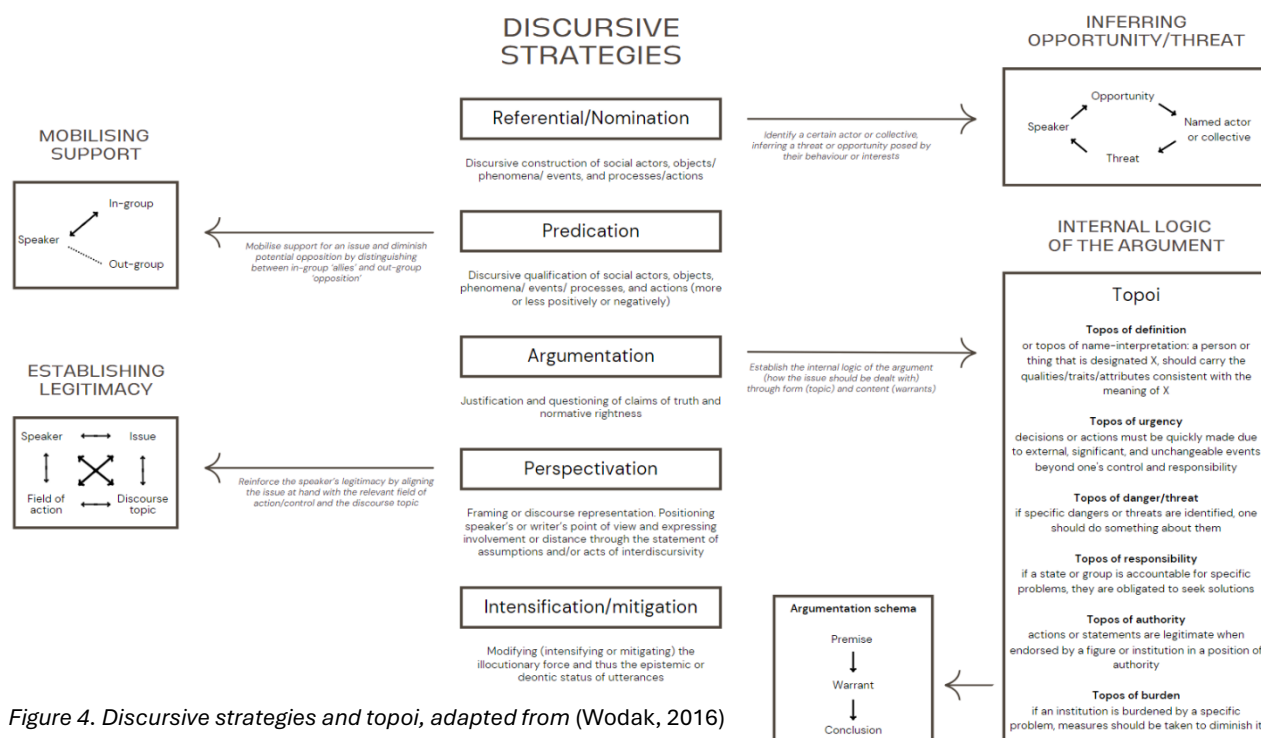


Figure 4. Discursive strategies and topoi, adapted from (Wodak, 2016)

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
<i>Referential/ Nomination</i>	Discursive construction of social actors, objects/ phenomena/ events, and processes/actions	Membership classification devices (person, origin, profession, religion), deictics, tropes (metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches), verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions, genericisation (collectivisation-aggregation)/specification
<i>Predication</i>	Discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena/ events/ processes, and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	Stereotypical/evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g., in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups), explicit predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/ pronouns, collocations, explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms), allusions, evocations, and presuppositions/ implicatures, and others that are employed to assign specific characteristics of social actors. Categories of refugee representation: the desired refugee, the undesired refugee, the victimised refugee, the refugee as a person, the religious refugee, and the refugee as subject of political decision-making
<i>Argumentation</i>	Justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness	Topoi
<i>Perspectivation</i>	Framing or discourse representation. Positioning speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance through the statement of assumptions and/or acts of interdiscursivity	Deictics, direct/indirect or free indirect speech, quotation marks, discourse markers/particles, metaphors, animating prosody, hypotactic syntax, abstract passive voice, prepositional phrases, nominalisations, metonymisations etc.
<i>Intensification/ mitigation</i>	Modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances	Diminutives or augmentatives, (modal) particles, tag questions, use of the subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, hyperboles, litotes, indirect speech acts (e.g., question instead of assertion), repetition, modal verbs of saying, feeling, thinking

Table 1. Discursive strategies and their associated linguistic devices, adapted from Wodak (2016)

First, we conducted a brief content analysis of each article, examining the key themes extracted from newspaper articles across various contexts and outlets. Each article was then coded based on its predominant theme(s), recognising that many articles covered multiple topics. Additionally, we performed a discursive analysis, focusing on verbal processes. In this analysis, we first identified who was speaking. Individuals who appeared more than once in an article were only counted once. If they appeared again in a different article, they were counted separately. We wrote down the code of the article in which a speaker appeared, the identity of the speaker, and the role the speaker played. We also paid attention to whether refugees themselves were represented in the discourse or if only experts were featured. And, if refugees were represented, if their involvement focused on specific topics or vary. Furthermore, we examined the roles assumed by non-refugee speakers. In essence, we explored the other discourses upon which the discourse in the newspaper articles was built.

The examination of nomination strategies involves a detailed exploration of the linguistic devices employed to name and categorise social actors. This entails investigating anthroponyms, metaphors, and metonymies to understand how individuals and groups are positioned within discourse. Moreover, the analysis delves deeper to unveil the underlying ideologies and power dynamics at play in the naming process. In other words, how does the writer/speaker linguistically designate and refer to actions, events, individuals, and entities (Wodak, 2015)? In the analysis of nomination strategies, we examine the words used to refer to RASIM, while also considering any potential distinction between terms with different legal meanings (migrant, asylum seeker, refugee). For this purpose, Social Actor Analysis is applied, a method to study the representation of social actors in texts, such as newspaper articles. The Social Actor model assumes that there are a certain number of 'socio-semantic' choices of words and expressions to represent people, reflecting an ideological background (Van Leeuwen, 2005). There are three main categories: nomination, functionalisation, and identification. Nomination involves social actors being named. This can be formal (last name with or without title, for example, (mevr.) Vermeersch), semi-formal (first and last name, such as Emmelie Vermeersch), or informal (only first name, Emmelie). Functionalisation means that social actors are categorised in terms of what they do, their activities or social roles. Examples include 'vluchteling' (refugee) and 'asielzoeker' (asylum seeker). These nouns are derived from verbs that denote the activities 'vluchten' (flee) en 'asiel zoeken' (seek asylum). Identification involves social actors being defined not in terms of what they do but in terms of what they are, more or less permanently (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Identification can be further divided into classification and relational identification. When social actors are classified, origins, professions, religions, or other characteristics of people are used to distinguish them. Examples include 'de Syriër' (the Syrian), 'de moslim' (the muslim) or 'de vrouw' (the woman). The religious refugee category could also be classified under refugee as a person. However, a separate category was created for this, based on the assumption that the Islamic faith of many refugees may play a role in the fear of and resistance to the arrival of refugees. Relational identification defines social actors in terms of their personal relationships with others, such as 'vader' (father) or 'dochter' (daughter). Finally, we also chose to include the genericisation¹⁶ (collectivation and aggregation) – specification referential strategies in our analysis, which can also be categorised under social actor representation (Baker & Ellece, 2011). Aggregation as a form of genericisation involves representing individuals collectively through numerical or quantitative references, while collectivisation achieves a similar effect without resorting to statistical data. As opposed to the genericised approach, specification entails representing social actors as specific cases (Baker & Ellece, 2011).

¹⁶ According to Van Leeuwen (1996), genericisation entails portraying social actors as classes rather than as distinct individuals. He highlights the ideological implications, suggesting that groups depicted in this manner are symbolically detached from the readers' immediate experiences, positioning them as distant 'others' rather than individuals with whom 'we' interact in our daily lives.

Predicational strategies illuminate the qualities ascribed to social actors, revealing how different groups, actions, and individuals are portrayed. The linguistic choices made in predicating certain traits can reveal biases and stereotypes perpetuated through discourse (Wodak, 2015). We categorised the predications as follows: the desired refugee, the undesired refugee, the victimised refugee, and the refugee as subject of political decision-making. Predications associating refugees with negative aspects fall into the category of undesired refugee. These include associations with violence, e.g. ‘misdaden plegen’ (commit crimes), refugees who are not actually refugees, e.g. ‘economische migranten’ (economic migrants), undesirable consequences of refugee arrival, e.g. ‘aanzuigeffect’ (pull factor) and undesirable actions of refugees, e.g. ‘schijnhuwelijken’ (marriages of convenience). The victimised refugee category includes predications addressing the dire circumstances of refugees, delving into reasons behind the flight, e.g. ‘vluchten uit oorlogsgebieden’ (fleeing war zones) or the horrors of the flight, e.g. ‘ondraaglijke levensomstandigheden’ (unbearable living conditions). The category of desired refugee consists of predications indicating that the refugee is welcome where they end up, or at least not unwelcome, e.g. ‘die wettig in ons land verblijven’ (who legally reside in our country). This may be due to characteristics of the refugees, e.g. ‘hoogopgeleid’ (highly educated) or because a place has no negative experiences or associations with refugees, e.g. ‘echte vluchteling’ (‘true’ refugee). Finally, the category of refugee as subject of political decision-making encompasses predications regarding the legal status of refugees, e.g. ‘erkend worden’ (being recognised) or political decisions made concerning refugees, e.g. ‘gezinshereniging’ (family reunification).

Argumentative strategies play a central role in justifying or challenging assertions within discourse. Through the identification of rhetorical devices such as topoi we seek to uncover the ideological underpinnings of discourse and the strategies used to legitimise certain viewpoints. Topoi are conclusion rules, which rationalise the shift from the argument/s to the conclusion/s¹⁷. They are employed to justify the social actor’s positions in the in- or out-group (Wodak, 2015). The following Topoi are adopted from (Wodak, 2015): the topos of definition or name-interpretation suggests that actions, objects, or individuals labelled as X are expected to inherently possess the qualities associated with the literal meaning of X. The topos of urgency posits that decisions or actions must be swiftly made due to external and unalterable events beyond one's control. The topos of danger means that identified dangers necessitate action to mitigate them. The topos of responsibility holds that if a group is accountable for specific problems, they are obligated to seek solutions. The topos of authority asserts that actions or statements are legitimate when endorsed by a figure or institution in a position of authority. And lastly, the topos of burden states that if an institution is burdened by a problem, measures should be taken to alleviate it.

¹⁷ A key feature of topoi, however, is that they are ‘common-sense’ reasoning schemes typical for specific issues. The conclusion, therefore, need not be made explicit in the argument but may be presupposed to follow from the arguments as a rational inference (Van Dijk, 2005).

Furthermore, perspectivisation strategies elucidate the standpoint from which discourse is articulated, offering insights into the involvement or detachment of the speaker. By analysing the use of perspectivation devices, we reveal the speaker's positioning and its implications for the construction of social reality. The speaker or writer employs involvement strategies to convey their attitudes and feelings towards social actors, as well as to foster emotional and cognitive engagement among their audience in their discourse. Conversely, detachment is utilised to create distance from social actors using hypotactic syntax such as relative and complement clauses, sequences of prepositional phrases, or abstract passive voice. Nominalisations and metonymisations are employed instead of vivid metaphors, and distancing techniques such as altering personal, local, and temporal deictics, forms of address and salutation, or indirect speech are utilised. In other words, from what perspectives does the writer/speaker express detachment or involvement in actions with nominations, arguments, and attributions (Wodak, 2015)?

Mitigation/intensification strategies further shape discourse by modulating the force and tone of utterances. Using linguistic devices such as diminutives and augmentatives, speakers strategically adjust the emphasis and interpretation of statements, influencing their reception (Wodak, 2015)?

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that aspects such as representation and discrimination are challenging to quantify. In both the content analysis and the analysis of lexicalisation, predication, argumentation and verbal processes, there are no definitive thresholds to determine when a certain representation can be concluded. Nonetheless, figures and percentages provide a clear indication and enable comparison between representations.

Results and discussion

Content analysis: key themes

Tag clouds

To initially assess the articles' contents, 'tag clouds' were utilised. Tag clouds provide visual representations of text, where the font size of each phrase corresponds to its frequency of occurrence in the text (Hearst & Rosner, 2008). The process of creating a tag cloud involves inputting the words/phrases for cloud generation. However, one must be cautious as the program used, TagCrowd, does not recognise apostrophes and requires phrases to be combined with a tilde (~) to avoid separation. Moreover, the program does not group together similar words (such as 'vluchteling' and 'vluchtelingen'). Despite its limitations, tag clouds can still be advantageous for starting a CDA seeing as they unveil hidden positions and relationships not immediately apparent from tables or lists. While tables provide accurate statistics, they may not be as conducive to qualitative studies. Tag clouds allow for quick identification of frequently used words and their relationships, aiding in the analysis of social actors' nominations and the speakers' positioning in relation to them (Cheng, 2017).

The tag cloud below represents the newspaper articles analysed in the CDA published from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015.



Figure 5. Tag cloud 2015 corpus

1. Asylum policy and accommodation:

Numerous articles discuss the surge in migration, the pressure on Belgian asylum policy, problems with accommodation for asylum seekers, and the need for emergency solutions.

2. Integration:

Many articles delve into the complexities of fostering the integration of newcomers, addressing both challenges and opportunities. They examine aspects such as social inclusion, cultural adaptation, and the obstacles encountered in these processes, as well as the economic involvement of refugees and migrants within host communities. Coverage encompasses language acquisition, employment opportunities, access to education, and eligibility for social benefits and child benefits.

3. Criticism and political debate:

Numerous articles highlight criticism of political decision-making and political figures' policies and responses, as well as engage in political debates regarding responsibility, pull factors, expenditures, and deportation policies.

4. Flight:

The theme of flight was also notably present in the articles analysed. This encompasses the experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by individuals during their journeys fleeing conflict, persecution, or insecurity in their home countries.

Each article was coded based on its predominant topic(s), with many articles covering more than one theme. Table 2 illustrates the number of articles addressing each topic. A complete review including the codes of the specific articles can be found in Appendix 2. Figures 7 and 8 present these data in a more accessible format.

	Themes → ↓ Newspaper	Asylum policy & accommodation	Integration	Criticism and political debate	Flight
2015	<i>De Morgen</i>	4	1	6	3
	<i>De Standaard</i>	3	3	5	2
	<i>De Tijd</i>	8	0	7	2
	<i>HLN</i>	5	2	3	2
	<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i>	4	1	3	2
2022-23	<i>De Morgen</i>	7	5	4	1
	<i>De Standaard</i>	4	2	5	4
	<i>De Tijd</i>	7	2	1	4
	<i>HLN</i>	6	1	3	1
	<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i>	5	1	4	2
Total	2015	24	7	24	11
	2022-23	29	11	17	12
	Both periods	53	18	41	23

Table 2. Key themes in 2015 and 2022-23 by newspaper

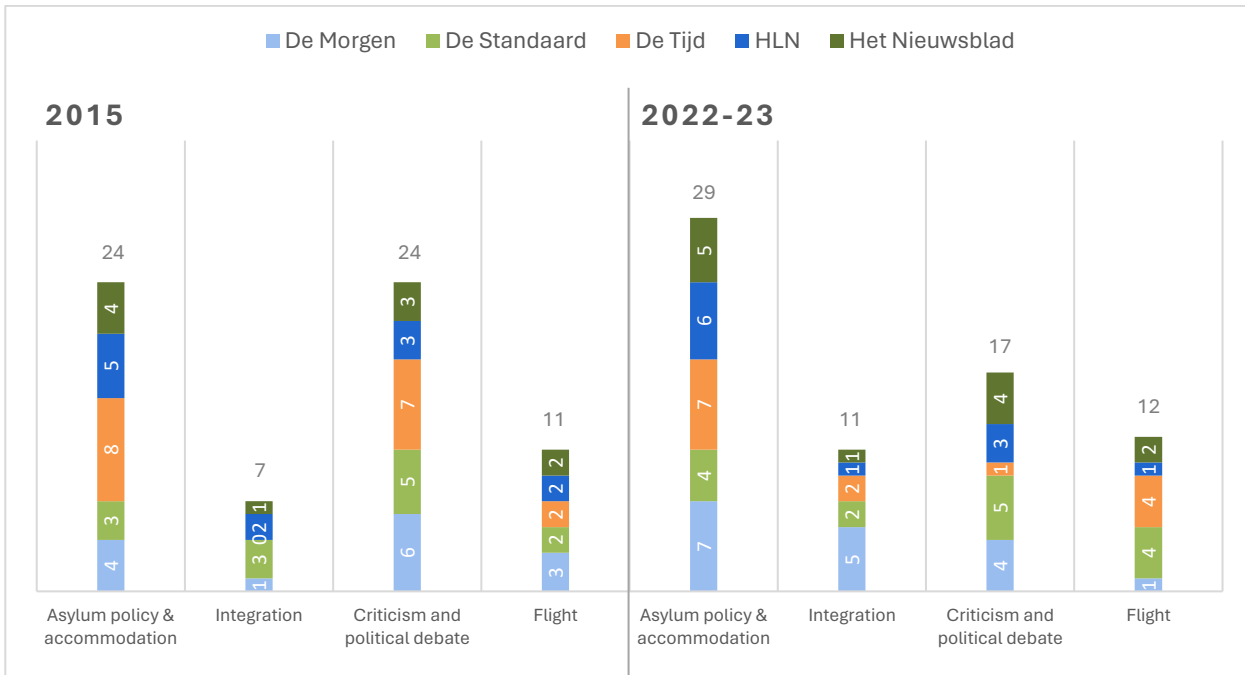


Figure 7. Key themes in 2015 and 2022-23 by newspaper

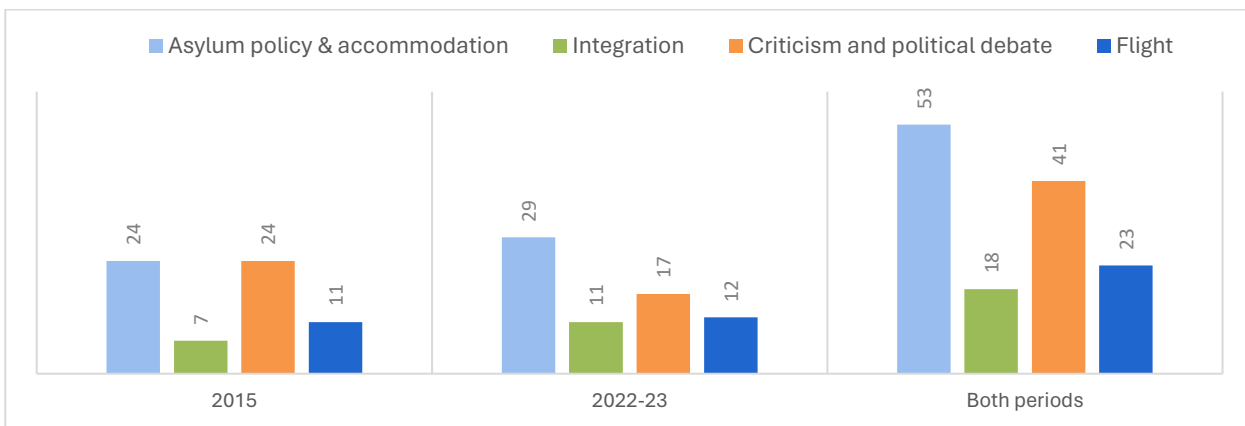


Figure 8. Key themes in 2015, 2022-23 and both periods together

The media coverage in both 2015 and 2022-23 exhibited limited attention to the contextual factors surrounding RASIM experiences. Particularly in 2015, there was minimal integration of stories about new arrivals with reports on the conflicts driving migration, with some exceptions. This lack of contextualisation results in a superficial representation, failing to provide the public with sufficient information to develop a nuanced understanding of refugee movements and their underlying causes, hindering the development of empathy (Rosstalnyj, 2022). In 2022-23, however, there was on several occasions a direct linkage to updates on the ongoing war in the region, offering a clearer view of the root cause of the refugee influx. In addition, reference to refugees from Ukraine as members of ‘the European family’ fosters notions of belonging and unity (Paré, 2022). The portrayal of the war in Ukraine as a clear-cut conflict between victim and aggressor evokes sympathy and promotes a sense of emotional solidarity (Rosstalnyj, 2022). The comparison of media coverage between 2015 and 2022-23 highlights the greater contextual clarity and unity of purpose in reporting on the

Ukrainian refugee crisis. In 2015, migration itself was often depicted as the ‘crisis’, with refugees portrayed as the primary problem to be managed. In contrast, the refugees fleeing from Ukraine in the 2022-23 period are presented as a symptom of a larger crisis instigated by Russia's aggression, reframing the narrative to focus on the broader geopolitical dynamics at play (Rosstalnyj, 2022).

Nu het Russische leger vooral de grote steden in Oekraïne in het vizier neemt, verwachten de VN dat meer Oekraïners **het land verlaten**. Mogelijk willen 4 miljoen mensen **de oorlog ontvluchten**¹⁸. (2022-23.27)

In 2015, most of the media coverage focus on the political debates surrounding the asylum system, political decision-making, and related policies such as pull factors and deportation. For instance, economic considerations, often cited as pull factors, fuelled prejudice against RASIM perceived as exploiting welfare states. Conversely, in 2022-23, there was a shift in the political debates towards addressing accommodation issues for Ukrainian refugees arriving in Flanders. This highlights a transition from discussing the mere arrival of refugees to practical solutions for their settlement.

Duitsland wordt overspoeld door asielzoekers. Dit jaar verwacht het er 800.000. Een record, vier keer meer dan in 2014. Dat zijn niet alleen oorlogsvluchtelingen. 40 procent van de nieuwkomers is afkomstig uit de Balkan: mensen **op zoek naar een beter leven**. Waarom is Duitsland **zo populair**? Het ligt voor de hand dat **de economische toestand** een rol speelt: Duitsland heeft nauwelijks last van de crisis.¹⁹ (2015.14)

Volgens covoorzitster van Groen Nadia Naji hebben de groenen lang achter de schermen gewerkt in de regering, in de hoop sneller gehoor en **oplossingen te vinden voor de crisis in de opvang voor asielzoekers**. ‘Maar het mag ondertussen wel duidelijk zijn dat **de oplossingen** van staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Nicole de Moor (CD&V) **echt niet voldoen**. Het is **niet genoeg**’, zegt ze. Groen wil dat de regering-De Croo **zonder dralen publieke gebouwen en ambtenaren opvordert om opvang te voorzien voor iedereen die in de vrieskou moet slapen**.²⁰ (2022-23.4)

¹⁸ [Now that the Russian army is mainly targeting the major cities in Ukraine, the UN expects more Ukrainians to leave the country. Possibly, 4 million people may want to flee the war.]

¹⁹ [Germany is being flooded with asylum seekers. This year, it expects 800,000. A record, four times more than in 2014. They are not only war refugees. 40 percent of the newcomers come from the Balkans: people in search of a better life. Why is Germany so popular? It is obvious that the economic situation plays a role: Germany hardly suffers from the crisis.]

²⁰ [According to co-chair of Groen, Nadia Naji, the Greens have been working behind the scenes in the government for a long time, hoping to find quicker response and solutions to the crisis in asylum seeker reception. "But by now it should be clear that the solutions of Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration Nicole de Moor (CD&V) really do not suffice. It is not enough," she says. Groen wants the De Croo government to promptly requisition public buildings and officials to provide accommodation for everyone who must sleep in the freezing cold.]

Another key theme concerns the integration in Flanders and the obstacles encountered in this process. A comparative analysis between the two periods reveals that while discussions in 2015 predominantly focused on challenges, discourse in 2022-23 leaned towards proposing actionable measures to facilitate successful integration, adopting a more solution-oriented approach.

Ons geweten mag niet gesust zijn met het geven van een leefloon, zonder **ons te bekommeren over de integratie van die mensen en de mogelijke bedreiging van de cohesie in de samenleving.**²¹ (2015.7)

Ik hoop dat de opvanggezinnen goed -begeleid en omkaderd worden door lokale diensten als de OCMW's, en dat de overheid **een plan klaar zal hebben om de Oekraïners te ondersteunen.** Kunnen ze wel **helpen bij de integratie. Nederlands leren, bijvoorbeeld?** 'Daar kan een **opvanggezin wel een belangrijke rol in spelen.**'²² (2022-23.26)

Finally, although the theme of flight was present in many articles, it received less attention compared to asylum policy and political debates. Flight narratives often intersected with the victimisation of refugees, whether due to shortcomings in the Belgian asylum system, war-induced displacement, or exploitation by human traffickers. While such narratives may foster solidarity, they also portray refugees as inherently vulnerable, potentially overlooking their agency and rational decision-making abilities (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Interestingly, in 2015, solidarity sometimes even directed more towards Member States at the forefront of refugee arrivals, using detachment strategies to justify actions against RASIM rather than supporting them.

Almaar meer mensen uit het ruimere Midden-Oosten en Afrika **ontvluchten de oorlogen, de terreur en de economische ellende** die in de plaats zijn gekomen van ouderwetse dictaturen. Ze **leggen hun leven in de handen van criminele smokkelaars** om Europa te bereiken en liever nog Duitsland.²³ (2015.3)

Wie **de bombardementen** in Jemen, **het gifgas** in Syrië of **de repressie van de taliban** wil **ontvluchten**, kan dat dus **alleen met de hulp van smokkelaars, duur en aartsgevaarlijk.**²⁴ (2022-23.36)

²¹ [Our conscience should not be appeased by providing a basic income, **without concerning ourselves with the integration of those people and the potential threat to societal cohesion.**]

²² [I hope that the host families are well-guided and supported by local services such as the Public Centers for Social Welfare (OCMW), and that the government will **have a plan ready to support the Ukrainians.** Can they **help with integration? Learning Dutch, for example? A host family can play an important role in that.**]

²³ [More and more people from the broader Middle East and Africa are **fleeing the wars, terrorism, and economic misery** that have replaced old-fashioned dictatorships. They **entrust their lives to criminal smugglers** to reach Europe, preferably Germany.]

²⁴ [Anyone wanting to **escape the bombings** in Yemen, **the chemical weapons** in Syria, or **the repression by the Taliban** can only do so with the help of smugglers, which is **costly and extremely dangerous.**]

Ze zijn **de oorlog ontvlucht**, maar hier **belanden ze in een andere stresserende situatie.**²⁵
(2022-23.3)

'Het wordt echt **tijd dat Europa begint met betere controles van zijn buitengrenzen** en daar hotspots voor de registratie van asielzoekers uitbouwt. **Dit is niet lang meer houdbaar**', klinkt het.²⁶ (2015.24)

Discursive analysis: verbal processes

During the analysis of discursive practices, the focus lies on examining which other discourses the discourse builds upon through citations and quotes. Journalists wield considerable power in selecting who gets to voice their opinions. Notably, the inclusion or exclusion of certain voices can speak volumes, often revealing implicit biases (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Moreover, the omission of refugees' voices in media narratives contributes to the process of 'othering' (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). In the entire corpus, 197 individuals were quoted. Among them, 16 were refugees, comprising 8% of the total. The diagram below illustrates the ratio of refugees to non-refugees.

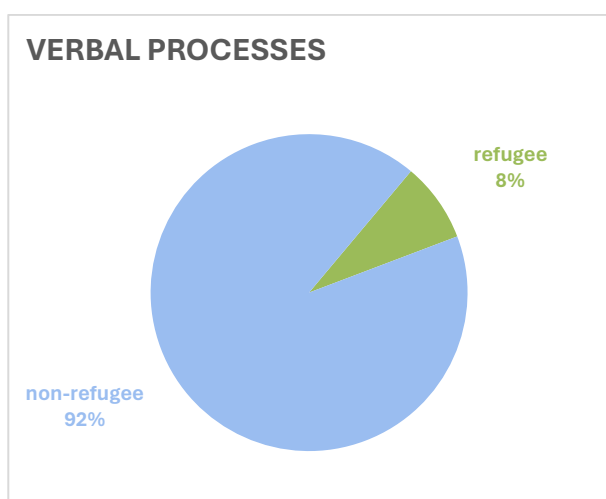


Figure 9. Ratio of refugee to non-refugee speakers

²⁵ [They **flee from war**, only to **end up in another stressful situation here.**]

²⁶ ["It's really **time** for Europe **to step up its game in border control** and establish hotspots for the registration of asylum seekers. **This is no longer sustainable**," they say.]

Subsequently, the roles assumed by non-refugee speakers were examined. We categorised them into distinct groups. 'Laypeople' encompass ordinary citizens who offer their perspectives rather than representing formal institutions. These individuals may fulfil various roles, including assisting refugees, expressing dissent or protest, offering criticism, or remaining neutral. Other non-refugee speakers represented formal organisations or institutions, such as politicians from political parties or governmental positions, refugee experts affiliated with organisations deeply involved in refugee affairs, or institutional figures from organisations with less direct involvement. The goal of the role distribution is to identify the types of discourses upon which the newspaper discourse relies. Therefore, the content of what the speakers said was of less importance.

The table and figures below provide an overview of the different roles assumed by speakers and their frequencies of appearance in each newspaper across the 2015 and 2022-23 datasets. The complete data, including the speaker's names, their roles, and the codes indicating the article source, can be found in Appendix 3.

	<i>Who speaks? →</i> ↓ Newspaper	Refugee	Non-refugee			
			Laypeople	Politicians	Refugee expert	Institutional expert
2015	<i>De Morgen</i>	2	1	12	3	1
	<i>De Standaard</i>	3	2	7	1	1
	<i>De Tijd</i>	3	0	9	1	4
	<i>HLN</i>	0	15	7	0	0
	<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i>	0	0	11	5	4
2022-23	<i>De Morgen</i>	4	3	12	7	6
	<i>De Standaard</i>	0	0	14	6	2
	<i>De Tijd</i>	0	0	10	6	0
	<i>HLN</i>	1	0	8	2	2
	<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i>	3	2	7	5	3
Total	2015	8	18	48	10	10
	2022-23	8	5	51	26	13
	Both periods	16	23	99	36	13

Table 3. Number of speakers by speaker role per newspaper in 2015 and 2022-23

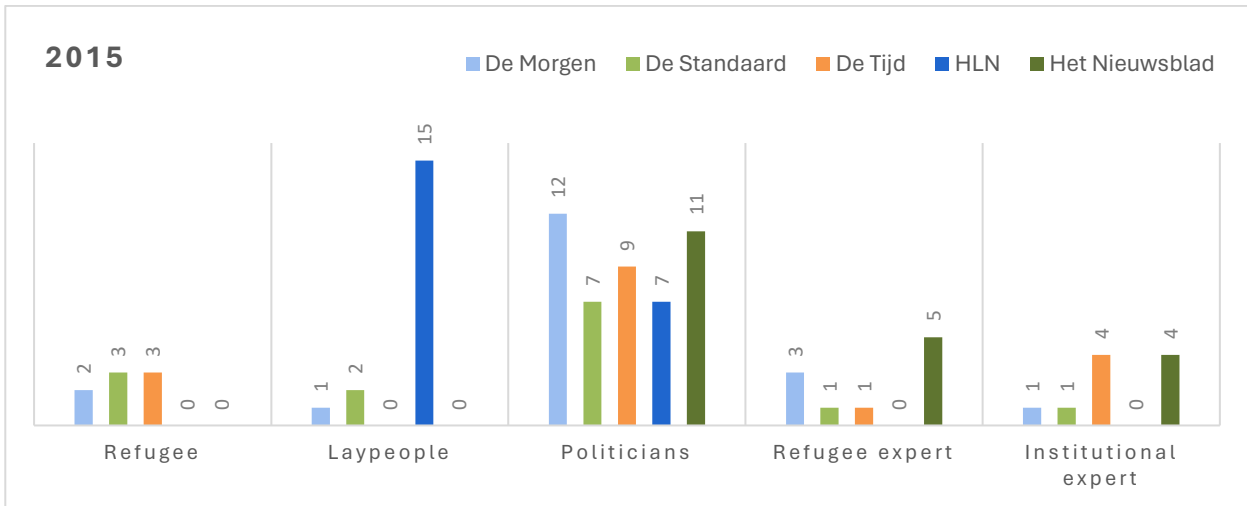


Figure 10. Number of speakers by speaker role per newspaper in 2015

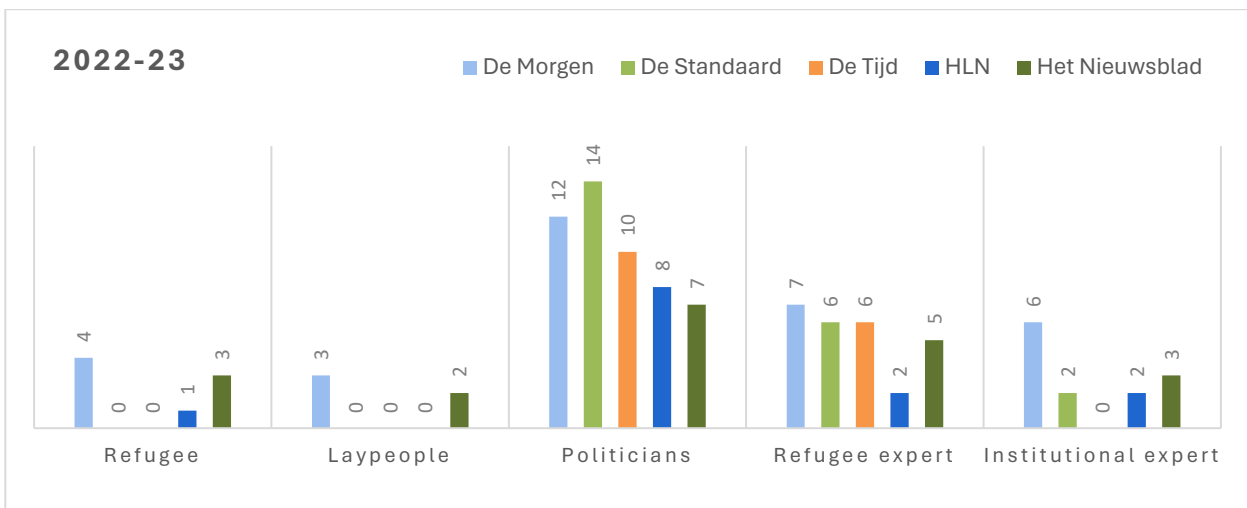


Figure 11. Number of speakers by speaker role per newspaper in 2022-23

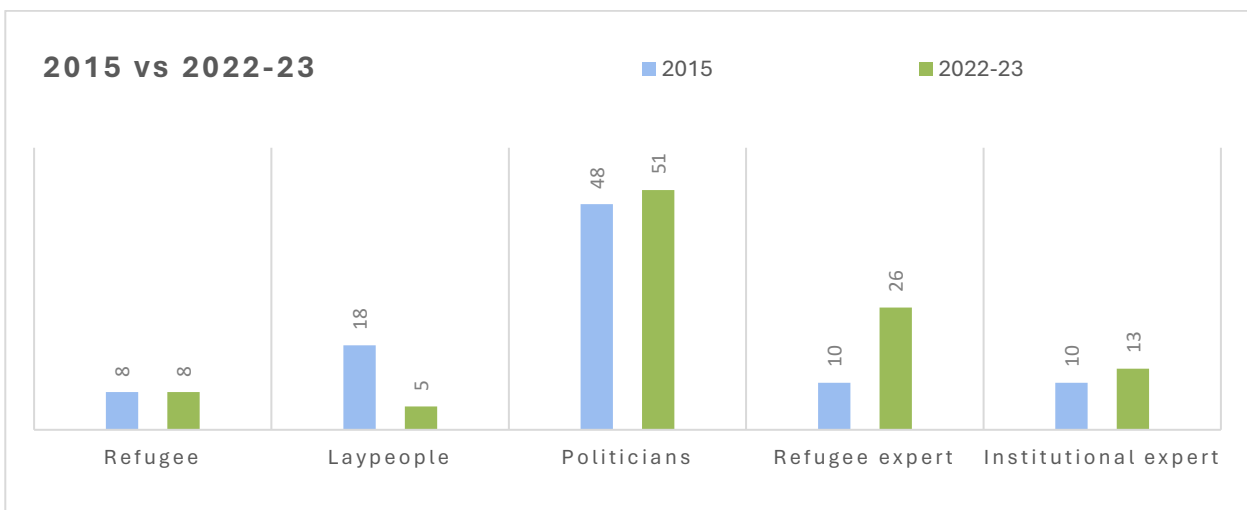


Figure 12. Number of speakers by speaker role in 2015 and 2022-23

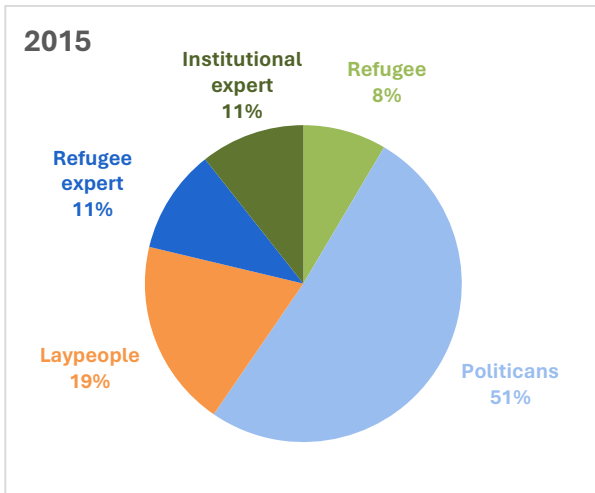


Figure 13. Ratio of speaker roles in 2015

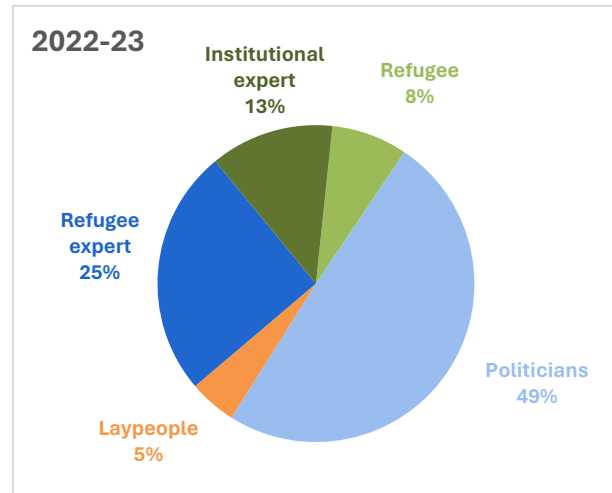


Figure 14. Ratio of speaker roles in 2022-23

Firstly, we observe that 8% of the speakers are refugees, and this remains consistent across the two analysed periods, with each newspaper featuring refugees at some point. This suggests a slightly varied discourse, where various parties are represented. However, journalists not only determine who speaks but also which questions are posed. Examining the topics on which refugees spoke reveals a focus on their flight experiences: the reasons behind it, conditions in refugee camps, and the journey itself. This emphasis on the past, the conditions prompting flight, and present aligns with the problematic victimisation of refugees discussed earlier. Allowing refugees to primarily recount their experiences reinforces their passive role, often portraying them as victims. While this contributes to a discourse that evokes sympathy for refugees, it also dehumanises them and perpetuates a narrative focused on problems rather than solutions. Presenting refugees discussing their dreams and ambitions in the host country would shift the discourse towards a more solution-oriented and future-focused approach, portraying refugees as capable contributors to society.

Furthermore, we observe that laypeople are featured as non-refugee speakers in both periods. This appears to be more prevalent in the 2015 corpus (19%) than in the 2022-23 corpus (5%), although this result may be skewed by 15 laypeople featured in a single article from *Het Laatste Nieuws*, rendering this difference non-representative. Notably, *De Tijd* does not feature any laypeople, suggesting a potential editorial inclination that avoids lay perspectives.

Additionally, in the category of non-refugee speakers, politicians are predominantly featured, with their frequency of appearance similar across the two periods (51% in 2015 and 49% in 2022-23). There are no significant differences observed among newspapers. Politicians may feature prominently because asylum policy themes are frequently addressed in articles (see content analysis in the previous section), and politicians wield considerable influence in this domain. Moreover, the media landscape in Flanders is heavily influenced by political debates and party agendas (Mistiaen et al., 2023).

Refugee experts are also relatively prominent, particularly in the 2022-23 corpus (25%) compared to the 2015 corpus (11%). In 2015, this role is primarily filled by Het Nieuwsblad and De Morgen, whereas the distribution across newspapers is more even in 2022-23. By 2022-23, the refugee crisis may have become a more central and enduring topic, leading to a greater demand for expert analysis. As the refugee situation becomes more complex, there's a growing recognition of the need for specialised expertise to address challenges. Changes in media practices may also contribute to this evolution, with outlets seeking expert voices for context and insights, reflecting a trend towards more informative journalism, and recognising the importance of expert perspectives in shaping public opinion on social issues.

Institutional experts are less frequently featured but still relatively common, accounting for 11% and 13% of speakers in 2015 and 2022-23, respectively, with no significant differences observed between newspapers.

Our findings from the analysis of verbal processes serve as a clear illustration of 'symbolic bordering,' a linguistic practice where media and European journalism actively participate in determining who belongs to 'us' and who does not, thereby shaping the symbolic construction of refugees as human beings. This practice encompasses techniques such as silencing, collectivisation, and de-contextualisation, alongside the systematic exclusion of migrant perspectives and visual representations from the realm of visibility (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Through this perspective, symbolic bordering emerges as a pivotal mechanism for governing who is granted visibility, how they are represented, and why, thereby illustrating the intricate interplay between journalism, borders, and narrative construction in today's media landscape.

Textual analysis: nomination strategies

Functionalisation

Functionalisation refers to the categorisation of social actors based on their actions, activities, or social roles (Wodak, 2015). The names given to individuals constitute an important part of how people are discussed, including in the media. Words referring to the legal status of the individual in question are the most used: they are referred to as 'vluchteling' (refugee), 'asielzoeker' (asylum seeker), or 'migrant'. Moreover, the analysis clearly indicates that all five newspapers interchangeably use the terms, despite the importance of distinguishing between them due to their ideological implications.

As previously outlined in the conceptual framework, the term refugee, defined by a well-founded fear of persecution, underscores the unique challenges faced by individuals compelled to seek refuge outside their homeland. Persecution can stem from factors such as race or nationality, religion, political opinion, or belonging to a specific social group. Refugees often lack protection from their own government, and in some cases, it is the government itself that perpetrates the persecution (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019). This definition aligns with the UNHCR

guidelines for journalists on reporting about migration and refugees (UNHCR, 2021). However, our analysis revealed that most of the examined articles blur the distinctions between refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. This interchangeable usage risks oversimplification and misrepresentation (Van Gorp, 2006). Moreover, these terms carry nuanced connotations that can elicit varied societal responses. For instance, Van Gorp (2006) suggests that the term asylum seeker may carry negative associations, portraying individuals as 'useless' or a financial burden. This perception is exacerbated by the fact that asylum seekers are typically prohibited from working until four months after submitting their application, leaving them primarily waiting for necessary documentation (Fedasil, n.d.). The frequent use of the term asylum seeker, even when referring to refugees, in a text can foster negative perceptions, diminishing sensitivity and empathy towards refugees.

However, this interchangeable use is not necessarily incorrect in all cases, because asylum seekers are essentially (potentially recognised) refugees, but it does give the impression that the terms mean the same thing. For instance, in the case of accommodation both terms are often used in an equal way, even though Belgium only accommodates asylum seekers. During the asylum procedure (and during any potential appeals process), asylum seekers are entitled to material assistance from the federal government. They are accommodated in a reception structure recognised by Fedasil, while recognised refugees are required to leave the reception centres within two (sometimes three) months after their recognition. The reception structure assists them during that period in finding suitable housing (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering, 2016b).

This tendency to interchange the different terms was particularly noticeable in the articles from 2015, where they were often used interchangeably, frequently without clear understanding of their precise meanings.

De boot vol **migranten** was vastgelopen op een paar tientallen meters van de kust en kapotgeslagen op de rotsen. Het was de eerste keer dat een schipbreuk met **vluchtelingen** zo duidelijk werd gefilmd.²⁷ (2015.22)

Het gaat om 62 procent van de **migranten** die zich de afgelopen maanden in de drie landen hebben gemeld. Duitsland en Frankrijk nemen met 31.443 en 24.031 **asielzoekers** het merendeel van de asielzoekers op. Maar ook Spanje (14.931) en Polen (9.287) moeten een flink aandeel leveren. Beide landen verzetten zich voor de zomer hevig tegen de hun toebedeelde quota. Nederland krijgt 7.214 **vluchtelingen**, 6 procent van het totaal.²⁸ (2015.1)

In contrast, articles from the 2022-23 period displayed more deliberate usage of the different terms, although not always in an accurate manner as delineated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2019). Consequently, the terms are infused with ideological connotations. For

²⁷ [The boat full of **migrants** had run aground just a few dozen meters from the coast and was smashed on the rocks. It was the first time that a shipwreck with **refugees** had been filmed so clearly.]

²⁸ [It concerns 62 percent of the **migrants** who have registered in the three countries in recent months. Germany and France accommodate most **asylum seekers**, with 31,443 and 24,031 respectively. However, Spain (14,931) and Poland (9,287) also must contribute a significant share. Both countries strongly resisted their allocated quotas before the summer. Netherlands will receive 7,214 **refugees**, 6 percent of the total.]

instance, the term ‘vluchteling’ might be employed to evoke sympathy and emphasise the need for humanitarian assistance, while ‘migrant’ or ‘asielzoeker’ might be utilised to imply economic motivations and potentially foster a less sympathetic response.

Sinds het begin van de oorlog krijgen de Oekraïense **vluchtelingen** een statuut van tijdelijke bescherming, en volgen ze een verschillend traject dan andere **vluchtelingen**. Volgens de normale procedure zouden ze na hun registratie bij de Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken naar een gewestelijke opvangplaats verwezen worden, na een kort verblijf in het transitcentrum. Maar dat centrum barst uit zijn voegen. En ondertussen worden er ook **asielzoekers** ondergebracht, wat extra druk zet op de opvangcapaciteit.²⁹ (2022-23.6)

This indicates that the three different terms are used for referencing the same groups of people. The arbitrariness is further evident from the use of legally incorrect terms, such as ‘economische vluchteling’ (economic refugee). An economic migrant is fleeing poverty and can safely return to their home country. The term ‘refugee’ implies that it has been demonstrated that someone has fled war or persecution and that it is too dangerous to return. Someone with primarily economic motives is therefore by definition not a refugee (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019).

Onder de bootvluchtelingen zitten er vandaag bijvoorbeeld ook zeer veel Afrikaanse **economische vluchtelingen**. Dat zijn geen echte vluchtelingen volgens de conventie van Genève.³⁰ (2015.17)

The figures below illustrate the comparison between the 2015 and 2022-23 periods regarding the most frequently used terms for functionalisation.

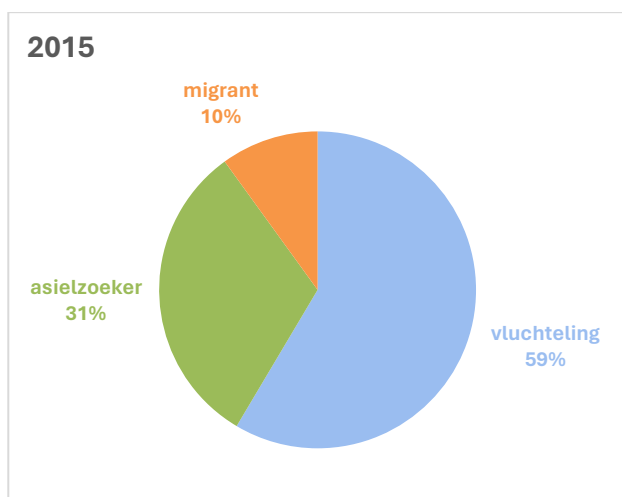


Figure 15. Functionalisation 2015

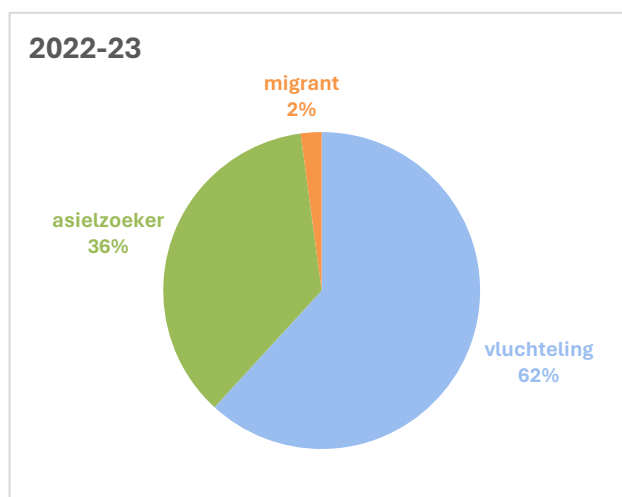


Figure 16. Functionalisation 2022-23

²⁹ [Since the beginning of the war, Ukrainian **refugees** have been granted temporary protection status and follow a different trajectory than other refugees. According to the standard procedure, they would be referred to a regional reception center after their registration with the Immigration Office, following a brief stay in the transit center. However, that center is bursting at the seams. Meanwhile, **asylum seekers** are also being accommodated there, putting additional pressure on the reception capacity.]

³⁰ [Among the boat refugees today are also many African **economic migrants**. These are not genuine refugees according to the Geneva Convention.]

In both periods, 'vluchteling' (refugee) was the most common, followed by 'asielzoeker' (asylum seeker) and 'migrant'. The findings show striking similarities between the two periods, with one notable difference being the decreased usage of 'migrant' in the 2022-23 period. The perception of immigrants, particularly those migrating for economic reasons, tends to be more negative than that of refugees (King & Wood, 2001). When newspapers use the term 'migranten' (migrants) instead of 'vluchtelingen' (refugees) during times of substantial refugee influx, they frame public opinion towards these individuals. However, this phenomenon seems to be absent in 2022-23. Although refugees are not explicitly labelled as 'migranten', there remains a persistent differentiation between 'genuine' and 'false' refugees, often achieved by using 'asielzoekers' to delineate between them.

In hun ijver om **migranten** tegen te houden overweegt Europa deals te sluiten met repressieve regimes in Soedan en Eritrea. [...] Geconfronteerd met steeds meer **vluchtelingen** in eigen land - die momenteel vooral via Turkije komen - wil Europa in de eerste plaats maatregelen afdwingen die de **migratie** vanuit Afrika indammen.³¹ (2015.10)

Niet alleen **asielzoekers**, maar ook meer en meer Oekraïense **vluchtelingen** moeten op straat slapen. Toch de eerste dagen dat ze in ons land aankomen.³² (2022-23.30)

In the 2015 corpus, the term 'kandidaat-vluchteling' or 'kandidaat-asielzoeker' is referenced 11 times, highlighting the fact that these individuals do not yet have the legal status of a refugee and therefore may not receive it. In the 2022-23 corpus, this reference is only used 4 times. Referring to individuals in this way may be unnecessary because it implies a transitional status inherent in the asylum-seeking process. Once someone's refugee status is determined, the term becomes redundant and may perpetuate a distinction between asylum seekers and recognised refugees, potentially reinforcing stigma or marginalisation of those awaiting official refugee status.

Daartegenover staat de vrees dat georganiseerde opvang van **kandidaat-asielzoekers** zorgt voor een 'aanzuigefect'. Om dat in Calais te vermijden zijn dringend meer inspanningen nodig in de landen van herkomst en aan de EU-buitengrenzen, om de mythe te doorprikken dat het Verenigd Koninkrijk het paradijs is waar ze over dromen.³³ (2015.29)

Additionally, in both periods, occasional references are made to 'oorlogsvluchtelingen', which is likely an unnecessary specification. This term may unnecessarily narrow the focus to only one aspect of the refugee experience. It could also overlook the various other reasons why individuals may seek refuge, such as persecution based on ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, or other forms of violence or human rights abuses (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019).

³¹ [In their eagerness to deter **migrants**, Europe is considering striking deals with repressive regimes in Sudan and Eritrea. [...] Faced with increasing numbers of refugees in their own countries - mainly coming through Turkey at the moment - Europe primarily seeks to enforce measures that curb **migration** from Africa.]

³² [Not only **asylum seekers**, but also an increasing number of Ukrainian **refugees**, are forced to sleep on the streets, especially in the first days after arriving in our country.]

³³ [On the other hand, there is concern that organised accommodation of **candidate asylum seekers** will create a 'pull effect'. To avoid this in Calais, urgent efforts are needed in the countries of origin and at the EU's external borders to debunk the myth that the United Kingdom is the paradise they dream of.]

Francken betreurt dat er “politieke spelletjes worden gespeeld op de kap van **oorlogsvluchtelingen**” en zegt “dat er bij de verdeling enkel gekeken is naar waar er snel plaatsen konden worden gecreëerd”.³⁴ (2015.11)

Nomination

Nomination refers to the practice of referring to individuals by their names. Using a proper name to refer to someone, especially when it concerns refugees or asylum seekers, is not very common. Conversely, political figures are often mentioned by name, as we observed in the verbal processes analysis. Providing ample information, such as a name, makes it easier for readers to empathise with individuals. Referring to refugees solely by their legal status, on the other hand, deprives them of a face and contributes to the media's portrayal of these individuals as a homogeneous group (KhosraviNik, 2010). Naming refugees grants them visibility and personal recognition, counteracting their depiction as faceless entities often seen in media coverage. This depersonalisation is evident in the use of collectivisation through numerical representations and metaphors in media discourse, as elaborated upon in the subsequent section on genericisation. By assigning names, refugees are not only humanised but also afforded distinct identities and personalities, affirming their individuality and countering dehumanisation inherent in categorising them solely as refugees.

In the 2015 corpus, mentions of refugees or asylum seekers by name were relatively infrequent, occurring only 13 times. However, the 2022-23 corpus showed a significant surge in the use of names, with refugees being specifically named 66 times, Ukrainian refugees in particular. Often, these references were accompanied by narratives emphasising the hardships faced by the individual refugees. Despite the potential drawbacks of constructing this image of a victimised refugee, as we will delve into further in the results, this shift does reflect an increasing acknowledgment of refugees' individuality, marking a departure from viewing them as a homogeneous group toward recognising their unique identities. While the sharing of personal stories carries the risk of revictimisation for those recounting them, such specific accounts also afford refugees agency and the power to convey their experiences. Regardless of the tragic nature of these stories, they provide an opportunity for refugees to voice their perspectives and be present in the narratives (Ozdora-Aksak et al., 2021). Consequently, this nomination strategy is intertwined with our results from the verbal processes analysis.

Genericisation-specification

Genericisation and specification strategies play significant roles in the representation of social actors, particularly RASIM. The genericisation strategy encompasses two primary forms: aggregation and collectivisation. Aggregation entails representing individuals as a collective through numerical or quantitative references, whereas collectivisation achieves a similar outcome without relying on statistical data (Baker & Ellece, 2011). Our analysis revealed numerous instances of aggregation in discussions about migration within our data sample, often accompanied by excessive quantity adverbials such as ‘grote aantallen migranten’ (huge amounts of migrants) or ‘nog meer

³⁴ [Francken regrets that "political games are being played at the expense of **war refugees**" and says "that the distribution only looked at where places could be created quickly".]

vluchtelingen' (even more refugees). In the 2015 corpus, refugees were described numerically about 200 times, while in the 2022-23 corpus, this occurred around 136 times, indicating a notable but slightly reduced frequency. Examples of aggregation through numerical references include phrases like '25,971 refugees', 'hundreds of thousands', or '73 percent', as well as quantity adverbials such as 'many' or 'most'.

The repeated portrayal of RASIM solely through numerical figures reduces them to statistical data, perpetuating their dehumanisation. This depiction diminishes their individuality, presenting them as a collective entity rather than recognising them as unique individuals, and reinforces the perception of unanimity within the refugee population. This assumption of unanimity sustains negative stereotypes of refugees and asylum seekers, suggesting that they form a homogeneous group with shared characteristics and backgrounds (KhosraviNik, 2010). Consequently, refugees are depicted as outsiders and remain anonymous, reinforcing their status as 'the other' (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017). Subsequently, dehumanisation can then be considered the ultimate form of 'otherness', seeing as refugees are not even permitted to belong to human groups (Esses et al., 2013).

In heel 2022 vroegen **maar liefst 36.871** mensen internationale bescherming aan in ons land. Dat is **een stijging van 42%** tegenover 2021, toen **25.971** mensen hier hun toevlucht zochten. Asiel aanvragen betekent echter niet dat je het ook krijgt. In 2022 werden **11.905** mensen erkend als vluchteling, maar kregen ook **13.011** asielzoekers rood licht.³⁵ (2022-23.1)

On the other hand, specification involves representing social actors as specific cases, achieved through individualisation and humanisation processes that recognise their differences (Baker & Ellece, 2011). Through referential and predicational strategies, asylum seekers are depicted as unique individuals with diverse backgrounds and characteristics. This approach challenges the genericised portrayal of refugees and asylum seekers, offering a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and identities. The next section on 'classification' provides several examples illustrating this approach. The following example involves aggregation, but this is counteracted by specification strategies, which present them as identifiable individuals by including details such as age, gender, and origin, thus emphasising their humanity.

Nooit eerder stonden zo veel asielzoekers bij de Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken (DVZ) aan te schuiven als gisteren Ze waren met **liefst 314**. En **159** van hen, of ongeveer **een op de twee**, waren **Irakees**. Onder hen **tientallen** alleen reizende **mannen tussen de 20 en de 45 jaar oud**.³⁶ (2015.9)

³⁵ [Throughout 2022, a **staggering 36,871** people applied for international protection in our country. That's an **increase of 42%** compared to 2021 when **25,971** people sought refuge here. However, applying for asylum does not guarantee its approval. In 2022, **11,905** people were recognised as refugees, but **13,011** asylum seekers received a red light.]

³⁶ [Never before have so many asylum seekers lined up at the Immigration Office (DVZ) as yesterday. There were **as many as 314** of them, and **159** of them, or about **one in two**, were **Iraqi**. Among them were **dozens of men** travelling alone **between the ages of 20 and 45**.]

Classification

Within the category of classification, subcategories such as ‘person’, ‘origin’, ‘profession’ and ‘religion’ were identified. This classification also serves to highlight the individual behind the refugee, having a similar effect as nomination. Moreover, writing for instance ‘de Syriër’ instead of ‘de man’ also makes his nationality a very important part of his identity.

Classification: Person

In our analysis, the classification category of ‘person’ emerged as an interesting point. Within this category, asylum seekers or refugees are portrayed as concrete, identifiable individuals, emphasising their humanity and allowing space for the recognition of their individual characteristics. Mentioning age or gender contributes to this portrayal, although specific ages of individual refugees were infrequently provided, particularly outside the 2022-23 period. This tendency may be attributed to the nomination strategy, which was more prevalent during this time frame and often involved providing ages within brackets alongside specific naming of refugees. Notably, during the 2022-23 timeframe, references to ‘minderjarigen’ (minors; 16 occurrences) and ‘kinderen/jongeren’ (children/youth; 22 occurrences) were more frequent compared to the 2015 period, which had zero references to ‘minderjarigen’ and only 14 references to ‘kinderen/jongeren’. Moreover, when age was mentioned in the 2015 corpus, it grouped individuals into age brackets, suggesting a more collective representation.

Het transitcentrum zit overvol, terwijl elke dag nog een honderdtal Oekraïners aankomen. Wie geen contacten heeft, doolt soms wekenlang rond en slaapt op straat of in kraakpanden. Mensen zoals Yevgenii, die Engels noch Frans spreken. Of Gaby Tasu, die in hetzelfde kraakpand een onderkomen heeft gevonden. De **28-jarige vrouw** is samen met haar ouders en haar **6-jarige dochter** naar België gereisd.³⁷ (2022-23.3)

Gisterochtend stonden bij de Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken (DVZ) meer dan driehonderd asielzoekers aan te schuiven om zich te laten registreren. 159 van hen, ongeveer een op de twee, kwam uit Irak. Onder hen tientallen alleenstaande **mannen tussen 20 en 45 jaar**.³⁸ (2015.15)

Furthermore, the frequent use of ‘mensen’ (people) instead of functional terms like ‘vluchtelingen’ (refugees) was notable, especially in the 2022-23 period across most newspapers (excluding De Morgen). This shift suggests a trend towards humanising language over functionalisation. Placing the individual at the forefront underscores similarities: migrants are people with aspirations and dreams, just like everyone else (Other Talk, 2021). A noteworthy observation from the 2022-23 period

³⁷ [The transit centre is overcrowded, while every day about a hundred Ukrainians still arrive. Those without contacts sometimes wander for weeks and sleep on the streets or in squats. People like Yevgenii, who speak neither English nor French, or Gaby Tasu, who has found shelter in the same squat. The **28-year-old woman** travelled to Belgium with her parents and her **6-year-old daughter**.]

³⁸ [Yesterday morning, more than three hundred asylum seekers were queuing at the Immigration Office (DVZ) to register. 159 of them, about one in two, came from Iraq. Among them were dozens of single **men aged between 20 and 45**.]

was the emergence of the term 'mensen op de vlucht (gejaagd)' (people fleeing (forced to)) in different newspapers, which carries connotations suggesting a more urgent or perilous situation than merely the functionalisation as 'vluchteling' (refugee) or 'asielzoeker' (asylum seeker). This shift in terminology may reflect a heightened awareness or emphasis on the danger faced by individuals fleeing their homes. It also underscores the notion that these are people, without reducing their entire identity to 'refugee' (Other Talk, 2021).

De oorlog in Afghanistan heeft veel **mensen op de vlucht gejaagd**, en ook het aantal klimaatvluchtelingen blijft toenemen.³⁹ (2022-23.12)

Mensen staan in de vrieskou in kilometerslange rijen aan te schuiven, maar desondanks arriveren er nog dagelijks 50.000 Oekraïners, meldt de Poolse regering. Ook Hongarije en Moldavië vangen veel **mensen op de vlucht** op.⁴⁰ (2022-23.27)

Moreover, both analysed periods saw a classification based on marital status, particularly when referring to single RASIM. This classification occurred 10 times in the 2015 corpus and 12 times in the 2022-23 corpus, with implications varying depending on gender. For instance, the connotation associated with describing an individual as single within the context of migration may vary significantly for men and women due to societal norms and gender stereotypes.

Met de winter voor de deur is er opnieuw te weinig plaats om elke vluchteling een dak boven het hoofd te bieden. 'Een groep **alleenstaande mannen** zal zijn weg op straat moeten zoeken.'⁴¹ (2015.24)

In de tussentijd heeft Fedasil al dagen moeite met het vinden van voldoende opvangplaatsen voor de kwetsbaarste asielzoekers, zoals minderjarigen, **alleenstaande vrouwen** en gezinnen.⁴² (2022-23.8)

The term 'alleenstaande mannen' (single men) often implies strength and independence, with societal expectations that they can handle challenges, such as homelessness, autonomously. However, negative stereotypes associating single men with being 'bogus' refugees or potentially dangerous or antisocial can result in less sympathy or support. In contrast, 'alleenstaande vrouwen' (single women) may suggest vulnerability and the need for protection, aligning with societal expectations of women as caregivers. This perception, alongside the broader view of female asylum seekers as victims of patriarchal domination, can lead to increased concern for their safety, potentially resulting in greater sympathy or support (Mascini & Van Bochove, 2009).

³⁹ [The war in Afghanistan **has forced many people to flee**, and the number of climate refugees also continues to rise.]

⁴⁰ [People are queuing in the freezing cold for kilometers. Nevertheless, the Polish government reports that 50,000 Ukrainians still arrive daily. Hungary and Moldova also accommodate many **fleeing people**.]

⁴¹ [With winter approaching, there is once again insufficient space to provide every refugee with shelter. 'A group of **single men** will have to find their way to the streets.']

⁴² [Meanwhile, Fedasil has been struggling for days to find sufficient accommodation for the most vulnerable asylum seekers, such as minors, **single women**, and families.]

This classification based on marital status intertwines with the broader concepts of ‘deservingness’ and ‘promising victimhood’ within the asylum procedure. The prevailing archetype of a ‘real’ refugee often relies on the ability to convincingly demonstrate suffering and capitalise on victimhood, granting individuals ‘the right to have rights’ (Mazzocchetti, 2017). However, societal perceptions of deservingness are deeply ingrained with gendered stereotypes and expectations (Mascini & Van Bochove, 2009). Single men are expected to demonstrate strength and independence, aligning with the notion of promising victimhood, where refugees must prove their vulnerability while still showcasing their ability to integrate into the receiving society. Conversely, single women are often perceived as inherently vulnerable, leading to a heightened concern for their safety and potentially greater sympathy or support. This intersectional perspective highlights how gender intersects with deservingness and victimhood, shaping the experiences and outcomes of refugees within the asylum procedure.

Classification: Origin

The inclusion of country-of-origin identifiers is particularly noteworthy. The origin of refugees is mentioned relatively frequently: in the 2015 corpus, there are 134 classifications according to origin, while in the 2022-23 corpus, there are as many as 311, representing a notable increase. This suggests a heightened emphasis on the geographical origins of refugees in media discourse, reflecting a growing interest in portraying the movements of refugees from their countries of origin to Belgium or Europe.

The figures on the following page depict the most frequently mentioned countries of origin or nationalities during the analysed periods. Ukrainian nationality predominates in the 2022-23 period, while Syrian nationality prevails in 2015. This can be explained by the fact that in 2015, most asylum seekers in Belgium originated from Syria, followed by Iraq and Afghanistan, accounting for 63% of all asylum applications (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2015). The significant increase in mentions of Ukrainian nationality in the 2022-23 period compared to Syrian nationality in 2015 reflects the shift in the geographical origins of refugees highlighted in media discourse. Despite fewer mentions, Afghan nationality maintains a consistent presence across both periods, underscoring the enduring media attention on displacement from Afghanistan. This persistence is logical, given that Afghanistan ranked as the primary country of origin for asylum seekers in 2022, followed by Syria and Palestine (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022).

Moreover, in 2015, aside from the dominant Syrian origin, the media presented a more diverse representation of various nationalities among refugees, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the refugee population during that period. In contrast, the data from 2022-23 shows a significant concentration of mentions on Ukrainian nationality, with fewer references to other nationalities. Conversely, the focused attention on Ukrainian refugees in 2022-23 signifies a shift towards a more centralised narrative in media discourse. This shift is directly linked to the emergence of the conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent influx of Ukrainian refugees, resulting in heightened media coverage and a narrower focus on this group.

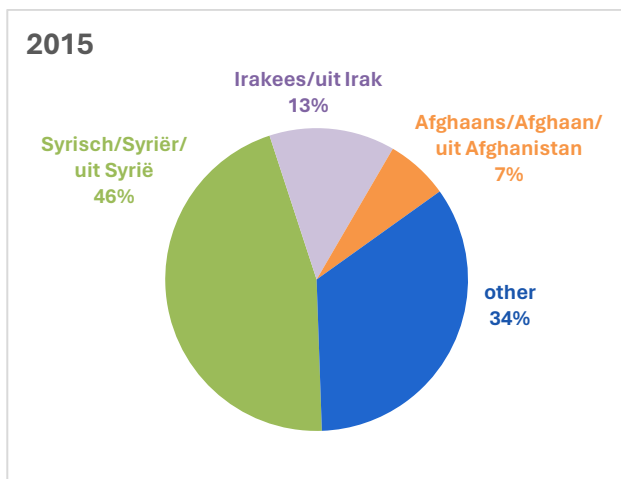


Figure 17. Classification: origin 2015

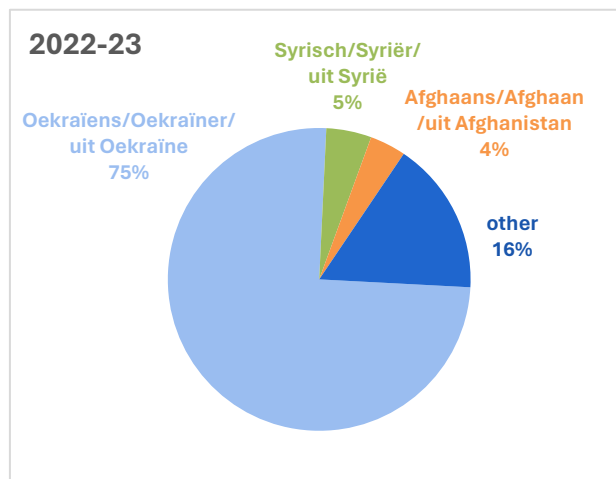


Figure 18. Classification: origin 2022-23

Classifying refugees according to their nationality can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes and biases associated with certain countries or regions. By emphasising refugees' nationality, the media may engage in 'othering', differentiating and stigmatising a group as distinct (Said, 1978), thereby perpetuating negative perceptions or generalisations about individuals based on their country of origin (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017). This focus on nationality can oversimplify refugees' experiences and overlook the diverse reasons why people flee their countries. Moreover, the concentration of media attention on refugees from specific countries, such as the heightened focus on Ukrainian refugees in the 2022-23 period, can overshadow the experiences of refugees from other regions. This selective framing may perpetuate inequalities in the representation of refugee populations, prioritising the stories of some while marginalising others. This disparity is evident in the limited mention of refugee origins other than Ukraine in the 2022-23 corpus, despite significant numbers of refugees originating from various other places, with 36,871 first applications in 2022 (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022), compared to 39,064 first applications in 2015 (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2015).

However, there are also positive aspects to highlighting refugees' nationalities. Doing so can raise awareness about specific crises or conflicts occurring in different parts of the world. By identifying refugees' countries of origin, media outlets can draw attention to the root causes of displacement, fostering understanding of the geopolitical, social, and economic factors driving migration. Additionally, acknowledging refugees' nationalities can humanise their experiences and provide a more nuanced understanding of their identities and backgrounds. Refugees are not faceless masses but individuals with unique cultural heritages, languages, and traditions. Recognising their nationalities can help counteract the dehumanisation often associated with the term 'refugee', highlighting the individual behind the refugee.

Classification: Profession

The classification of refugees according to their profession was relatively infrequent in the analysed data. This suggests a potential oversight in media coverage regarding the diverse skills and talents that refugees bring with them. The classification based on profession often reflects an image of the 'desired refugee', as it portrays refugees as potentially valuable contributors to the labour market.

This notion will be further explored in the discussion of predicational strategies. While it is positive to view refugees as potential assets to the economy, this perspective should not overshadow the complexities of their experiences and the multifaceted reasons for their displacement. Interestingly, there were no discernible differences between the different time periods regarding the classification based on profession. However, it is noteworthy that in both periods, the newspapers De Morgen and De Standaard were the most frequent in employing this classification method.

Er zijn vandaag **veel noden op de arbeidsmarkt**, denk alleen maar aan **de zorgsector**. Omgekeerd zien we dat vluchtelingen hier moeilijk aan de slag kunnen door de rigiditeit van onze arbeidsmarkt. Waarom willen velen van hen doorreizen naar het Verenigd Koninkrijk? Omdat ze er veel gemakkelijker **aan de bak geraken**. Dat zou bij ons ook moeten kunnen. Dan wordt een vluchteling niet iemand die kampeert in een of ander opvangtehuis, maar wel iemand die **meedraait in een zorgtehuis** bijvoorbeeld.⁴³ (2015.7)

Classification: Religion

Despite the limited number of religious classifications, we can still observe a few notable trends. Specifically, such classifications were more common in the 2015 corpus (20 mentions) but nearly absent in the 2022 corpus (2 mentions). In the 2015 period, these mentions were primarily related to Islam, likely reflecting the origin of most refugees being Muslim-majority countries at that time. We posited that the prevalence of Islam among refugees might have fuelled apprehension and resistance to their arrival. This conjecture gains credibility when considering the context in which the religious classifications were employed, as demonstrated by the examples below. Many of these instances are closely linked to the topos of danger, which will be further explored when discussing argumentative strategies. This is consistent with prior research, affirming that the discourse surrounding the 2015 refugee surge in Belgium was imbued with culturalist perspectives, particularly evident with right-wing parties problematising diversity based on religion, and associating recent migrants with perceived threats to public safety (De Cleen et al., 2017). The heightened mentions of Islam in 2015 within negative contexts align with the post-9/11 era, marked by increased Islamophobia and suspicion towards migrants from Muslim-majority countries (Boesman et al., 2017). The association of Islam with danger, evident in the context of religious classifications, reflects broader societal anxieties surrounding terrorism and security (Breen-Smyth, 2014).

Conversely, in the 2022 period, religious classifications were often associated with Christianity, referring to Ukrainian refugees. This trend aligns with prior literature indicating how Ukrainians are often perceived as part of the in-group with European values, potentially reflecting a Eurocentric perspective that contributes to the ‘othering’ of non-European refugees (Mäenpää, 2022). This

⁴³ [Today, there are **many needs in the job market**, just think about **the healthcare sector**. Conversely, we see that refugees have difficulty finding employment here due to the rigidity of our job market. Why do many of them want to travel on to the United Kingdom? Because **finding work** there is much easier. That should also be possible here. Then, a refugee wouldn’t just be someone who camps in some shelter, but rather someone who is **actively involved in**, for example, **a nursing home**.]

common 'European identity', transcending national affiliations, finds its roots in the Christian tradition (Paré, 2022). Thus, mentioning the religion of Ukrainian refugees may have an opposite effect compared to mentioning the religion of non-European (mostly Muslim) refugees.

Of zijn het inderdaad 'de politiek correcten' die dwalen in hun pleidooi voor verdraagzaamheid, in hun voorspelling dat we straks migranten nodig hebben om onze economie draaiende te houden en in hun analyse dat discriminatie en ongelijkheid, eerder dan **de islam**, de voedingsbodem voor onbehagen en terreur zijn?⁴⁴ (2015.26)

In de bouillabaisse van Europese angst wordt alles door elkaar gehusseld: de volkomen legale burgermigrant van binnen Europa, de illegale migrant van buiten, de halfeconomische-migrant-half-politieke-vluchteling, de oorlogsvluchteling uit Syrië, de klassieke politieke vluchteling uit Eritrea, **de moslim en de terrorist**. Er loopt een soort denkbeeldige lijn van de Poolse loodgieter naar de Syrische zelfmoordterrorist.⁴⁵ (2015.3)

Relational identification

Relational identification characterises social actors based on their personal relationships. Our analysis revealed a notable increase in the use of this strategy in the 2022-23 corpus (76 instances) compared to the 2015 corpus (50 instances). It is noteworthy that in both time periods, De Morgen made the most relational identifications, totalling 62 instances.

'Indien wij erkennen dat vluchtelingen in hun thuisland gevaar lopen, lijkt het logisch dat **hun gezinsleden** in dezelfde situatie verkeren', is de redenering.⁴⁶ (2015.9)

Yevgenii Yevstavief en **zijn gezin** zijn vijf van de meer dan 62.000 Oekraïners die sinds het begin van de oorlog naar België zijn gevlucht in vrachtwagens, met de trein of per auto. Ze kwamen terecht bij **vrienden of kennissen**, of vonden een woning via **contacten** in de Oekraïense gemeenschap in België.⁴⁷ (2022-23.3)

⁴⁴ [Or is it indeed 'the politically correct' who are mistaken in their plea for tolerance, in their prediction that we will soon need migrants to keep our economy running, and in their analysis that discrimination and inequality, rather than **Islam**, are the breeding ground for discontent and terrorism?]

⁴⁵ [In the mosaic of European fear, everything is mixed: the completely legal citizen migrant from within Europe, the illegal migrant from outside, the half-economic-migrant-half-political-refugee, the war refugee from Syria, the classic political refugee from Eritrea, **the Muslim**, and the terrorist. There is an imaginary line running from the Polish plumber to the Syrian suicide terrorist.]

⁴⁶ [The reasoning goes: 'if we recognise that refugees face danger in their home country, it seems logical that **their family members** are in the same situation'.]

⁴⁷ [Yevgenii Yevstavief and **his family** are among over 62,000 Ukrainians who have fled to Belgium since the war began, arriving in trucks, trains, or cars. They found shelter with **friends or acquaintances**, or through **connections** in the Ukrainian community in Belgium.]

By focusing on refugees' interpersonal connections, this method humanises them, giving them individuality and evoking empathy from readers. This serves as a counterbalance to 'othering', where individuals are marginalised or seen as alien (Paré, 2022). By highlighting refugees' relationships, readers are more likely to see them as relatable individuals rather than abstract figures. This helps cultivate a sense of shared humanity, thereby reducing ingroup-outgroup distinctions (Laffan, 2019).

Textual analysis: predicative strategies

Predicative strategies analyse qualities assigned to social actors, revealing how groups and individuals are portrayed. These linguistic choices uncover biases and stereotypes within discourse (Wodak, 2015). We categorised predications to explore various representations of refugees, including the desired, undesired, victimised, and the refugee as subject of political decision-making.

Desired refugee – Undesired refugee

The desired refugee category includes predications suggesting the refugee is welcomed or at least not unwelcome in their destination. In the 2015 corpus, there were almost as many desired refugee predications (59) as in the 2022-23 corpus (61). Most desired refugee predications refer to their recognised refugee status, education level, potential contributions to the job market, and deserving of assistance due to conflict-induced displacement. Also notable is the portrayal of cultural similarities with Ukrainians, presented as a positive characteristic. This portrayal may be linked to the potential influence of Eurocentrism, as suggested by Mäenpää (2022) and Zawadzka-Palucktau (2022). These analyses also reveal asymmetries in the identification of in-group actors (Europeans, Ukrainians, Ukrainian refugees) and out-group actors (Russia, other refugees, other states), indicating a Eurocentric bias that extends to associating Ukrainians with perceived European values.

"We moeten op termijn evolueren naar een betere **legale migratie**, zeker met het oog op de vergrijzing op ons continent, die voor een **groei van de knelpuntberoepen** zal zorgen."⁴⁸ (2015.29)

Aan haar opvangpleidooi knoopt de partij de vaststelling dat de 30.000 Belgische opvangplaatsen al vol zitten door allerhande 'gelukszoekers', waardoor er nu geen plaats meer is voor de mensen **die onze hulp écht nodig hebben**. "Deze crisis toont het absolute falen van het beleid", zegt Van Grieken. "Omdat we genereus zijn geweest voor de hele wereld, kunnen we nu **onze eigen broeders** niet meer helpen."⁴⁹ (2022-23.24)

⁴⁸ [In the long term, we need to move towards improved **legal migration**, especially considering the aging population on our continent, which will lead to **growth in demand for critical professions**.]

⁴⁹ [The party ties its plea for reception to the observation that the 30,000 Belgian reception places are already filled with all sorts of 'fortune seekers', leaving no room for those **who truly need our help**. "This crisis

Conversely, the undesired refugee category encompasses predications linking refugees to negative attributes. There are notably more negative characteristics found in the 2015 corpus (86) than in the 2022-23 corpus (68). These primarily include topics such as unrecognised refugee status, cultural differences, negative effects of their arrival, associated dangers like terrorism or pull factors, and undesirable actions such as marriages of convenience and fraud.

Zelfs de Duitse boulevardkrant Bild heet de vluchtelingen herzlich Willkommen. "Tot het bij iedereen doordringt wat de impact is van hun komst. Je voegt 1 procent aan je bevolking toe. Mensen **die de taal niet spreken. Die een andere cultuur en een ander geloof aanhangen. En voor wie de jobs niet voor het grijpen liggen.**"⁵⁰ (2015.16)

"Haal dringend de 2.000 mensen uit de opvang die intussen een fulltime job hebben en waarvan het grootste deel **niks bijdraagt aan de opvangkosten. Dat is massale fraude: die horen daar niet thuis**", zo besluit het Kamerlid.⁵¹ (2022-23.9)

The distinction between desired and undesired characteristics of refugees in media discourse is closely linked to the concept of deservingness. Desired refugee attributes align with societal notions of deservingness, where individuals are deemed worthy of assistance and welcome. On the other hand, undesired refugee traits challenge their perceived deservingness and may contribute to their exclusion or marginalisation. This dichotomy underscores the complex interplay between protection entitlements, vulnerabilities, and perceived assimilability, shaping societal perceptions of who merits access to protection, resources, and membership (Abdelaaty, 2022; Welfens, 2023).

Moreover, it is arguable whether the 'desired refugee' predication truly represents RASIM in a 'positive' light, given the underlying assumption of differential power dynamics and a moral high ground. While the negative characteristics are clearly 'hostile' towards the constructed 'out-groups,' the 'positive' characteristics appear more 'friendly' in comparison. However, both approaches ultimately rely on the 'us vs. them' categorisation (KhosraviNik, 2010). This dynamic may be better understood as victimisation rather than positive representation, a concept that seamlessly connects to the next part: the victimised refugee category.

demonstrates the utter failure of policy," says Van Grieken. "Because we have been generous to the whole world, we can no longer help **our own brothers.**"

⁵⁰ [Even the German tabloid newspaper Bild welcomes the refugees warmly. "Until everyone realises the impact of their arrival. You add 1 percent to your population. People who do not speak the language. Who adhere to a different culture and religion. And for whom jobs are not readily available."]

⁵¹ ["Immediately remove the 2,000 people from the shelter who now have a full-time job and the majority of whom **contribute nothing to the shelter costs. That is massive fraud: they do not belong there,**" concludes the Member of Parliament.]

Victimised refugee

Chouliaraki & Zaborowski (2017) delved into two key linguistic tactics for representing victimhood: passivisation and collectivisation. Passivisation portrays refugees as vulnerable beings in pain, underscoring their lack of essential resources for survival and contributing to their dehumanisation (Malkki, 1996). Conversely, collectivisation presents refugees as mere statistical figures, part of an undifferentiated mass of unfortunate individuals, a concept discussed earlier in the section on genericisation. Both strategies render refugees voiceless, positioning them outside the realms of reason, history, and humanity.

The victimised refugee category aligns with the passivisation tactic, comprising predications that highlight the challenging circumstances faced by refugees. These predications often explore the motivations behind their flight, the fact that they have left their homes in search of a better life, and the hardships endured during their journey to and upon arrival in Belgium. In articles from 2015, victimised refugee predications were more prevalent compared to those from 2022-23, with 108 and 62 instances respectively, indicating a notable difference across the analysed articles. It is noteworthy that in the 2022-23 articles, refugees were primarily victimised in the context of the Belgian asylum system's failure to provide adequate accommodation, alongside the war-induced causes of flight. Conversely, in 2015, refugees were predominantly victimised in terms of the perilous journey to Europe via small boats, exploitation by human traffickers, and the terrorism and conflicts in their home countries.

Slapen op straat en van het ene **kraakpand** naar het andere **sjokken met koffers en plastic zakken**, dat is niet het leven dat hij zich hier had voorgesteld. 'Mijn vrouw **huilt iedere dag** en vraagt me om terug te keren naar Odessa', zeg Yevgenii. '**Daar vallen af en toe wel bommen, maar dat is beter dan dit**, vindt ze.⁵² (2022-23.3)

Dit jaar alleen al **waagden** 35.000 **wanhopige** vluchtelingen **de oversteek** naar Europa **in gammele bootjes**. Vorig jaar bereikten 170.000 **sukkelaars** op die manier de Italiaanse kust.⁵³ (2015.27)

Daarvan zijn er 3.485 mensen **gestorven of 'verdwenen' op zee**. De Middellandse Zee is een **horizon van hoop voor de hopelozen** geworden, en voor sommigen **een zeemansgraf**.⁵⁴ (2015.3)

The abundance of victimised refugee predications may reflect the prevalent narrative in media discourse, where articulating suffering is intricately linked to the acquisition of refugee status (d'Haenens et al., 2019). In this context, refugees are often depicted as vulnerable individuals, facing

⁵² [**Sleeping on the street** and **trudging** from one **squat** to another **with suitcases and plastic bags** is not the life he had envisioned here. "My wife **cries every day** and asks me to return to Odessa," says Yevgenii. "**There are occasional bombings there, but she thinks it's better than this.**"]

⁵³ [Just this year, 35,000 **desperate** refugees **risked the journey** to Europe **in rickety boats**. Last year, 170,000 **unfortunate souls** reached the Italian coast in this manner.]

⁵⁴ [Out of them, 3,485 people have **died or 'disappeared' at sea**. The Mediterranean Sea has become a **horizon of hope for the hopeless**, and for some, a **watery grave**.]

dire circumstances. This portrayal aligns with the prevailing archetype of a 'real' refugee, which hinges on the ability to convincingly demonstrate suffering and capitalise on victimhood (Mazzocchetti, 2017). However, while emphasising vulnerability and suffering, this narrative may overlook refugees' agency and their capacity for rational decision-making (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Additionally, the abundance of victimised refugee predications underscores the dual expectations refugees face to prove their immediate vulnerability to gain recognition as refugees and subsequently demonstrate their worthiness to become active members of the host society. This complex set of criteria highlights the concept of promising victimhood, where vulnerability and assimilability selection criteria intersect (Welfens, 2023).

Refugee as subject of political decision-making

The category of refugee as a subject of political decision-making involves predications concerning the legal status of refugees or political decisions affecting them. This type of predication was prevalent in both periods but occurred more than double the times in the 2022-23 corpus (246 occurrences) compared to the 2015 corpus (102 occurrences). This increase could be partly attributed to the temporary protected status granted to Ukrainians, mentioned approximately 43 times. Within the category of 'refugee as a subject of political decision-making,' refugees are portrayed in a passive role, with their fate determined by higher authorities. Predications in this category primarily revolve around admitting, granting permits to, or deporting refugees, potentially contributing to this 'impersonal' portrayal. It is noteworthy that in the 2022-23 period, these predications often simultaneously present the image of the 'desired refugee', highlighting the refugee's entitlement to stay and recognition, while in the 2015 period, there were relatively more references to non-recognition.

Vorig jaar **behandelde** België 17.000 **asielaanvragen** en **erkenden** we er voor het eerst bijna de helft. Vroeger kregen we veel **aanvragen** van economische vluchtelingen uit de Balkan, die **geen aanspraak konden maken op asiel**. Nu zijn het vooral Syriërs en Irakezen die **er recht op hebben**.⁵⁵ (2015.17)

De Oekraïense vluchtelingen zijn door hun **aparte EU-bescherming** gescheiden van **het asielcircuit**. Ze zijn zeker van een jaar **verblijf**, terwijl asielzoekers **een screening moeten doorlopen via het Vluchtelingencommissariaat** of ze voldoende gevaar lopen in hun thuisland **om het statuut te krijgen**.⁵⁶ (2022-23.19)

⁵⁵ [Last year, Belgium **processed** 17,000 **asylum applications** and for the first time, we **recognised** almost half of them. Previously, we received many **applications** from economic refugees from the Balkans who **were not eligible for asylum**. Now, it's mainly Syrians and Iraqis **who qualify for it**.]

⁵⁶ [Ukrainian refugees, due to their **separate EU protection**, are kept distinct from **the asylum process**. They are guaranteed a year of **residency**, whereas asylum seekers must **undergo screening by the Refugee Commissioner** to determine if they face sufficient danger in their home country **to qualify for status**.]

Textual analysis: argumentative strategies

Argumentative strategies are methods used to either support or challenge assertions within discourse, employing rhetorical devices such as topoi to reveal underlying ideologies and legitimise certain viewpoints. Topoi serve as common-sense reasoning schemes that rationalise the shift from arguments to conclusions and justify social actors' positions within in- or out-groups (Wodak, 2015).

Topos of definition

The topos of definition implies that when something, an action, an object, or a person, is designated as X, it is assumed to inherently possess or should possess the qualities linked to the literal definition of X. This topos is exemplified numerous times across both analysed time frames. For instance, the term 'migration crisis', used frequently in both the 2015 and 2022-23 articles (28 times and 55 times respectively), implies an urgent and potentially harmful situation demanding immediate attention. However, this term has faced criticism for oversimplifying the complexity of migration, focusing on negative aspects, and serving political agendas. It contributes to the dehumanisation of RASIM, deflects attention from underlying structural issues, and perpetuates stereotypes, potentially leading to stigmatisation and marginalisation (De Genova & Tazzioli, 2016).

Another example of the topos of definition lies in phrases that imply refugees are coming in large numbers, distancing them from individual recognition. Referring to refugees as mere 'entrants' contributes to dehumanisation, associating them with an out-of-control phenomenon comparable to a devastating natural disaster, such as a massive wave or an avalanche that requires restraint. Metaphors like 'stroom' (flow), 'ze overspoelen ons' (they are flooding us), and 'vloedgolf' (tidal wave) occur 50 times in the 2015 corpus and 64 times in the 2022-23 corpus. These metaphors give the impression that the number of RASIM entering is higher than the actual number and are often used as if they are neutral, which they are not. These kinds of metaphors exemplify an intensification strategy and can contribute to dehumanisation, due to its positioning of refugees as distant 'others', detached from the reader's immediate experiences (Van Leeuwen, 1996). The usage of water metaphors like these carries connotations of threat and uncontrollability, and has become firmly embedded in the discourse on migration (Porto, 2022).

Toen besliste het Europees Hof voor de Rechten van de Mens dat de Italiaanse marine een bootje met migranten op zee niet mocht terugsturen. Het was het begin van **een almaar aanzwellende stroom** van bootvluchtelingen, waardoor de Middellandse Zee een massagraf is geworden en Europa **overspoeld wordt**.⁵⁷ (2015.17)

⁵⁷ [Then the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Italian navy could not return a boat carrying migrants at sea. It was the beginning of **an ever-increasing flow** of boat refugees, turning the Mediterranean into a mass grave and **inundating** Europe.]

Topos of urgency

The topos of urgency asserts that decisions or actions need to be promptly taken in response to external, substantial, and unchangeable events beyond one's influence. Throughout our analysis, we observed several instances of this strategy across both time periods. Specifically, it predominantly revolved around the anticipated strain on the asylum system and the urgent need for additional accommodation due to the substantial surge in migration. This urgency is often reinforced through augmentative devices aimed at conveying the gravity of the situation. However, the urgent action often advocated for is not solely focused on assisting refugees in finding their place into the host community but also, as illustrated in the first example below, on the urgent need to fortify borders for security purposes.

“En open niet je televisienieuws met de droeve, schuldbewuste melding dat er een kind is gestorven, op de vlucht voor oorlog en geweld. Nee, er is een kind gestorven doordat zijn ouders op zoek waren naar een betere economische toekomst. **Europa moet dringend werk maken van opvang dicht bij de conflictzone.**”⁵⁸ (2015.16)

De vluchtelingen uit Oekraïne komen **veel sneller dan verwacht** onze kant op. “Dit is van een totaal andere orde dan de vluchtelingencrisis in 2015. Europa **stevent af op de grootste humanitaire catastrofe sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog**”, zei minister-president Jan Jambon (N-VA) woensdag in het Vlaams Parlement.⁵⁹ (2022-23.22)

Topos of danger/threat

The topos of danger or threat suggests that when specific dangers or threats are identified, action should be taken to address them. However, this topos can result in a victim-victimiser reversal, wherein victims are unfairly blamed for the prejudices against them. Throughout both analysed periods, this topos was predominantly applied to non-European refugees and notably absent in references to Ukrainian refugees. The prevalence of the topos of danger during these periods may be attributed to their designation as moments of ‘crisis’, during which the dynamics of ‘othering’ become particularly pronounced (Paré, 2022). Crises serve as ‘open moments’ that heighten the delineation between ingroup and outgroup, fostering a dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ (Laffan, 2019).

Additionally, it is noteworthy that in the 2015 corpus, the topos of danger was primarily articulated in terms of cultural differences, as well as the fear of terrorism or radicalisation. This can be explained by the convergence between discourses on terrorism and migration, framing migration as a security

⁵⁸ [“And do not open your television news with the sad, guilt-ridden report that a child has died fleeing from war and violence. No, a child has died because his parents were seeking a better economic future. **Europe urgently needs to make progress in providing shelter close to conflict zones.**”]

⁵⁹ [The refugees from Ukraine are heading our way **much faster than anticipated**. “This is of an entirely different scale than the refugee crisis in 2015. Europe is **heading towards the largest humanitarian catastrophe since World War II**,” said Prime Minister Jan Jambon (N-VA) on Wednesday in the Flemish Parliament.]

threat and associating it with the causes of terrorist attacks. This securitised perspective on migration and radicalisation contributes to the construction of a 'suspect community', particularly targeting Muslims as a stigmatised minority and perceiving them as potential threats (Breen-Smyth, 2014).

"Asielzoekers trekken liever naar steden waar ze land- en taalgenoten aantreffen. Dat is de minst goede manier om ze te integreren in onze gemeenschap. In steden **vormen ze snel een getto en de radicalisering kan er worden gevoed.**" Bonte gelooft wel dat **de kans op een terroristische aanslag** in een landelijke gemeente als Glabbeek nihil is.⁶⁰ (2015.20)

Met heel wat lawaai hield Voorpost, een organisatie die naar eigen zeggen strijdt voor "**het behoud van ons volk, onze cultuur en identiteit**", zaterdagmorgen een **protestbetoging tegen niet-Europese migratie**. 'Maak plaats voor Europese vluchtelingen'.⁶¹ (2022-23.20)

Topos of responsibility

The topos of responsibility, which emphasises that if a state or group is responsible for particular problems, they are obligated to seek solutions, is present in both analysed time frames. The debates often fit within a legal or institutional framework, described in terms of who is responsible for providing shelter and the efforts being made. This is frequently paired with numerical figures, indicating who is providing how much support. Moreover, this discourse often intertwines with detachment strategies, aiming to avoid responsibility and portray Belgium as already doing its fair share for refugee and asylum seeker intake compared to other nations, thus shifting the responsibility onto them. In addition, in the second example, another interesting aspect concerns the rhetorical question, 'wie betaalt [...], denkt u?' (who do you think pays?), which serves as an intensification strategy, amplifying the assertion of burden, to be further explored later with the topos of burden.

"We **hebben onze verantwoordelijkheid genomen**, maar ik wil eerlijk zijn: het zal moeilijk zijn en nog moeilijker worden in de komende maanden." De premier **pleit voor meer solidariteit op Europees vlak**. "Ik **nodig bepaalde regeringen die weigeren hun deel van de inspanningen te doen uit om zich aan te sluiten** bij de actievere lidstaten."⁶² (2015.4)

⁶⁰ [Asylum seekers prefer to move to cities where they can find fellow countrymen and speakers of their language. This is the least effective way to integrate them into our community. In cities, **they quickly form ghettos, and radicalization can be fuelled there.**" However, Bonte believes that the likelihood of a terrorist attack in a rural municipality like Glabbeek is negligible.]

⁶¹ [With much noise, Voorpost, an organisation that claims to fight for "**the preservation of our people, our culture, and identity,**" held a **protest demonstration against non-European migration** on Saturday morning. "Make room for European refugees."]

⁶² ["We **have taken our responsibility**, but I want to be honest: it will be difficult, and it will become even more challenging in the coming months," the Prime Minister **advocates for more solidarity at the European level**. "**I invite certain governments that refuse to do their part to join** the more active member states."]

“Wie betaalt die vluchtelingenkampen van de Verenigde Naties, denkt u? In 2013 **leverden de EU en de VS bijna 70 procent van alle middelen**. Met 4 procent was Koeweit het enige niet-westerse land met een belangrijke bijdrage. **Zeg nu nog eens dat het rijke Westen het hoofd zagezegd afwendt** en niet solidair zou zijn. **Hebt u weet van één vluchtelingenkamp in het rijke Saudi-Arabië**, dat toch bijna aan Syrië grenst?”⁶³ (2015.17)

België **doet als relatief klein land al heel veel**. Een duurzame oplossing **kan enkel Europees zijn**.⁶⁴ (2015.8)

In certain instances, responsibility is also extended to the Flemish citizenry, aiming to cultivate a sense of solidarity. This understanding of responsibility transcends legal or institutional frameworks and underscores a moral obligation to stand in solidarity with those experiencing hardship while fleeing.

België zal eind dit jaar 14.000 asielzoekers erkend hebben. **Indirect helpt iedere Belg hen**, via onze belastingen. Maar wees eerlijk: het blijft nog steeds een ver-van-mijn-bedshow. **Wordt het echt geen tijd dat wij iets meer doen dan alleen maar de krant lezen en laten begaan?**⁶⁵ (2015.30)

In the 2022-23 corpus, this often involves invoking a 'European identity', which serves to unite member states and their populations. However, as mentioned before, it is important to acknowledge the problematic origins of this identity, as it was initially founded on the principle of 'responsibility towards the rest of the world'. This principle has historically reinforced a perception of Europe's (moral) superiority, particularly in relation to non-European cultures (Paré, 2022). When framed in this manner, it implicitly reinforces the in-group out-group distinction between Europeans and non-Europeans. In the following example, there's an implicit differentiation between responsibilities perceived as belonging to 'us' (European countries) and those viewed as external (conflicts occurring outside of Europe).

“Deze keer wordt er een conflict in Europa uitgevochten. **Als Europeanen is het dus onze plicht om solidair te zijn** met de moedige Oekraïners.”⁶⁶ (2022-23.24)

⁶³ ["Who do you think pays for those refugee camps of the United Nations? In 2013, **the EU and the US provided nearly 70 percent of all resources**. With 4 percent, Kuwait was the only non-Western country with a significant contribution. Now, **tell me again that the wealthy West supposedly turns a blind eye** and is not solidary. **Are you aware of a single refugee camp in wealthy Saudi Arabia**, which is almost adjacent to Syria?"]

⁶⁴ [Belgium, **as a relatively small country, is already doing a lot**. A sustainable solution **can only be European**.]

⁶⁵ [By the end of this year, Belgium will have recognised 14,000 asylum seekers. **Indirectly, every Belgian helps them** through our taxes. But let's be honest: it still feels like something happening far away. **Isn't it about time that we do more than just read the newspaper and let things happen?**]

⁶⁶ ["This time, a conflict is being fought in Europe. **As Europeans, it is therefore our duty to show solidarity** with the courageous Ukrainians."]

Topos of authority

The topos of authority operates on a straightforward principle: if authority X asserts that A is true, then A must indeed be true. This strategy hinges on leveraging the credibility and expertise of authoritative sources to persuade the audience of the argument's validity. It frequently involves referencing experts, leaders, or established institutions to bolster the argument and increase its persuasiveness. This approach is employed to legitimise critique, specific actions, or measures, often by citing statements from political figures, other countries, organisations or international or EU-level agreements. Moreover, this topos can also be linked to the analysis of verbal processes, where the individual whose opinion is quoted is often presented as an authority figure.

Maar blijkbaar staan er ook nog meer doorgedreven en omstreden maatregelen op stapel. Zo is er het zogenaamde Khartoem-proces waarbij landen als Eritrea, Soedan, Ethiopië en Egypte nauw met de EU samenwerken om mensensmokkel en illegale migratie tegen te gaan. **Volgens mensenrechtenorganisaties als Human Rights Watch** is dat bijzonder problematisch.⁶⁷ (2015.10)

De vraag blijft: als de lege vrije plaatsen niet opgevuld worden, zijn er dan wel alternatieven voor de groep asielzoekers die geen plek heeft? **Volgens Tine Claus, directeur van Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen**, zouden reguliere asielzoekers voorlopig best opgevangen worden waar er plaats is.⁶⁸ (2022-23.13)

Topos of burden

The topos of burden was also identified in several articles, which means they present refugees as imposing costs or strains on resources and services, portraying them as a weight on society. It emphasises the economic, social, or cultural challenges associated with accommodating and integrating refugees. This perspective often leads to attributing negative consequences, such as increased competition for jobs or housing, to the mere presence of refugees. Economic burdens, such as perceived abuse of welfare systems or increased expenditure, are commonly cited. This perspective echoes earlier literature, indicating a prevalent focus on this economic rationale in Belgian media discourse (De Cleen et al., 2017). Van Dijk (2000) describes the topos of burden as a common anti-immigration tactic, stating that it suggests refusal of immigrants is not based on prejudice but rather on an inability to accommodate them. This narrative is often reinforced by the topos of numbers, which emphasises the perceived overwhelming scale of the refugee influx.

⁶⁷ [But apparently, there are also more extensive and controversial measures in the pipeline. For example, there is the so-called Khartoum Process, in which countries such as Eritrea, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt closely cooperate with the EU to combat human trafficking and illegal migration. **According to human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch**, this is particularly problematic.]

⁶⁸ [The question remains: if the vacant places are not filled, are there alternatives for the group of asylum seekers who have no place? **According to Tine Claus, director of Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen**, regular asylum seekers should, for the time being, be accommodated where there is space.]

Het lijkt erop dat de gemeentebesturen schrik hebben om achteraf **voor de kosten op te draaien**. “Eens ze hier zijn, **geraken we niet meer van die mensen af**.” Dat is volgens Geert Depondt (CD&V), de OCMW-voorzitter van Roeselare, de reflex van veel collega's. “Ze vrezen dat ze na erkenning **moeten zorgen voor taalcursussen, huisvesting, begeleiding**. Terwijl **de druk op de sociale woningmarkt en de taalcursussen nu al groot** is.”⁶⁹ (2015.19)

“Als we 200.000 Oekraïense vluchtelingen gemiddeld 1.000 euro leefloon per maand geven, dan kost dat 200 miljoen euro per maand en dus 2,4 miljard per jaar. **Dat kunnen de overheidsfinanciën gewoon niet aan**, en zal op termijn **betaald worden door alle werkende mensen in ons land**.”⁷⁰ (2022-23.17)

⁶⁹ [It seems that municipal authorities are afraid of **being left to bear the costs afterward**. "Once they're here, **we can't get rid of these people anymore**," according to Geert Depondt (CD&V), the chairman of the Public Center for Social Welfare (OCMW) of Roeselare, echoing the sentiments of many colleagues. "They fear that after recognition, they **will have to provide language courses, housing, and guidance**. Meanwhile, **the pressure on the social housing market and language courses is already significant**."]]

⁷⁰ ["If we give 200,000 Ukrainian refugees an average monthly allowance of 1,000 euros, it will cost 200 million euros per month and therefore 2.4 billion per year. **Public finances simply cannot afford this**, and it will ultimately **be paid for by all working people in our country**."]]

Conclusions

The analysis of Flemish newspaper coverage during the periods of 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015, and 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023, regarding the Syrian and Ukrainian migration surges in Flanders has provided significant insights into how these complex phenomena are discursively framed and represented. Utilising critical discourse analysis (CDA), particularly the discourse-historical approach (DHA), this study has unveiled the underlying discursive strategies deployed by media outlets to shape public perceptions of refugees.

One of the key findings of this research is the evolution of whose perspectives are showcased over time. Comparison between the 2015 and 2022-2023 coverage highlighted a shift in emphasis and tone, mirroring changing societal attitudes and political dynamics. The increased visibility of refugee experts in the later corpus suggests a growing recognition of the necessity for specialised expertise in addressing the challenges posed by ongoing refugee surges. This trend also signifies a move towards more informative journalism, with an increased demand for expert analysis to offer context and insights to the public. Conversely, politicians' voices remained consistently the most prevalent in both periods.

Moreover, thematic analysis unveiled four prevalent topics consistently featured in the coverage of both migration surges: asylum policy and accommodation, integration, criticism and political debate, and flight. These themes underscore the multifaceted nature of migration issues and reveal enduring concerns and discursive trends in how they are framed and discussed in Flemish newspapers. However, some thematic differences between the analysed periods were observed. For instance, there was a heightened focus on asylum policy and infrastructure challenges in managing the influx of refugees in 2022-23 compared to 2015, indicating a shift towards more practical solutions for refugee settlement rather than political debates on their arrival. Yet, it is crucial to contextualise these discussions within their broader context, such as the visa-free entry for Ukrainians into Europe under the Temporary Protection Directive, a factor absent in 2015. Conversely, in 2015, discussions primarily revolved around arrivals seeing as responsibility for asylum applications had to be determined under the Dublin Regulation. Discussions on integration issues varied between the two periods, with discussions in 2015 predominantly focusing on the challenges and difficulties of integration, and the discourse in 2022-23 leaning towards proposing actionable measures to facilitate successful integration, adopting a more solution-oriented approach. Additionally, while asylum policy and political debates dominated Flemish newspaper coverage of migration surges, narratives on flight received less emphasis. These flight narratives often portrayed refugees as victims, highlighting flaws in the Belgian asylum system, war-induced

displacement, or exploitation by human traffickers. This may foster solidarity, but this portrayal risks overlooking refugees' agency and rational decision-making. Interestingly, in 2015, solidarity sometimes favoured Member States over refugees themselves, reflecting complex societal responses to migration crises. This underscores the need for nuanced approaches that recognise both the challenges faced by refugees and their capacity for self-determination. Through examining these thematic differences, the thesis offers insights into the evolving media representations of migration crises, contextualising the changing discursive trends and societal attitudes towards refugees and migrants over time.

Additionally, a textual analysis of the data revealed intriguing trends in nomination, predicative, and argumentative strategies employed in media discourse. In terms of the analysis of the nomination strategies we first saw a tendency among newspapers to interchangeably use terms like 'vluchteling' (refugee), 'asielzoeker' (asylum seeker), and 'migrant', despite their nuanced differences. This interchangeable usage risks oversimplification and misrepresentation, potentially influencing public perceptions. However, there was a discernible decrease in the interchangeable use of terms like 'migrant' and 'vluchteling' (refugee) in the 2022-23 corpus, indicating a more deliberate choice of terminology and heightened sensitivity to language implications. Furthermore, a significant increase in individualisation and humanising language regarding refugees, particularly Ukrainians, was observed in the 2022-23 period compared to 2015. These shifts reflect evolving societal attitudes and linguistic conventions. Future research could delve deeper into the reasons behind this interchangeable usage, exploring whether it stems from unconscious writing, editorial decisions, journalistic conventions, or societal attitudes towards migration, as well as investigate how different terminologies impact readers' empathy, understanding, and support for refugees and migrants.

The comparative analysis of predicative strategies offers nuanced insights into how refugees are portrayed in media discourse, uncovering underlying biases and societal perceptions. Notably, the 2015 corpus depicted refugees more negatively compared to the 2022-23 corpus, suggesting a potential shift towards more positive portrayals, possibly influenced by Eurocentric perspectives. Additionally, the analysis revealed a significant increase in the individualisation of refugees, particularly Ukrainian refugees, in the later period. This trend reflected a growing recognition of refugees' individuality and a departure from viewing them as a homogeneous group. Moreover, there was a notable increase in naming refugees and mentioning their countries of origin in the 2022-23 corpus, again indicating a shift towards more humanising language. Furthermore, the analysis identified a shift in religious classifications, with mentions of Islam predominating in 2015 and Christianity in 2022-23. Further research could explore how these classifications contribute to the stereotyping and stigmatisation of refugees, particularly in the context of Islamophobia or xenophobia.

The textual analysis also sheds light on how refugees are victimised in media narratives, with a shift from external dangers during the journey to internal struggles within the host country. This portrayal underscores the dual expectations refugees encounter, to demonstrate vulnerability to gain recognition as refugees and subsequently prove their worthiness as active members of society. And lastly, refugees are often portrayed as passive subjects of political decision-making, with their fate determined by higher authorities. Predications in this category focus on admission, granting permits, or deportation, contributing to an 'impersonal' portrayal of refugees. Interestingly, in the 2022-23 period, there were more references to refugees as subjects of political decision-making, often alongside the image of the 'desired refugee,' highlighting their entitlement to recognition and stay. Conversely, in the 2015 corpus they are more focused on non-recognition and legal status issues.

When analysing the argumentative strategies, the key findings unveiled the widespread use of rhetorical devices such as topoi to justify arguments, reinforce ideological stances, shape public perceptions, and garner support for specific policies or actions. A notable shift in focus emerged between the 2015 and 2022-23 datasets. While references to the dangers and burdens associated with refugees remained prevalent in both periods, there was a noticeable decline in mentions of cultural differences and security threats linked to non-European refugees in the 2022-23 dataset. Conversely, there was an uptick in references to the urgent need for solidarity with Ukrainian refugees and the importance of European unity in response to the 'crisis'. Responsibility narratives also evolved over time, mirroring shifts in political dynamics and policy priorities. In the 2015 dataset, responsibility was often framed in terms of institutional obligations, with references to Belgium's efforts to accommodate refugees. In contrast, the 2022-23 dataset witnessed a broader invocation of European identity and moral imperatives. Furthermore, the 2015 dataset tended to adopt a securitised perspective on migration, emphasising terrorism, cultural assimilation, and economic burdens. Conversely, the 2022-23 dataset displayed a reconfiguration of discourses, with increased emphasis on humanitarian concerns, solidarity, and European unity in response to the Ukrainian crisis. Future research could delve into audience reception and media effects to gauge the actual impact of argumentative strategies on public perceptions, attitudes, and policy preferences.

In conclusion, this thesis provides significant insights into the construction of narratives surrounding refugee and asylum seeker issues in Flanders. Its localised focus on Flanders and its comparative lens provides a nuanced exploration of newspaper coverage surrounding the Syrian and Ukrainian migration surges. This approach offers a detailed examination of the media landscape, political influences, and public discourse specific to Flanders, shedding light on dynamics that have not been thoroughly investigated previously. However, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations that may impact the interpretation and generalisability of the findings. These include the scope of the study, reliance on qualitative content analysis, methodological constraints, biases in coding processes, and resource constraints. Addressing these limitations in future research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of refugee and migration issues.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. References of newspaper articles and assigned codes

- Abbeloos, J. (2015, December 26). Hoe rechts zijn inconvenient truths op de agenda kreeg. *De Standaard*, 26. [2015.26]
- Abbeloos, J. (2022, March 19). Van broedervolk naar kostenpost. *De Standaard*. [2022-23.17]
- Abbeloos, J., & Justaert, M. (2015, August 29). “Ook vluchtelingen kunnen iets terugdoen, vaak willen ze niet liever.” *De Standaard*, 8. [2015.7]
- Andries, S. (2015, August 29). Tenten uit Dubai voor asielzoekers. *Het Nieuwsblad*, 11. [2015.23]
- Antonissen, T. (2022, March 8). #HELPOEKRAÏNE. Ik heb plaats genoeg en wil graag vluchtelingen opvangen. Wat nu? *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.23]
- Atillah, S. (2022, June 15). Er zijn nog veel plaatsen vrij, maar enkel voor Oekraïners. *De Morgen*, 14. [2022-23.13]
- Barbieux, Y. (2015, August 18). “Ga naar België daar krijgt je gezin makkelijk asiel.” *Het Nieuwsblad*, 2. [2015.9]
- Barbieux, Y., & Delepeleire, Y. (2015, August 18). Smokkelaars lokken Irakezen met fabeltje over België. *De Standaard*, 2. [2015.15]
- Bervoet, D. (2015, November 20). Terreur houdt spreidingsplan tegen. *De Tijd*, 7. [2015.33]
- Bervoet, D. (2015, November 21). Er slapen weer asielzoekers op straat. *De Tijd*, 11. [2015.24]
- Bervoet, D. (2022, June 7). Al 45.300 Oekraïners kregen bescherming in ons land. *De Tijd*, 8. [2022-23.14]
- Bervoet, D. (2022, March 16). Oorlog in Oekraïne sijpelt door in stijgende asielcijfers. *De Tijd*, 8. [2022-23.19]
- Bervoet, D., & Lamote, S. (2022, March 9). België maakt zich op voor meer dan 100.000 Oekraïense vluchtelingen. *De Tijd*. [2022-23.22]
- Bervoet, D., & Steel, T. (2015, August 29). Artsen Zonder Grenzen vliegt tenten over. *De Tijd*, 7. [2015.12]
- Boels, K. (2015, August 21). “Er zijn grenzen aan verdraagzaamheid.” *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 21. [2015.30]

- Cattebeke, H. (2015, April 22). Oorlogsvluchteling is welkom, maar familie is geen excuus. *Het Nieuwsblad*, 12. [2015.21]
- Cattebeke, H. (2015, August 8). Extra opvangplaatsen voor asielzoekers: te weinig en verre van zeker. *Het Nieuwsblad*, 10. [2015.11]
- Coppens, X., & Van Vlierden, G. (2015, March 16). Al 4.600 vluchtelingen uit Syrië bij ons. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 11. [2015.1]
- D'hoore, J. (2015, November 12). EU vraagt Afrika migranten terug te nemen. *De Tijd*, 4. [2015.32]
- De Bode, L., & De Lobel, P. (2022, October 22). 'We gaan dit niet oplossen met een paar hotelkamers.' *De Standaard*. [2022-23.31]
- De Boeck, A. (2022, March 5). Hoe Vlaams Belang op een zere plek van Vivaldi duwt: een andere aanpak van verschillende vluchtelingen. *De Morgen*. [2022-23.24]
- De Ceulaer, J. (2022, April 19). Mensenrechtenexpert Brigitte Herremans: 'We zijn wakker geworden in een nieuwe wereldorde'. *De Morgen*. [2022-23.16]
- De Cock, J. (2015, January 5). "Spookschip is voor Syriërs de veiligste vluchtweg." *De Standaard*, 2. [2015.18]
- De Decker, A. (2022, August 14). Anastasia (29) wil terug naar Oekraïne: "Daar ging ik door de hel, maar de situatie waarin ik nu verkeer in België, maakt alles nog erger." *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.11]
- Dierickx, R. (2022, April 20). Vlaams Belang voert actie tegen komst open asielcentrum in hotel: "Dit is de druppel te veel." *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.15]
- Dijardin, D. (2015, July 4). Syriëstrijders verliezen statuut van vluchteling. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 6. [2015.2]
- Duk, W. (2015, September 1). "Mekka was dichterbij, maar Duitsland neemt ons tenminste op." *De Tijd*, 10. [2015.14]
- El Mabrouk, F. (2022, November 17). De druk neemt overal toe: hoe het komt dat ook Oekraïense vluchtelingen nu soms op straat moeten slapen. *Het Nieuwsblad*. [2022-23.30]
- Erkul, A. (2023, January 11). Oekraïense daklozen in Brussel: 'Kom niet naar België, hier moet je buiten slapen'. *De Morgen*. [2022-23.3]
- Garton Ash, T. (2015, December 1). De muren zijn terug. *De Standaard*, 37. [2015.3]
- Gorlé, P. (2015, May 15). Duizenden bootvluchtelingen naar België maar niemand weet hoeveel: Zo wordt aantal migranten verdeeld. Europese Unie vraagt ons land om 3% asielzoekers op te vangen. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 8. [2015.27]

- Heynderickx, H. (2022, June 25). De erfenis van Mahdi na twee jaar op Asiel en Migratie: “Hij legde systematisch beslissingen van de rechter naast zich neer.” *Het Nieuwsblad*. [2022-23.12]
- JDG. (2022, August 1). België krijgt steeds meer asielaanvragen: “Door bepaalde opvattingen over ons land is de migratiestroom veranderd.” *Het Nieuwsblad*. [2022-23.33]
- JV. (2022, November 22). Schaarbeek klaagt aanwezigheid aan van vluchtelingenkamp in hart van de Noordwijk. *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.5]
- Khader, S., & Stoffelen, A. (2015, December 12). “Als je al die ellende ziet, denk je niet aan geld” Smokkelaar Abu Saif slaapt pas als zijn bootjes vol migranten in Europa zijn. *De Morgen*, 66. [2015.34]
- Liekens, R. (2023, January 16). ‘Blijkbaar is de drang om met de N-VA te besturen zo groot dat Rousseau hun voorstellen begint te kopiëren’. *De Morgen*. [2022-23.2]
- Mees, F. (2023, January 19). Nog nooit zochten zo veel mensen een toevluchtsoord in België. *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.1]
- Met honderd overboord, net voor Griekse kust. (2015, April 21). *Het Nieuwsblad*, 2. [2015.22]
- Mijlemans, P. (2022, October 14). “Asielopvang moet streng en rechtvaardig zijn. Maar ook menselijk. Dat laatste lijkt vergeten.” *Het Nieuwsblad*. [2022-23.35]
- Moens, B., & De Groote, P. (2015, September 26). “Ook vluchtelingen kunnen iets terugdoen, vaak willen ze niet liever.” *De Tijd*, 9. [2015.8]
- Naegels, T. (2022, March 5). Lijken Oekraïners op ons? *De Standaard*, 61. [2022-23.34]
- NSB. (2022, November 11). Ook Oekraïense vluchtelingen vinden geen opvangplaats meer. *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.6]
- Oesjakov, J. (2015, June 18). Om ter flinkst over migratie. *De Standaard*, 18. [2015.35]
- Overheid trok vluchtelingen zelf aan via nieuwe website. (2015, September 5). *Het Nieuwsblad*, 5. [2015.31]
- Peeperkorn, M. (2015, September 7). 4.500 extra vluchtelingen naar België Vertrouwelijk Europees spreidingsplan verdeelt 120.000 asielzoekers over lidstaten. *De Morgen*, 1. [2015.4]
- Peeperkorn, M. (2022, February 28). EU wil tijdelijke verblijfsstatus voor vluchtelingen. *De Morgen*, 3. [2022-23.28]
- Peeters, T. (2015, February 25). “Belgiërouten” gaat dicht Theo Francken en zijn Nederlandse collega willen sluiptwegen voor schijnhuwelijken blokkeren. *De Morgen*, 3. [2015.36]
- Politie verjaagt tweehonderd migranten aan Frans-Italiaanse grens. (2015, June 15). *De Morgen*, 7. [2015.25]

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- Poppelmonde, J. (2022, September 2). Waarom kampen we nu ineens weer met zo’n grote asielcrisis? *De Standaard*, 10. [2022-23.10]
- Rabaey, M. (2015, July 30). Jungle van Calais eist mensenlevens: Alleen EU-migratiebeleid kan licht brengen aan einde van Kanaaltunnel-crisis. *De Morgen*, 17. [2015.29]
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- Renson, T. (2022, March 5). Eerste Oekraïense vluchtelingen komen aan in ons land, en moeten uren aanschuiven: “Ik heb niet geslapen, ik heb alleen nog maar geweend.” *Het Nieuwsblad*. [2022-23.25]
- Romans, S., & Verhaeghe, O. (2022, October 20). Belgisch asielbeleid kraakt in zijn voegen. *De Tijd*, 6. [2022-23.8]
- Schoofs, N., & Van De Velden, W. (2015, April 25). “Fort Europa? Prietpraat.” *De Tijd*, 6. [2015.17]
- Segers, J. (2015, September 5). “Ik laat mij geen schuldgevoel aanpraten” Bart De Wever (N-VA) aanvaardt niet dat hij in vluchtelingencrisis wordt weggezet als slecht mens. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 12. [2015.16]
- SSM. (2022, March 17). Belgische koninklijke familie zal drie Oekraïense gezinnen opvangen. *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.18]
- Struys, B. (2022, October 24). Hoe zit het met de solidariteit met Oekraïense vluchtelingen? Vlaamse steden kunnen gezinnen niet meer opvangen. *De Morgen*. [2022-23.7]
- Suy, P., & Broens, B. (2022, July 2). 1.500 plekken noodopvang voor asielzoekers. *De Tijd*, 1. [2022-23.32]
- Tack, E. (2022, March 13). Voorpost demonstreert tegen “niet-Europese migratie” aan toekomstig asielcentrum: “Maak plaats voor Europese vluchtelingen.” *Het Nieuwsblad*. [2022-23.20]
- Tegenbos, G. (2015, September 2). Vluchtelingen, een Vlaamse kwestie. *De Standaard*, 39. [2015.6]
- Terrière, L. (2022, October 15). Amper een gemeente die nog asielzoekers wil opvangen : “Er is geen draagvlak meer voor het huidige asielbeleid.” *Het Laatste Nieuws*. [2022-23.9]
- Thijskens, D. (2022, March 12). Pas volgende week beslissing over nooddorpen. *De Morgen*, 5. [2022-23.21]

- Van De Velden, W. (2022, December 16). Groenen eisen oplossing voor mensen die in vrieskou slapen. *De Tijd*, 8. [2022-23.4]
- Van Den Eynde, I. (2015, October 16). "De Wever kakelt veel, maar legt geen ei" Tom Van Grieken zet Vlaams Belang op de kaart dankzij vluchtelingencrisis. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 12. [2015.5]
- Van Oost, M. (2022, March 3). Oekraïeners krijgen automatisch verblijfsrecht in Europa. *De Tijd*. [2022-23.27]
- Vantommel, S. (2015, January 22). Vlaanderen, voor wie asiel én werk zoekt: Vluchtelingen hebben 90 procent meer kans op een job in het noorden van het land. *De Morgen*, 3. [2015.13]
- Vanmechelen, R. (2015, December 17). "Vluchtelingen kunnen terroristen zijn." *Het Nieuwsblad*, 1. [2015.20]
- Vidal, K. (2015, November 12). EU vraagt hulp dictators: Repressieve regimes zouden Europa steunen bij indammen migrantenstroom. *De Morgen*, 9. [2015.10]
- Vos, H. (2022, April 19). Sjacheren met vluchtelingen. *De Standaard*, 35. [2022-23.36]
- Walker, S., & Tondo, L. (2022, February 22). Buren van Oekraïne zetten zich schrap voor komst van vluchtelingen. *De Standaard*. [2022-23.29]

Appendix 2. Content analysis

Themes → ↓ Newspaper	Asylum policy and accommodation		Integration		Criticism and political debate		Flight	
<i>De Morgen</i>	4 (2015.4, 2015.10, 2015.28, 2015.29)		1 (2015.13)		6 (2015.4, 2015.10, 2015.25, 2015.28, 2015.29, 2015.36)		3 (2015.25, 2015.29, 2015.34)	
	7 (2022-23.2, 2022-23.3, 2022-23.7, 2022-23.13, 2022-23.21, 2022-23.28)		5 (2022-23.2, 2022-23.3, 2022-23.16, 2022-23.21, 2022-23.24)		4 (2022-23.2, 2022-23.13, 2022-23.16, 2022-23.24)		1 (2022-23.3)	
<i>De Standaard</i>	3 (2015.7, 2015.15, 2015.35)		3 (2015.3, 2015.6, 2015.7)		5 (2015.3, 2015.6, 2015.7, 2015.26, 2015.35)		2 (2015.3, 2015.18)	
	4 (2022-23.10, 2022-23.26, 2022-23.29, 2022-23.31)		2 (2022-23.26, 2022-23.34)		5 (2022-23.10, 2022-23.17, 2022-23.29, 2022-23.31, 2022-23.36)		4 (2022-23.10, 2022-23.26, 2022-23.29, 2022-23.34)	
<i>De Tijd</i>	8 (2015.8, 2015.12, 2015.14, 2015.17, 2015.19, 2015.24, 2015.32, 2015.33)		0		7 (2015.8, 2015.14, 2015.17, 2015.19, 2015.24, 2015.32, 2015.33)		2 (2015.8, 2015.19)	
	7 (2022-23.4, 2022-23.8, 2022-23.14, 2022-23.19, 2022-23.22, 2022-23.27, 2022-23.32)		2 (2022-23.8, 2022-23.22)		1 (2022-23.4)		4 (2022-23.8, 2022-23.14, 2022-23.22, 2022-23.27)	
<i>HLN</i>	5 (2015.1, 2015.2, 2015.5, 2015.27, 2015.30)		2 (2015.5, 2015.16)		3 (2015.5, 2015.16, 2015.30)		2 (2015.16, 2015.27)	
	6 (2022-23.1, 2022-23.5, 2022-23.6, 2022-23.9, 2022-23.18, 2022-23.23)		1 (2022-23.15)		3 (2022-23.9, 2022-23.11, 2022-23.15)		1 (2022-23.11)	
<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i>	4 (2015.9, 2015.11, 2015.21, 2015.23)		1 (2015.20)		3 (2015.20, 2015.21, 2015.31)		2 (2015.9, 2015.22)	
	5 (2022-23.12, 2022-23.25, 2022-23.30, 2022-23.33, 2022-23.35)		1 (2022-23.33)		4 (2022-23.12, 2022-23.20, 2022-23.33, 2022-23.35)		2 (2022-23.25, 2022-23.33)	
Total	2015	2022-23	2015	2022-23	2015	2022-23	2015	2022-23
	24	29	7	11	24	17	11	12
	53		18		41		23	

Appendix 3. Analysis verbal processes

Who speaks? → ↓ Newspaper	Refugee	Non-refugee				
		Laypeople	Politicians		Refugee expert	Institutional expert
De Morgen	2015: 2 2022-23: 4	2015: 1 2022-23: 3	2015: 12 2022-23: 12		2015: 3 2022-23: 7	2015: 1 2022-23: 6
	Een Soedanese man (2015.29)	Smokkelaar Abu Saif (2015.34)	Staatssecretaris Francken (N-VA) (2015.4)	Jeremie Vaneeckhout (2022-23.1)	Auteur Johan Wets (HIVA) (2015.13)	Judith Sunderland, Human Rights Watch-directeur voor Europa en Centraal Azië (2015.10)
	Een Afrikaanse vrouw (2015.29)	De Oekraïense Taisiia Nakonechna, die in Gent als vrijwilligster betrokken was (2022-23.3)	Premier Charles Michel (MR) (2015.4)	Diependaeles woordvoerder (2022-23.7)	Wets en mede-auteur Andrea Rea (ULB) (2015.13)	Nathalie Debast, woordvoerder van de Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (VVSG) (2022-23.7)
	Yevgenii Yevstavief (41) (2022-23.3)	Jean-Jacques Nyassé (2022-23.3)	De Belgische premier Charles Michel (2015.10)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie, Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.13)	Kris Pollet van de Europese koepel voor vluchtelingen-organisaties (ECRE) (2015.29)	Mensenrechtenexpert Brigitte Herremans (2022-23.16)
	Gaby Tasu (28) (2022-23.3)	Sidy Sy Savané (2022-23.3)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.13)	Vlaams minister van Wonen, Matthias Diependaele (N-VA) (2022-23.13)	Pieter Van Roeyen van Caritas International (2022-23.3)	Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, baas van de Wereldgezondheidsorganisatie (2022-23.16)
	Roman Muntean (2022-23.3)		De Italiaanse premier Matteo Renzo (2015.25)	PS-burgemeester Catherine Moureaux (2022-23.13)	Ana Yavoroska van Caritas International (2022-23.3)	Filosoof Hannah Arendt (2022-23.16)
	Grigori Baran (2022-23.3)		Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.25)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.16)	Magali Pratte van Samusocial (2022-23.3)	Chomsky (2022-23.16)
			De Hongaarse premier Viktor Orbán (2015.28)	Arthurt Orlians, woordvoerder van Vlaams minister van Binnenlands Bestuurbart Somers (Open Vld) (2022-23.21)	Mieke Schrooten, onderzoeker en docent sociaal werk aan de Odisee Hogeschool (2022-23.7)	Oud-kolonel Roger Housen (2022-23.16)
			De Libische VN-ambassadeur (2015.28)	Ben Bruynseels, woordvoerder van Vlaams minister van Wonen Matthias Diependaele (N-VA) (2022-23.21)	Tine Clau, directeur van Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2022-23.13)	
			De Franse minister van Binnenlandse Zaken Bernard Cazeneuve (2015.29)	Partijvoorzitter Tom Van Grieken (2022-23.24)	Ina Vandenberghe, adjunct van de directeur bij Myria, het federaal migratiecentrum (2022-23.21)	
	Natasha Bertaud, migrati woordvoerder van de Europese Commissie (2015.29)		Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie, Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.28)	Joost Depotter, coördinator beleid en ondersteuning bij Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2022-23.21)		
	Staatssecretaris Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.36)		Eurocommissaris Janez Lenarcic (2022-23.28)			
	Fred Teeven (VVD) (2015.36)		Collega-commissaris Ylva Johansson (Binnenlandse Zaken) (2022-23.28)			
De Standaard	2015: 3 2022-23: 0		2015: 2 2022-23: 0	2015: 7 2022-23: 14		2015: 1 2022-23: 6
	Interviews van asielzoekers (2015.15)	Een lezer reageerde in mijn mailbox (2015.26)	Orban (2015.3)	Minister van Maatschappelijke Integratie Karine Lalieux (PS) (2022-23.17)	Geert De Vulder, woordvoerder van de DVZ (2015.15)	Timothy Garton Ash (2015.3)

	Beiroet Heba (26) (2015.18)	Publicist Wim Van Rooy (2015.26)	Patrick Dewael (Open VLD) (2015.7)	Maciej Wasik, de onderminister van Binnenlandse Zaken (2022-23.29)	Jeff Crisp, onderzoeker aan de Oxford University en gewezen hoofd van beleid bij UNHCR, het VN-vluchtelingen-agentschap (2022-23.10)	Willem Staes van 11.11.11 (2022-23.10)
	Iyas Kaadouni (35) (2015.18)		Gwendolyn Rutten (2015.7)	Krzysztof Kosinski, de burgemeester van het stadje Ciechanów (2022-23.29)	Dirk Van den Bulck, de commissaris-generaal voor de Vluchtelingen en de Staatlozen in ons land (2022-23.10)	Grupa Granica, een Pools netwerk van ngo's (2022-23.29)
			De Britse premier David Cameron (2015.7)	Serhiy Marchenko, Oekraïense minister van Financiën (2022-23.29)	Mieke Candaele van Fedasil (2022-23.10)	
			Staatssecretaris Francken (2015.15)	Lucian Bode, de Roemeense minister van Binnenlandse Zaken (2022-23.29)	Nils Luyten van de vzw Orbit (2022-23.26)	
			N-VA voorzitter Bart De Wever (2015.26)	Roman Mikulec, de Slowaakse minister van Binnenlandse Zaken (2022-23.29)	Natalia Prokopchuk, communicatie-functionaris verbonden aan het Hoog Commissariaat voor de Vluchtelingen (UNHCR) in Europa (2022-23.29)	
			De sociaaldemocratische premier Thorning-Schmidt (2015.35)	De Moor (2022-23.31)	Tine Clause, directeur van Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2022-23.31)	
			Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Nicole de Moor (CD&V) (2022-23.10)	Minister van Defensie Ludivine Dendonder (PS) (2022-23.31)		
			Open VLD-Kamerlid Tim Vandenput (2022-23.17)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie, Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.34)		
			Kamerlid Theo Francken (2022-23.17)	Assita Kanko (N-VA) (2022-23.36)		
			Vlaams Belangvoorzitter Tom Van Grieken (2022-23.17)			
<i>De Tijd</i>	2015: 3 2022-23: 0	2015: 0 2022-23: 0	2015: 9 2022-23: 10		2015: 1 2022-23: 6	2015: 4 2022-23: 0
	Marwan (25) die uit Aleppo is gevlucht (2015.14)		Frontvrouw Liesbeth Homans (2015.8)	Het kabinet van de Moor (2022-23.4)	Fanny François, directeur beleidsondersteuning bij Fedasil (2015.19)	De onderzoekers van het BAMF (2015.14)
	De Syrische asielzoeker Ayid (21) (2015.14)		Francken (2015.12)	Rajae Maouane, de covoorzitter van de Franstalige groenen (2022-23.4)	Frederik Bordon van het VN-Vluchtelingen-commissariaat (2022-23.8)	Woordvoester An Luyten van het Rode Kruis Vlaanderen (2015.19)
	Een Syriër (2015.14)		Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.17)	De Moor (2022-23.8)	Dirk Van den Bulck, de topman van het Commissariaat-generaal voor de Vluchtelingen en de Staatlozen (CGVS) (2022-23.8)	Serge De Kerf van Sodexo (2015.19)
			De Australische premier (2015.17)	Mahdi (2022-23.19)	Mieke Candaele van Fedasil (2022-23.8)	Geert Depondt (CD&V), de OCMW-voorzitter van Roeselare (2015.19)
			Duitse premier Merkel (2015.19)	Minister-president Jan Jambon (N-VA) (2022-23.22)	Tine Claus, de directeur van Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2022-23.19)	
			Wouter Beke, CD&V-voorzitter en burgemeester van Leopoldsburg (2015.19)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.22)	Dirk Van den Bulck van het vluchtelingen-commissariaat (CGVS) 2022-23.22)	
			Het kabinet-Francken (2015.24)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.27)	Filippo Grandi, de Hoge Commissaris voor de Vluchtelingen van de VN (UNHCR) (2022-23.27)	

			De Belgisch premier Charles Michel (MR) (2015.32)	Siegchild Lacoere, de woordvoester van Mahdi (2022-23.27)			
			Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.33)	De nieuwe staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Nicole de Moor (CD&V) (2022-23.32)			
			Nadia Naji, covoorzitter van Groen (2022-23.4)				
HLN	2015: 0 2022-23: 1	2015: 15 2022-23: 0	2015: 7 2022-23: 8		2015: 0 2022-23: 2	2015: 0 2022-23: 2	
	Anastasia Alekseyuk (29) (2022-23.11)	Martine Fiers, Knokke-Heist (2015.30)	Lena Vervoort, Reet (2015.30)	Francken (2015.2)	Burgemeester Cécile Jodogne (DéFI) (2022-23.5)	Marie-Anne Robberechts van Samusocial (2022-23.6)	Persmagistraat Pascal Hubain (2022-23.9)
		Walter van Dyck, Heusden (2015.30)	Philippe Bourda, Nieuwpoort (2015.30)	Sp.a-Kamerlid Monica De Coninck (2015.2)	Voormalig staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2022-23.9)	Dimitri Vandezande (2022-23.9)	Jan Smets, voorzitter van de Koninklijke Schenking (2022-23.18)
		Ingrid D.L. (2015.30)	Philippe Bourda, Nieuwpoort (2015.30)	Tom van Grieken (2015.5)	Minister van Ambtenarenzaken Petra De Sutter (Groen) (2022-23.9)		
		Luc Clement, Brugge (2015.30)	Rudy Bruynooghe, Waregem (2015.30)	Bart De Wever (N-VA) (2015.16)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.15)		
		Roger Deprez, Hasselt (2015.30)	Jessy Van Uffelen (2015.30)	Monica De Coninck (s.pa) (2015.16)	Kamerlid Dries Van Langenhove (2022-23.15)		
		Robert Hessens, Brugge (2015.30)	Didier Vanhede, Menen (2015.30)	Partijgenoot Matthias Storme (2015.16)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.18)		
		Gonda Lievens, Sjeiks Antwerpen (2015.30)	Thomas Triphon, Antwerpen (2015.30)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.27)	Het kabinet van staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.23)		
		Jackie Verspecht, Hamme (2015.30)		Staatssecretaris De Moor (2022-23.1)			
Het Nieuwsblad	2015: 0 2022-23: 3	2015: 0 2022-23: 2	2015: 11 2022-23: 7		2015: 5 2022-23: 5	2015: 4 2022-23: 3	
	Sergey (24) (2022-23.25)	Nick Van Mieghem, actileider bij Voorpost (2022-23.20)		Francken (2015.9)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.23)	Bij de Brusselse hulporganisatie Samusocial [...] woordvoerder Christophe Thielens (2015.11)	OCMW-voorzitter Johnny Reweghs (sp.a) (2015.20)
	De Oekraïense Kameroener Cabrel (27) (2022-23.25)		Eric (51) (2022-23.25)	Titelvoerend burgemeester Rudy Demotte (PS) (2015.11)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.31)	Charlotte Vanduycke, diensthoofd opvang en bescherming bij Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2015.11)	Korpschef Luc Liboton (2015.20)
	Mustafa (30) (2022-23.25)			Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.11)	Vicepremier Petra De Sutter (Groen) (2022-23.12)	Els Keytsman van Vluchtelingenwerk (2015.21)	De Griekse kustwacht (2015.22)
				Burgemeester Peter Reekmans (Dorpspartij) (2015.20)	Mahdi (2022-23.12)	De Internationale Organisatie voor Migratie (IOM) (2015.22)	Raphaël Piret, woordvoerder van Artsen Zonder Grenzen (2015.23)
				Hans Bonte (sp.a), burgemeester van Vilvoorde (2015.20)	Kamerlid Theo Francken (N-VA) (2022-23.12)	Vluchtelingencommissaris Dirk Van den Bulck (2015.31)	Mensenrechtenadvocaat Alexis Deswaef (2022-23.12)
				Olivier Van Raemdonck, van minister van Veiligheid en Binnenlandse Zaken Jan Jambon (N-	Het kabinet van staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Sammy Mahdi (CD&V) (2022-23.25)	Tine Claus van Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (2022-23.12)	Nathalie Debast (VWSG) (2022-23.30)

			VA) (2015.20)				
			Katrien Jansseune, woordvoerder van staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Theo Francken (N-VA) (2015.20)	Staatssecretaris voor Asiel en Migratie Nicole De Moor (CD&V) (2022-23.30)	Migratie-expert Johan Wets (KU Leuven) (2022-23.12)	Dimitri Temmerman, woordvoerder van NMBS (2022-23.30)	
			Francken (2015.21)	Het kabinet van Vlaams minister van Wonen Matthias Diependaele (N-VA) (2022-23.30)	Didier Vanderslycke, coördinator van Orbit VZW (2022-23.12)		
			De Italiaanse premier Matteo Renzi (2015.22)	Sammy Mahdi (2022-23.35)	Commissaris-generaal Dirk Van den Bulck (2022-23.12)		
					Dirk Van den Bulck, hoofd van het Commissariaat-Generaal voor Vluchtelingen en Staatlozen (CGVS) (2022-23.33)		
			Non-refugee				
	Refugee	Laypeople	Politicians		Refugee expert	Institutional expert	
Total	2015: 8 2022-23: 8	2015: 18 2022-23: 5	2015: 48 2022-23: 51		2015: 10 2022-23: 26	2015: 10 2022-23: 13	