



# I-CLAIM

Improving the Living  
and Labour Conditions  
of Irregularised Migrant  
Households in Europe

## Discourses about irregularised migrants in the Netherlands

*Representation and narratives in media,  
politics, and civil society*

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February 2025



Funded by  
the European Union



UK Research  
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## Executive Summary

This I-CLAIM report presents the findings of a corpus-based analysis of the discourses surrounding irregular migration in the Netherlands, with a focus on the terminology and narratives used in media, politics, and civil society. The study reveals important differences in how each domain represents irregularised migrants, their status, and the broader migration issue.

The analysis shows that each domain uses distinct terminology to describe irregularised migrants. In politics, terms such as "rejected asylum seekers" and "alien" are commonly used, while civil society tends to favour the term "undocumented." The media employs a more varied range of terms, with the notable inclusion of the word "illegals," which is not used as frequently in the other two domains.

One of the key findings is that the discourse on irregular migration in the Netherlands is highly politicized. Media and political narratives often converge in framing irregular migration primarily as a political issue, particularly with regard to national and local policies, and more broadly as a European concern. Both domains emphasize the challenges posed to migration policy, especially in the context of border control and asylum management. In contrast, civil society discourse focuses more on the human aspects of irregular migration, attempting to humanize migrants through personal stories. However, this humanization is often linked to vulnerability, portraying irregular migrants as dependent on welfare and support.

The report also examines the case of the *kinderpardon* (child pardon) regularization programme, which serves as an example of how irregular migration is framed in the media, politics, and civil society. In both media and political discourse, the regularization process is framed as a challenge to political parties and migration policy, and it is seen not as a humane response to system failures but as a loophole that undermines the effectiveness of the migration regime. Civil society presents a contrasting perspective, using individual migrant stories to show how the *kinderpardon* programme, while regularising some children, was ultimately ineffective in addressing the plight of rejected migrant children drawing on testimonies by those affected.

In conclusion, the report highlights the political nature of the discourse surrounding irregular migration in the Netherlands, with both media and politics framing the issue in terms of control and policy. Civil society, while attempting to humanize irregular migrants, often reinforces a narrative of vulnerability and dependence. The absence of work-related narratives further underscores the limited framing of irregular migrants in terms of welfare and social policy, rather than their role as active workers. These findings suggest a need for a more nuanced approach to irregular migration discourse, one that acknowledges the complexity of migrants' experiences and contributions to society.

## 1. Introduction

This report presents key findings of the I-CLAIM discourse and narrative analysis of irregularised migrants and irregular migration in media, politics and civil society. It describes the most important quantitative results, followed by a qualitative analysis of some topics, providing an in-depth insight into the narratives and framing within the three domains. Methodological details are published in the separate methodological note.

## 2. The Discursive Construction of Irregularity in the Media

### 2.1. Data Sample

For the Media Corpus, 2293 texts were sampled from the four leading newspapers in the Netherlands in the five-year period January 2019 to December 2023.

Media	Texts 2293	Tokens 1.838.627
Algemeen dagblad	747	
NRC	408	
Telegraaf	627	
Volkskrant	511	

### 2.2. Quantitative Analysis

#### 2.2.1. High-frequency words

The list of high-frequency words provides an overview of salient topics in the discourse on irregularised migration in Dutch media. While the Dutch media primarily focuses on *the Netherlands* (rank 46), *Europe*, *the EU* and *(EU) countries* are all high-frequency words, showing the preoccupation with the European Union, framing migration as a European phenomenon/problem. The media corpus uses many different words to refer to (irregular) migrants, such as *migrants* (rank 56), *asylum seekers* (rank 60), *refugees* (rank 129), *illegals* (rank 166) and *illegal migrants* (rank 184). The term *undocumented*, for instance, is ranked lower at 289. *Shelter* features high on the list of high-frequency words indicate that shelter, both for asylum seekers and irregular migrants, is a prominent topic.

Moreover, the media corpus, in general, speaks a lot about politics. The list with the 200 most frequent words already demonstrates this, featuring words such as *cabinet* and *VVD*, the name of a major political party. Moreover, the word *Trump* shows attention to the political situation in the United States. Additionally, references to money (*euro* and *geld*) might refer to migration policy and shelter costs. *Children* are also a high-frequency word, possibly because the regularisation of irregular children was widely reported in the timeframe of the media corpus. Lastly, we observe *Morocco* as a high-frequency word. As we show below, Morocco features as a country of origin of troublesome asylum seekers or so-called '*veiligelanders*' (people from safe countries who should be returned or who have no right to protection). Secondly, Morocco is

reported on concerning bilateral agreements<sup>1</sup> on the return of asylum seekers and the political process of constructing these.

Word	Rank	Frequency
Nederland	46	4926
Migranten	56	3492
asielzoekers	60	3397
Land	64	3139
landen	111	1934
opvang	115	1856
europese	116	1837
Eu	117	1823
europa	127	1678
Nl	128	1661
vluchtelingen	129	1652
amsterdam	134	1532
Vvd	136	1508
migratie	155	1317
trump	156	1312
illegalen	166	1238
kinderen	174	1192
Euro	176	1190
politie	180	1152
kabinet	182	1137
illegale	184	1119
Geld	185	1117
grens	188	1100
marokko	198	1050
Werk	199	1044

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<sup>1</sup> A possible reason for the attention to bilateral agreements in Dutch media is the EU-Turkey deal. This deal is from before the timeframe of this analysis, but the Dutch prime minister being one of its architects might be a reason why bilateral agreements are discussed frequently.

### 2.2.2. Semantic groups

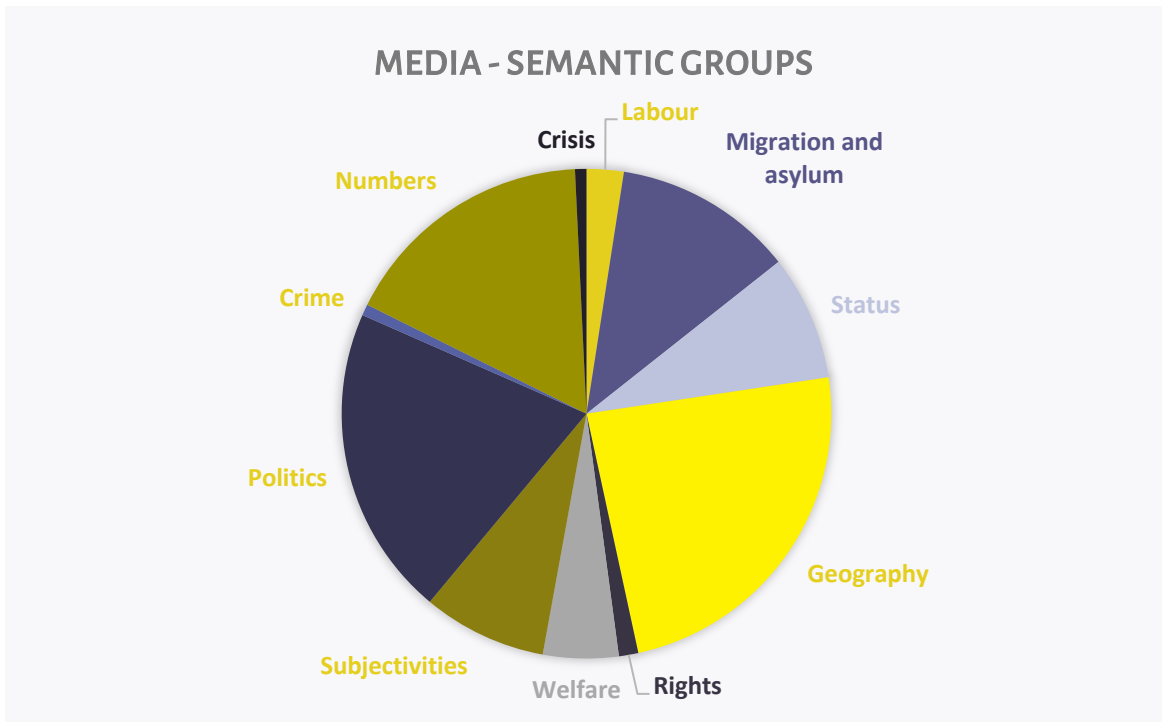


Figure 1: Saliency of macro-topics (media corpus)

Grouping frequencies of words with similar meanings in semantic groups, we can see similar yet slightly different semantic preoccupations. The attention to politics, one of the largest semantic groups, is interesting, as it shows how irregular migration is portrayed mainly as an issue of politics. Looking at subgroups, we see that migration is talked about in the context of the (parliamentary) political process more than, for instance, migration policy. Next, we see a semantic preoccupation with geography; in this semantic group place names and geographic locations are grouped. Within this group, we can see an almost equal distribution of words relating to the Netherlands and words pertaining to Europe; indicating how migration is seen as much a domestic issue as it is European.

Furthermore, zooming in on the semantic group 'migration and asylum', we can see how the media reporting on (irregular) migration focuses mainly on asylum. As also demonstrated in the Dutch policy report (I-CLAIM WP3), irregular migrants are seen as rejected asylum seekers, mainly ignoring all other forms of irregularity within the Netherlands. This semantic group also clearly demonstrates a focus on the return of irregular migrants, which is spoken about much more than their arrival. Although the subcategory of borders and border control is discussed, it should be pointed out that this concerns policies of border control rather than the border crossing of people. Finally, the analysis of semantic preoccupations reveals the relative absence of words relating to work and labour. Looking at this semantic group, we see primarily general words relating to work; the more specific words in this semantic group concern labour migrants, often Eastern European labour migrants.

Semantic group	Subcategory	sum frequency
Labour		4.652
Migration and asylum		22.614
	<i>Asylum</i>	14.559
	<i>Borders</i>	3.997
	<i>Return</i>	2.498
	<i>Stay</i>	1.047
	<i>Arrival</i>	513
Legal Status		15.700
Geography		45.558
	<i>The Netherlands</i>	13.783
	<i>Europe - EU</i>	12.394
Rights		2.430
Welfare		9.474
	<i>Housing</i>	5.898
	<i>Health</i>	2.683
	<i>Education</i>	893
Subject		15.548
	<i>Subjective experience</i>	7.511
	<i>Social categories/identities</i>	5.430
	<i>Family/Households</i>	2.607
Politics		39.024
	<i>Politics</i>	28.656
	<i>Policy</i>	7.383
	<i>Police</i>	2.985
Criminality		1.411
Numbers		32.119
Crisis		1.427

### 2.2.3. Collocations

#### 2.2.3.1. Migration

The collocations of the general base word *migratie* [migration] show that this word is mainly associated with terms that define migration as either legal or illegal (sum likelihood 837.002). Given the focus of the media corpus on irregular migration, it is not surprising that most associations are *illegal* or *irregular*. Next to this, migration is associated with a need or desire for control (751.238); this includes words like *Grip* (likelihood 177.581), *ongecontroleerde* [uncontrolled] (58.940) and *beheersbaar* [manageable] (24.997).

However, the semantic group ‘control’ mainly comprises words indicating to *stop* or *diminish* migration (sum likelihood 417.194). Related to this, migration is strongly associated with words indicating *supranational politics* (sum likelihood 596.275), mainly *Europe* and the *European Union* (sum likelihood 431.211).

#### *Proto-narratives*

*The government should get a grip on migration*

### 2.2.3.2. The EU needs to collaborate to counter illegal migration Collocations of terminology

#### 2.2.3.2.1. *Asielzoekers*

Within the media corpus, created using search terms related explicitly to irregular migration, we observe collocations for asylum seekers that relate to *legal status* (sum likelihood 6.135.878); these words often indicate that asylum seekers have been rejected or did (not) obtain a residence permit. Moreover, the words associated with asylum seekers show specific *characteristics* (sum likelihood 1.147.479), painting the picture of *minors, males, travelling alone, without a chance of getting asylum*. Moreover, regarding geography, it collocates with *Morocco*. Interestingly, while there are many words associated with asylum seekers that belong to the semantic group *migration and asylum* (sum likelihood 3.047.321), asylum seekers are hardly related to *arrival* (sum likelihood 203.619) but mostly with *return* (sum likelihood 1.211.192) and *stay* (sum likelihood 1.272.013), which could of course also indicate the fear for them staying.

#### *Proto-narratives*

*Nuisance asylum seekers must be placed in basic austere shelters*

*The government must do more to expel hopeless asylum seekers from safe countries such as Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia more quickly*

#### 2.2.3.2.2. *Veiligelanders*

The collocations and proto-narratives related to the word asylum seeker led us to investigate the collocations of the word '*Veiligelanders*'. *Veiligelanders* is a relatively new word<sup>2</sup> used to refer to people, usually asylum seekers, coming from so-called 'safe countries', usually North African countries. For instance, the term is associated with *Morocco* (likelihood 52.427). Yet, the term mainly relates to various forms of *nuisance* (*overlast* in Dutch) as the strongest association by far (sum likelihood 251.129). Moreover, nuisance is often associated with *shelter and shelter conditions* (sum likelihood 192.162), as the connection between nuisance and asylum seekers triggered plans for special shelter locations for this group of asylum seekers. The portrayal of people from safe countries in Dutch media as troublemakers and criminals that should be punished for their behaviour shows the connection between asylum seekers and the need for shelters with basic austere<sup>3</sup> conditions, providing not much more than the bare minimum.

#### *Proto-narrative*

*People from safe countries cause nuisance; therefore, their shelter has to be austere.*

## 2.3. Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis further explores two topics in media discourse: the *Veiligelander* and the child regularisation programme called *Kinderpardon*.

### 2.3.1. *Veiligelanders*

The media often portray *veiligelanders*—asylum seekers from 'safe' countries—as distinct from 'genuine' refugees who flee war-torn areas. In these narratives, their presence is most strongly associated with disruption, or what is generically referred to as *overlast* (nuisance), causing trouble in local towns where they are housed.

<sup>2</sup> For reference, it appears for the first time in government documents in 2016.

<sup>3</sup> In Dutch this is referred to as 'sobere opvang'



*'...how Ter Apel is being abandoned by parliament and other municipalities. And that a group of several hundred asylum seekers, who have little chance of being allowed to stay, meanwhile causes more and more problems and drives residents to despair' (NRC Handelsblad – 21-6-2023)*

The reporting highlights criminal behaviour or public disturbances, such as shoplifting and free-riding public transport, but also non-criminal but subjectively offensive behaviour, such as spitting on the ground or not talking to women.

The image often presented is of roaming groups of North-African men, going from country to country to exploit the asylum process despite having little chance of obtaining refugee status. They are depicted as opportunistic, taking advantage of benefits such as financial support and shelter, while manipulating the system through repeated appeals or delays in the Dublin process. These portrayals paint *veiligelanders* as abusers of a system meant to protect those in genuine need, obstructing asylum seekers fleeing actual wars.

*'The so-called 'veiligelanders' cause a lot of nuisance, occupy reception capacity and contribute to the erosion of social support for the reception of 'real' refugees' (De Volkskrant – 17-12-2021)*

The discourse also drives specific policy recommendations. *Veiligelanders* are depicted as undeserving of the benefits and protection afforded to genuine refugees, leading to the portrayal of policymakers as irrational for continuing to offer such resources to this group. Consequently, proposals to house *veiligelanders* in more restrictive, sober, and sometimes prison-like conditions emerge as a logical response.

*'an austere reception... 'no luxury' (...) a bed, food, toothbrush, razors. But no pocket money (...) on TripAdvisor the registration centre in Ter Apel would now get four stars. We want to get that to zero' (NRC Handelsblad – 19.11.2019)*

This framing is part of a broader narrative emphasising the Netherlands' lack of *grip op migratie* (grip on migration). The image of *veiligelanders* contributes to a growing perception of government impotence, reinforcing the idea that stricter policies are needed to regain control.

Where one would expect the discourse to focus specifically on asylum seekers, a notable trend is the conflation of *veiligelanders* with *uitgeprocedeerde asielzoekers* (rejected asylum seekers), 'illegal' and *irregular migrants*. By discussing these groups simultaneously and framing individuals with poor prospects as irregular migrants, the discourse blurs the lines between those navigating legal asylum procedures and those living outside these procedures. This conflation suggests that *veiligelanders*, despite technically being within the asylum process and still having the opportunity to be granted refugee status, are already on the path to illegality due to their near-certain rejection. As a result, they are often treated and spoken about as if they were part of the broader category of irregular migrants.

Interestingly, the discourse surrounding *veiligelanders* shows little distinction between broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. Despite their differing journalistic approaches and target audiences, both types of media tend to perpetuate similar narratives. They are, moreover, portraying this as a significant political challenge.<sup>4</sup> This convergence in discourse across media formats suggests that the framing of *veiligelanders* as threats to social order and system integrity is widespread.

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<sup>4</sup> For context, in 2023 there were 3.035 asylum seekers from a 'safe country' in the Dutch asylum system.

<https://www.coa.nl/nl/lijst/het-waar-dat-veel-asielzoekers-uit-veilige-landen-komen>

### 2.3.2. Kinderpardon

The media discourse surrounding the Kinderpardon reveals a stark, binary framing of migration policy, where individuals either obtain asylum or leave the country. Within this rigid framework, regularisation policies are portrayed as undermining the integrity of this migration system. The very existence of the Kinderpardon, which seeks to address the cases in which children have lived in legal limbo for years but meanwhile have become 'rooted' in Dutch society, is framed not as a necessary correction to the system's shortcomings but as a destabilising force. Over the past five years, the discourse has increasingly emphasised preventing future exceptions by reinforcing stricter, more black-and-white rules. This includes the suggestion that procedures should assess from the outset whether a case might later become poignant or urgent.

*This 'direness' had to be established at the beginning of the procedure with an 'early test', it was said. As a result, there should be no more pitiful cases after the last pardon scheme - which has now been concluded. (De Telegraaf – 29 November 2021)*

The framing of the Kinderpardon as undermining migration policy also alleges that it will potentially attract asylum seekers to the Netherlands. This is referred to as the '*aanzuigende werking*' or the pull effect of specific policies. Furthermore, these policies are depicted as encouraging irregular migrants to prolong their stay in the hope that extended periods of uncertainty might ultimately lead to legal recognition. In this media portrayal, regularisation is not seen as a humane response to system failures but as a loophole, weakening the overall migration regime and threatening its perceived effectiveness. Moreover, especially tabloid media tend to stress that with the regularisation of children, their parents (i.e., adults) are also allowed to stay.

*Every border produces borderline cases. That turned out to be unacceptable for the 'asylum lobby'. So another regulation followed: the kinderpardon from 2013. Once again, several thousand foreigners, most of whom were adults, were given a residence permit. The signal was disastrous: those who are rejected and refuse to leave will eventually be rewarded (de Telegraaf – 3 September 2022)*

*We are talking about the façade of the kinderpardon. Because it is precisely the parents who get their way with this, after years of grasping at every straw to take legal action against a new rejection. (Algemeen Dagblad – 29 December 2019)*

While the framing above is more prominent in the tabloid newspapers, all newspapers in the sample share the portrayal of the *kinderpardon* as a political battleground, with the reporting almost similar to the coverage of a football match. It depicts it as a contentious issue between coalition parties within the government, including their different motivations and dramatisation of changes in political stance. For example, the *kinderpardon* is: '*the first big test*' for the new government (de Volkskrant – 30 January 2019), '*a new explosive topic*' (de Volkskrant 22 January 2019), the '*Waterloo for the VVD [the Dutch liberal party]*' (de Telegraaf - 22 mei 2019), '*the Achilles heel of the government coalition*' (de Telegraaf - 6 juli 2023).

### 3. The Discursive Construction of Irregularity in Politics

#### 3.1. Data Sample

The politics corpus includes documents related to Dutch national politics, including transcripts of debates, written communication between the government, parliament, and senate. This is complemented by party programs of all political parties participating in the two national elections held within the five-year sample period (January 2019 – December 2023).

Politics	Texts: 478	Tokens: 13.705.213
Party programmes	33	
Debates and documents Tweede Kamer	408	
Debates and documents Eerste Kamer	37	

#### 3.2. Quantitative analysis

##### 3.2.1. High-frequency words

Examining the high-frequency words in the politics corpus shows that the politics corpus is, first and foremost, about *politics*. Within this corpus' 200 most frequent words, we see multiple words referring to government and parliament, such as *minister*, *parliament*, *state secretary*, *cabinet* and *government*. Furthermore, *municipalities* feature as a high-frequency word; as we will see, municipalities have a prominent role in the execution of Dutch migration and integration policies. Another prominent topic is Europe in the words *European* and *EU*. As we demonstrate below, migration and irregular migration are framed predominantly as a European phenomenon or problem within Dutch national politics. A last interesting high-frequency word is *safety*, indicating that migration is also framed as a safety issue. Yet, the word *migration* itself only ranks 366.

Word	Rank	Frequency
voorzitter	30	57510
minister	46	39850
motie	47	36868
kamer	48	36783
mensen	53	33767
nederland	61	29289
staatssecretaris	80	20839
kabinet	102	15369
vvd	111	14040
landen	122	11992
europese	126	11401
wet	127	11359
sp	140	10023
onderzoek	153	9495
groenlinks	158	9335
cda	161	9246
regering	164	9190
gemeenten	167	8956
pvv	168	8883

eu	181	8177
nederlandse	185	8033
veiligheid	185	8033
pvda	195	7623
commissie	197	7531

Looking specifically for the most frequently used terminology in the politics corpus, one can observe how the word *asylum seeker* appears most frequently (ranking place 242), followed by *alien* (vreemdeling), ranking 282. *Out-of-procedure* ranks 2445, *illegals* ranks 3758, and *undocumented* ranks 4312.

### 3.2.2. Semantic groups

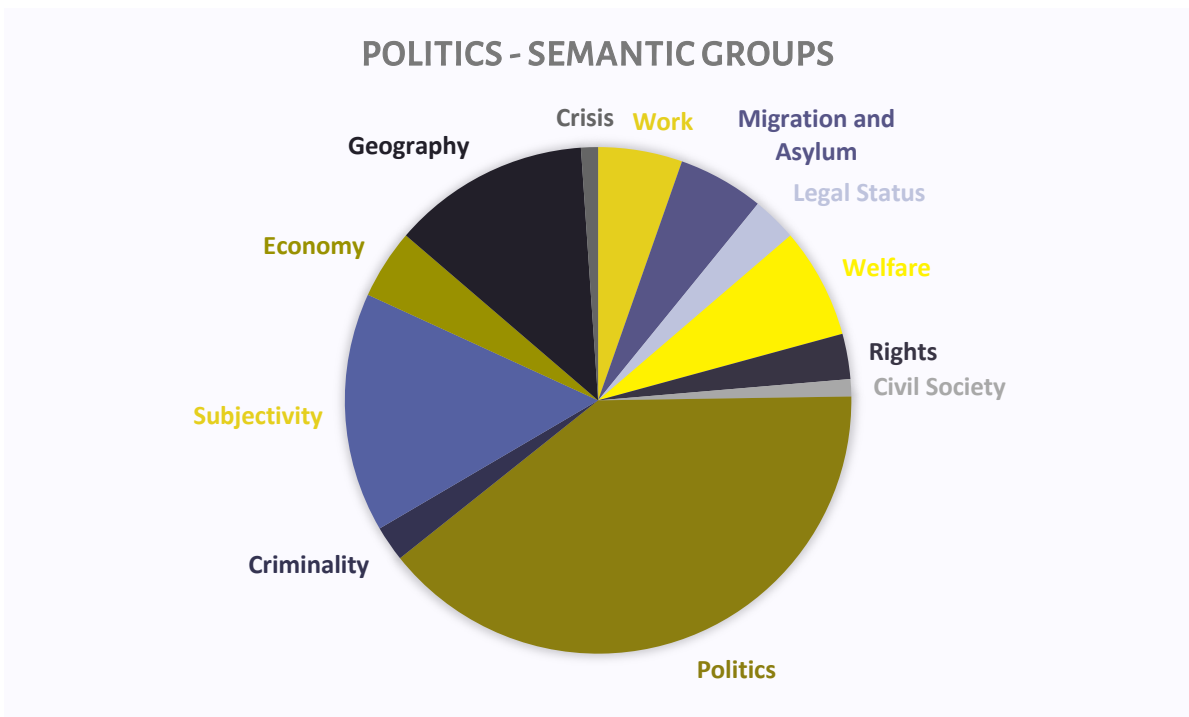


Figure 2: Saliene of macro topics (politics corpus)

Grouping semantically related words together, we see that the semantic preoccupation within the politics corpus is with politics and the political process in particular. This is unsurprising, as many of the documents included in this corpus are transcripts and communication between government and parliament. Moreover, the sub-group of policy is prominent within politics. Additionally, and contrary to the media and civil society corpora, there is another semantic group: the economy, including words about costs and budgeting.

The geography semantic group provides interesting insights into where discussions about irregular migration occur within the politics corpus. As to be expected of a corpus concerning Dutch national politics, the main focus is the Netherlands; however, there is a sizeable semantic preoccupation with Europe. This includes other European countries and the European Union, which aligns with irregular migration being framed as a European issue. For example, Europe is more prominent than the Dutch local level, or Caribbean parts of the Kingdom.

A significant group is that of subjectivities; this comprises words indicating categories such as age or gender, and a subgroup of words indicating victimhood, such as *victim* or *vulnerable*. It also includes a subgroup

indicating subjective experience, such as *life, health, happiness*, and lexical items related to family, such as *children, parents, and (nuclear) families*.

In the semantic group welfare, we observe words relating to general social support policies, but also more specific references to housing policies; a prominent subgroup here are words relating to shelter. To a lesser extent, there are words relating to healthcare and education.

Interesting is the relatively low salience of migration and asylum. Yet, within this semantic group, it is interesting to observe a solid semantic preoccupation with the asylum system in a politics corpus specifically selected for irregular and undocumented migration.

Semantic Group	Subcategory (non-exhaustive)	Sub-sub-category	Sum frequency
<b>Work</b>			<b>41.336</b>
	<i>Labour Inspectorate</i>		7.395
	<i>Employers</i>		5.560
	<i>Employees</i>		5.395
<b>Migration and Asylum</b>			<b>33.998</b>
	<i>Asylum</i>		14.243
	<i>Migration</i>		13.928
		<i>Return</i>	3.728
		<i>Arrival</i>	2.679
		<i>Stay</i>	2.171
	<i>Policy</i>		8.198
		<i>Residence Permit</i>	3.342
	<i>Borders</i>		4.103
	<i>Detention</i>		1.724
<b>Legal Status</b>			<b>21.939</b>
<b>Geography</b>			<b>97.100</b>
	<i>The Netherlands</i>		50.666
		<i>National</i>	36.987
		<i>Local</i>	9.267
		<i>Caribisch Nederland</i>	4.412
	<i>Europe</i>		19.246
	<i>Global</i>		8.146
	<i>Countries of Origin</i>		6.268
<b>Rights</b>			<b>22.212</b>
<b>Welfare</b>			<b>54.197</b>
	<i>Support</i>		16.391
	<i>Housing</i>		13.192
		<i>Shelter</i>	7.066
	<i>Welfare</i>		10.908
	<i>Healthcare</i>		8.745
	<i>Education</i>		4.961
<b>Subjects</b>			<b>117.512</b>
	<i>Social Categories and Identities</i>		81.228
		<i>Victims</i>	4.574

	<i>Subjective experience</i>	19.449
	<i>Family</i>	10.051
	<i>Society</i>	6.784
<b>Politics</b>		<b>294.900</b>
	<i>Politics</i>	136.480
	<i>Parliament</i>	43.020
	<i>Parties</i>	31.097
	<i>Politicians</i>	24.756
	<i>Supranational</i>	9.072
	<i>Policy</i>	83.045
	<i>Government</i>	75.505
	<i>Local</i>	8.942
<b>Economy</b>		<b>34.170</b>
<b>Civil Society</b>		<b>8.462</b>
<b>Criminality</b>		<b>17.430</b>
<b>Crisis</b>		<b>8.330</b>
	<i>Covid</i>	6.518

### 3.2.3. Collocations

#### 3.2.3.1. Migration

Within the politics corpus, the strongest association with migration is with the word *grip* (likelihood 1.911.967), indicating a desire for control; the semantic group control has a sum likelihood of 2.078.582. The second strongest collocation is with the word *irregular* (likelihood 1.891.219); in this case, the term irregular migration is used in politics to describe not controlled migration and does not refer to the legal status of irregular migrants. This relates to the link with the word *secondary*, referring to migration within the European union.

##### *Proto-narratives*

*Migration must be brought under control*

*Secondary migration within the European Union must be counteracted*

#### 3.2.3.2. Undocumented or out-of-procedure

The word undocumented collocates with three things: first, words relating to civil society (sum likelihood 822.076), often names of specific NGOs. Secondly, it links to shelter (sum likelihood 466.114), in particular words referring to the LVV<sup>5</sup>, 24-hour shelter and homelessness. Thirdly, it collocates with *subjectivities and descriptions* of undocumented people (likelihood 439.443). Another word for describing irregular migrants in the Netherlands is that of *uitgeprocedeerd*, referring to rejected asylum seekers or out-of-procedure, referring to asylum seekers who have exhausted all opportunities for appealing the rejection. Rejected asylum seeker collocates with words related to *legal status* (sum likelihood 2.352.386), and it heavily collocates with words relating to *return and deportation* (sum likelihood 1.025.535); in contrast, it rarely collocates with words relating to *regularisation* (sum likelihood 118.974).

##### *Proto-narratives*

<sup>5</sup> Landelijke vreemdelingen voorziening (LVV) is the national shelter programme for irregular migrants.

*The children of undocumented migrants/undocumented children remain out of sight of the government*

*The minister must make agreements about taking back rejected citizens*

*The deportation of rejected asylum seekers and illegals must be a priority*

### 3.2.3.3. Asylum seekers and veiligelanders

The collocations of the world asylum seekers, as expected, include many words related to the *asylum system* (sum likelihood 3.760.228). Moreover, many words linked to asylum seekers describe *legal status* (sum likelihood 3.447.489). *Safe countries* are strongly linked to the word asylum seeker (sum likelihood 2.869.084). The word *safe* (veilige) is one of the most frequently associated with *asylum seeker* likelihood 2.775.135. Moreover, the word asylum seeker is collocated strongly with words describing behaviour (sum likelihood 3.361.538). Interestingly, these words all describe 'bad' behaviour. This can be divided into words describing *crime and criminality* (sum likelihood 652.463), but it is mainly linked to words describing *nuisance* (sum likelihood 2.635.183). Lastly, asylum seekers collocate with words describing *shelter and housing* for asylum seekers (sum likelihood 2.332.596). Adding the collocation with the word 'veiligelanders', one can observe that discourse about people coming from safe countries paints a relatively clear picture. So-called *veiligelanders* concern asylum seekers with a *Dublin claim* (sum likelihood of 275.886), meaning they are supposed to ask for asylum in a different European member state. Concerning people from North Africa, *veiligelanders* is heavily collocated with words relating to North African geography, the sum likelihood is 163.657. They are described with words relating to *crime and conflict* (sum likelihood 207.371).

Strikingly, the above shows a relative absence of words associated with protection and human rights.

#### *Proto-narratives*

*Different procedures must be introduced for asylum seekers from safe countries of origin*

*Safe country and Dublin claimants causing nuisance must be separated from promising asylum applications*

### 3.2.3.4. Shelter & LVV

In the politics corpus, there are three ways to look for shelter policies. Firstly, the third strongest association of the word *opvang* (shelter) is the word *regio* (likelihood 1.397.129) and refers to the region of origin. This narrative regards the idea that refugees should be accommodated<sup>6</sup> in their region of origin, mostly meaning by neighbouring countries. However, this is a concept that can be stretched, but in any case means not in Europe or the Netherlands. Interestingly, *opvang in de regio* is hardly discussed in combination with people but is always discussed as a policy. That is, stating there has to be 'opvang in de regio' without specifically identifying who had to be accommodated.

Then, looking at the level of semantic groups, the concept of shelter, on the one hand, refers to the general shelter policy, including asylum seeker reception centres and especially it is spoken about in the context of shelter for displaced Ukrainians. The word shelter collocates with *asylum seeker* (likelihood 1.545.096) and *displaced* (likelihood 945.608). Note that the word displaced refers only to people from Ukraine and not to other migrants. The LVV, a shelter policy targeted specifically to irregular migrants, on the other hand, collocates with *aliens, undocumented, refugees*, as well as *asylum seekers* (usually rejected asylum seekers). Interestingly, the general word *shelter* collocates with many words relating to the conditions of the shelter. This can go two ways. On the one hand, it talks about austere minimal shelter. This discourse is particularly prominent in combination with asylum seekers coming from so-called safe countries. One of the frames relates to the support for housing asylum seekers in general, as the behaviour of a small group of people from safe countries and people with a Dublin claim would undermine the support for all asylum seekers. Therefore, the idea is to separate this group from the rest in a austere shelter regime.

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<sup>6</sup> In Dutch, the word 'opvang' is used to refer to shelter, but also to accommodate people, or to catch something/someone.

On the other hand, shelter collocates with words describing small-scale, humane, dignified shelter. A third concept that collocates with shelter is *'particulier'*, which refers to people offering shelter in private homes; this form of shelter is exclusive to Ukrainians. Moreover, the specific shelter for irregular migrants collocates not with words describing its conditions but words describing the *policy* itself (sum likelihood 8.370.563), especially describing the goals of the policy, the execution of the policy, and who should have access to this type of shelter. Furthermore, there is a specific emphasis on words relating to the fact that this policy is framed as a *pilot* that has to be evaluated (sum likelihood 2.562.688). In addition, where the word shelter relates to words regarding *public administration* (such as *municipality, alderman, ministry*), the word LVV relates to words denoting both public administration and civil society (such as NGO).

#### *Proto-narratives*

*Refugees have to be accommodated in the region.*

*Municipalities realise private and municipal shelters for displaced people from Ukraine.*

*The support for the shelter of asylum seekers is undermined by asylum seekers who cause nuisance or crime.*

*Safe countries and Dublin claimants must be placed in austere shelter.*

#### 3.2.3.5. Kinderpardon

A salient word in the politics corpus is *Kinderpardon*. This denotes the regularisation policy for irregular children, a subject of policy discussion within the timeframe of this research. The policy concerned regularisation of so-called 'rooted' children, yet in this time frame, the policy was ending, making problems more apparent. Looking at the collocations of this word, we see how it frequently occurs together with words that call for more *leniency* (sum likelihood 1.157.080). There it occurs a lot more often than words describing the *abolishment* of this policy (sum likelihood 427.107). Next to this, we see this policy discussed in *general policy terms* (sum likelihood 215.383) and *political terms* (sum likelihood 818.667), but this particular policy also collocates with words indicating *emotions* (sum likelihood 177.351) as well as *individual children* (sum likelihood 127.509).

#### *Proto-narratives*

*Children who are rooted here deserve to be able to stay here*

*To prevent long-term stay, the child pardon should be abolished*



### 3.3. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis further explores two topics in political discourse: the *kinderpardon* and the LVV shelter programme for irregular migrants.

#### 3.3.1. *Kinderpardon*

Irregularised children are a prominent topic in Dutch politics. In 2019, the decision to end the regularisation program for long-term irregular children sparked significant debate, offering insights into how this issue is framed by different political streams: the government, left-wing, and right-wing politicians.

##### 3.3.1.1. Left-wing politicians

Left-wing politicians advocate for the program's continuation, arguing that ending it would be unjust and lack solidarity. They emphasise the need to prioritise the child's best interests, often framing the *Kinderpardon* as a way to end uncertainty for children. Many, such as Atje Kuiken of the Labour Party, started their debates by highlighting the importance of providing children with a stable environment.

*"You do not wish a child the uncertainty of not knowing where you'll be tomorrow. You wish a child the certainty of knowing that you can go back to the same school tomorrow and play with the same children again."* (Kuiken, PvdA – debate: *versoepeling van het kinderpardon* 47-5-17)

##### 3.3.1.2. The government

The government's argument centres around preventing false hope and discouraging migrants from engaging in the 'stacking' of legal procedures. They frame the *Kinderpardon* as a final solution, aiming to prevent long-term residence for those who do not have legal status in the Netherlands. Mark Harbers, then Secretary of State, emphasised the importance of these measures in preventing further irregular stays. Harbers' successor, Eric van der Burg, continued this argument, framing regularisation policies as fuelling false hope for asylum seekers who have exhausted their legal options.

*"As long as a pardon scheme is established every few years for asylum seekers (...) those who have not yet been covered by a previous scheme will not want to believe that the exception does not apply to them."* (Staatsecretaris Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2021–2022, 35 925 VI, nr. 136)

This framing shifts the blame to parents, accusing them of creating uncertainty for their children by remaining in the Netherlands after their asylum claims are rejected. In contrast, left-wing politicians argue that children should not be punished for the actions of their parents and sometimes highlight that the government itself frequently appeals to rulings that favour asylum seekers.

##### 3.3.1.3. Right-wing politicians

Right-wing politicians oppose the *Kinderpardon*, criticising regularisation efforts in general. They argue that rejected asylum seekers' situation is clear and they should leave the country, countering the left-wing narrative that the *Kinderpardon* ends uncertainty.

*"No, there was complete clarity about their stay. There was zero ambiguity. They went through various appeal procedures... Each time it was decided that they were not allowed to stay (...) So yes, it was crystal clear."* (Geert Wilders, Tweede Kamer debate *versoepeling kinderpardon* 47-5-5)

They also argue that regularisation rewards illegal behaviour, with Wilders framing rejected asylum seekers as disrespecting Dutch law by staying after their claims were denied.

*“They gave the Dutch rule of law a big middle finger (...) Now they are rewarded (...) But isn't it incredibly unfair that the people who have followed the rules and returned now get nothing at all (...) That is so unfair.” (Wilders, Tweede Kamer debate versoepeling kinderpardon 47-8-4)*

### 3.3.2. LVV

The LVV programme emerges as a critical discursive battleground in the Dutch political arena, revealing ideological tensions surrounding irregular migration. As a national pilot policy, the LVV works towards creating a network of shelters for irregular migrants, implemented by municipalities. The debate illustrates the complex interplay between national policy imperatives and local implementation. The underlying tension revolves around who deserves state resources and protection. Two dominant framings emerge: the LVV as a contradiction to national migration policy, and critiques of municipal and NGO leniency toward irregular migrants.

#### 3.3.2.1. Contradiction to National Migration Policy

One prevalent framing within the national debate positions the LVV as fundamentally at odds with the overarching migration policy based on deterrence and exclusion. This discourse draws heavily on the *Koppelingswet*, a law which seeks to deter irregular migrants by excluding them from almost all state services. Within this discursive framework, the LVV undermines this deterrent intent. For instance, a 2020 speech by liberal politician Bente Becker (VVD), encapsulates this view, where the LVV is portrayed as a program that fosters false hope among irregular migrants and perpetuates their stay to the detriment of those who have adhered to the legal pathways of migration.

*“By facilitating illegal residence, people continue to grasp at every straw... This ultimately undermines the support for genuine refugees... millions are being wasted on shelters from which only one illegal resident returned.” (Bente Becker, Debat Begroting Justitie en Veiligheid 2021 – 25 November 2020)*

The LVV is also criticised for unfairly prioritising irregular migrants over refugees with legal status. This discursive construction serves to justify calls for a more punitive approach, reinforcing a national policy of deterrence. The fear that the LVV might act as a pull factor, attracting more irregular migrants, is also central to this narrative. Geert Wilders exemplifies this in a 2021 debate, where he critiques the government for expanding the LVV:

*“This government... is doing absolutely nothing... to ensure fewer people come in for asylum. In fact, you are going to expand the bed-bath-bread scheme... and establish a national shelter for illegal immigrants. Of course, this will only attract more asylum seekers and more illegal immigrants.” (Wilders, Tweede Kamer plenair debat 16 December 2021)*

This statement uses the LVV as a symbol of governmental failure to control migration, further entrenching the idea that lenient policies invite abuse of the asylum system.

#### 3.3.2.2. The leniency of Municipalities and NGOs

A second powerful framing revolves around the alleged leniency of municipalities and NGOs, which are depicted as undermining national policy objectives by prioritising humanitarian concerns over regulatory enforcement. The tension between national policy and local implementation is illustrated in a 2019 parliamentary exchange, where a liberal MP presses the government on the need for stricter adherence to national agreements:

*“Can the state secretary hold municipalities to the agreements about the shelter for illegals, and potentially cut their funding if they do not do so?” (Bente Becker, written questions, 25 November 2020)<sup>7</sup>*

Municipalities are framed as needing tighter control, and their autonomy is questioned in light of perceived deviations from national policy.

NGOs, as critical actors in the LVV program, also come under scrutiny in this discourse. Their role in supporting irregular migrants is frequently questioned, with some politicians suggesting that NGOs resist cooperating with return procedures, thereby prolonging irregular stay. The government’s call for a unified message, particularly when return is deemed the only viable solution, underscores the tension between state actors and civil society:

*“A lesson learned is the importance of ‘speaking with one voice’ by all local parties, especially when staying is not a realistic perspective and return is the only durable solution.” (State Secretary of Justice and Safety, 2020)*

This framing constructs NGOs as well-meaning but ultimately misguided actors, whose humanitarian efforts are seen as inadvertently undermining the state’s ability to manage migration effectively.

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<sup>7</sup> Schriftelijke antwoorden op vragen gesteld tijdens de eerste termijn van de begrotingsbehandeling van het Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid (35570-VI)

## 4. The Discursive Production of Irregularity in Civil Society

### 4.1. Data sample

For the civil society corpus, we sampled texts from various national and local civil society organisations. This includes (news)letters, website articles, yearly reports (jaarverslag), and other written texts. As some grassroots organisations use English as their primary language of communication, we included samples of the texts in Dutch due to the constraints of the method.

Civil society

Texts: 503

Tokens: 824.271

### 4.2. Quantitative analysis

#### 4.2.1. High-frequency words

Observing high-frequency words in the civil society corpus gives a good overview of important topics within the discourse about irregularised migrants. The most frequent word is *people*, indicating that, within this corpus, a lot of speech refers to people and individual migrant stories. Next is the word *Nederland* (the Netherlands), which suggests that civil society relates to the national debate. Moreover, shelter is an essential topic, as already seen in the other two corpora; this is not surprising, as civil society organisations play a vital role in the execution of shelter policies. *Children* (rank 68) is a high-frequency word as well. This relates to the attention paid by civil society actors to individual people and ‘vulnerable groups’ such as children. Other words relating to the household that appear less frequent but are within the 500 most frequently used words denote *family* (rank 295), *mother* (rank 339), and *nuclear family* (347). *Father*, however, is rarely used and only ranks 1008.

The preferred terminology to indicate irregularised migrants within the civil society corpus is *undocumented*, appearing twice in the 100 most frequent words. The term *asylum seeker* also features among the 100 most frequent words, and *refugees* appears within the 200 most frequently used words. In this corpus, words like *irregular migrants*, *illegal migrants* or *illegals* are not frequently used, as they do not appear in the 500 most frequent words. One term that does appear (rank 490) is *out of procedure*, which – paired with *asylum seeker* – forms the Dutch term for rejected asylum seeker: *uitgeprocedeerde asielzoeker*.

Inherent to the type of data collected, texts provided by civil society organisations and documents about these organisations also mention individual foundations and civil society organisations. Regarding the 100 most frequent words, *work* appears to be a high-frequency word. However, as we will see below, this most often refers to the work done by civil society organisations or what they are working on, rather than the employment of irregularised migrants.

Word	Frequency	Rank
mensen	3.284	22
nederland	2.068	37
opvang	1.480	52
kinderen	1.079	68
ongedocumenteerden	981	72
leven	881	76
stichting	861	80
werk	845	81
zorg	827	82

verblijf	810	86
ongedocumenteerde	787	87
pauluskerk	754	91
verblijfsvergunning	745	93
asielzoekers	727	94
recht	722	95

#### 4.2.2. Semantic Groups

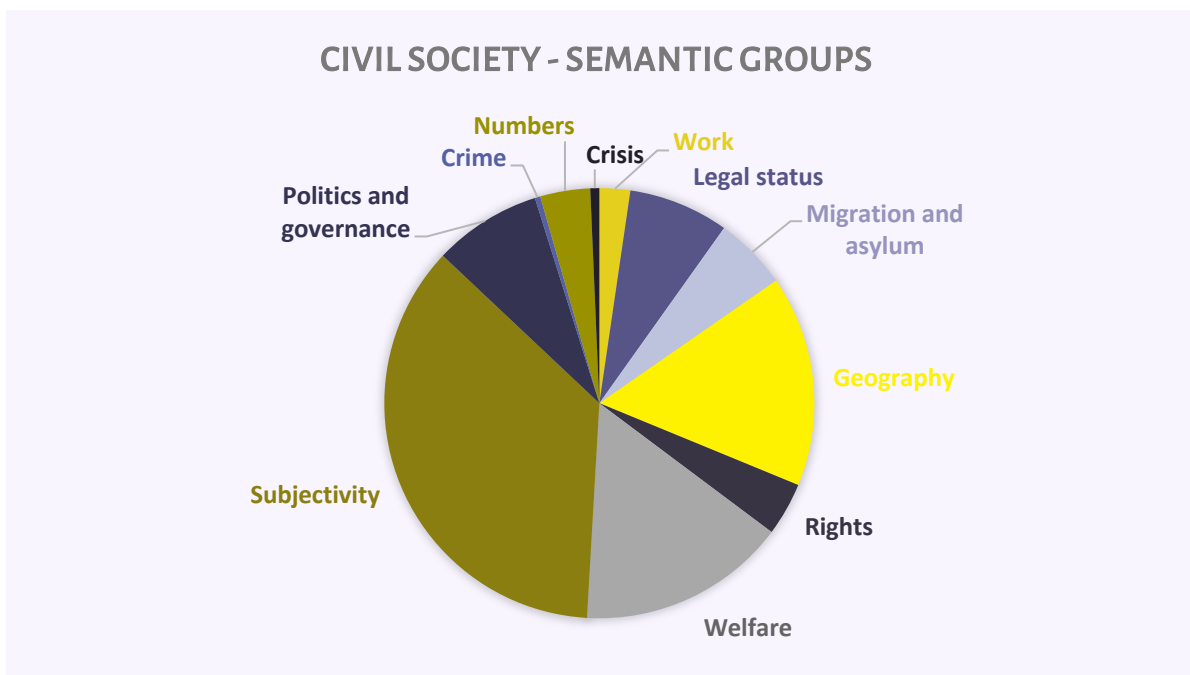


Figure 3: Salience of Macro Topics (Civil Society Corpus)

Grouping the frequencies of words with similar topics reveals more about the semantic preoccupations of civil society discourse. What stands out is that, contrary to the other corpora, much attention is paid to the individual. We see this in words that describe people or groups of people, words indicating family connections or people belonging to a nuclear family, but also in words describing people's age or describing them as a child or an adult. Additionally, it is only in this corpus that there is a subgroup for *emotions*, indicating how part of the discourse in civil society is aimed at humanising irregular migrants. Moreover, we see an important semantic preoccupation with *welfare*, especially *health* and *housing*, and general words relating to *social support*. This is unsurprising, as civil society organisations execute many welfare services for irregular migrants, especially housing and shelter

Furthermore, there is a semantic preoccupation with geography; here, we see that civil society sees irregular migration mainly as a national and local issue. Contrary to the other two corpora, the civil society corpus does not seem to define irregular migration as a mainly political issue. The semantic group about politics and governments is substantially smaller than the other corpora. Specifically, within the semantic group politics, civil society is mainly preoccupied with policy over politics. In line with the other two corpora is the relative unimportance of work. Within civil society discourse, irregular migrants are not seen as employees or as members of the labour force; words denoting work mainly relate to work done by civil society organisations.

Semantic group	Subcategory (non-exhaustive)	Sub-sub-category	Sum frequency
Work			2.801
Legal Status			9.135
Migration and Asylum			6.658
	Asylum		1.654
	Return		1.600
	Stay		1.330
	Arrival		217
	Detention		191
Geography			19.227
	National		5.662
	Local		3.979
	International		1.264
	Europe		1.172
	Colonial ties		233
	Origin		159
Rights			4.860
	Human rights		758
Welfare			19.020
	Health		4.503
	Housing		4.270
		Housing: shelter/Homelessness	2.269
	Support		3.648
	Services and activities		994
	Money		754
	Education		722
Subject			43.757
	Individuals		7.845
	Family		3.189
	Age		1.167
	Emotions		672
	Homeless		265
Politics and Governance			9.847
	Policy		1.752
	Government		1.336
	Local		910
	IND		852
	Parties		575
Crime			500
Numbers			4.552
Crisis			822
Civil Society Organisations			11.745
	Names of organisations		5.420

### 4.2.3. Collocations and proto-narratives

#### 4.2.3.1. Shelter and Homelessness

The strongest collocation of *shelter* is *guidance* (likelihood 256.589). This suggests that most of the shelter within the civil society corpus is part of the LVV programme, which explicitly provides shelter in combination with *guidance* towards a 'sustainable solution'. Grouping related words, we see also a significant presence of words relating to *shelter* and its organisation (sum likelihood 717.696), as well as words in the category of *support* (sum likelihood 683.984). Moreover, shelter collocates with *government*-related words (sum likelihood 484.847), most of which relate to *municipalities* (sum likelihood 304.797).

Among the specific collocations for the LVV, we see it is associated with shelters and names for *specific shelters* (sum likelihood 1.145.199). Moreover, the LVV associates with the *national scale* (sum likelihood 766.594); this could partly be due to the name, which translates to national alien provision. Interestingly, there is a lot of attention to the LVV programme being a *pilot*, a project that must be evaluated and monitored (sum likelihood 715.838). An interesting absence is that the LVV does not collocate with words referring to people who would live in the LVV shelters.

##### *Proto-narratives*

*To prevent (more) undocumented people from ending up on the streets, shelter (within the LVV) is essential.*

*The aim of the LVV pilot is to achieve a permanent outflow from illegality.*

In addition, it is interesting to consider the discourse surrounding the homelessness of irregular migrants. Using the proxy of *street* (in Dutch, it is common to refer to the condition of homelessness as 'living on the street' instead of homeless (or 'roofless', common in Dutch), we see an interesting pattern. The main collocation is with words that indicate a state of *becoming* (sum likelihood 925.739), an interesting distinction being the number of verbs that describe an *indirect becoming*: people 'end up' living on the street (sum likelihood 676.194), compared to a far weaker collocation with words indicating an *active becoming* homeless or *being made* homeless (sum likelihood 249.545). This is especially interesting given that shelter for irregular migrants, i.e. the shelter that prevents them from being homeless, is conditional, making people who do not comply homeless. From the examples, we see a proto-narrative of out-of-procedure aliens who can end up on the street if they do not cooperate with return. Moreover, there is quite a high collocation with words that mean *sleeping* (sum likelihood 273.937), as sleeping on the street is another way of referring to a homeless state.

##### *Proto-narrative*

*Rejected aliens can end up on the streets if the condition to cooperate in the departure is not met*

#### 4.2.3.2. Children

Regarding collocations with *children/child* (kinder\*) for the household dimension, the strongest individual collocation is with *women*, as women and children are often mentioned together and opposed to men, justifying differential treatment between the two groups. Analysis of semantic groups within the collocations with *child* reveals the enormous prevalence of words referring to the *child regularisation programme* (sum likelihood 982.504). Many civil society organisations and NGOs have been active in advocating for the remaining of this regularisation policy or are active in providing shelter to families who have been rejected for this regularisation of children. Additionally, we see a significant association between children and words relating to family (sum likelihood 881.072). Moreover, *age* is important when describing children (sum likelihood 511.544).

##### *Proto-narrative*

*Organizations support families who were denied in the Kinderpardon*

#### 4.2.3.3. Work

While work is not a frequent topic within the civil society corpus, exploring the collocations with work does give an interesting insight into how work appears within the corpus. The word *domestic* is the strongest individual collocation with work (likelihood 235.247); this is also the only labour market sector mentioned in the collocations. A possible explanation is that the domestic workers union is one of the civil society organisations included in this corpus. Next to this, work is associated with *money and salary* (sum likelihood 426.552). Moreover, work is mainly associated with words related to *having a job* and *working* (sum likelihood 370.783), which is more often associated with *informal work* (sum likelihood 176.270) than *formal work* (sum likelihood 93.980). Furthermore, we observe that work is more closely associated with *losing work* (sum likelihood 148.132) than it is with *working conditions* (140.849).

##### *Proto-narratives*

*Undocumented migrants work in domestic work because domestic work is not regulated.*

### 4.3. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis further explores the discourse regarding the *Kinderpardon* in Civil Society.

#### 4.3.1. *Kinderpardon*

The discourse surrounding the *kinderpardon* articulated by civil society organisations is strikingly different from the other corpora, particularly in its focus on the humanising detail of individual cases. Unlike more abstract political discussions in media and politics, civil society explicitly anchors their writing in real-life examples. Moreover, they base their policy critiques on the lived experiences of children and families directly impacted by the policy. This rhetorical strategy not only personalises the issue but also directly links policy and the people it affects.

The texts analysed emphasise this intersection between politics and individual lives, highlighting how the *kinderpardon* policy plays out in concrete cases. There is a duality in the discourse: on the one hand, it examines the intended and actual effects of the *kinderpardon* itself, and on the other, it critiques the consequences of the so-called *kinderpardon-deal*.

In the discussion on the effects of the *kinderpardon*, particular emphasis is placed on children for whom the policy has failed. Even when celebrating the successes, the discourse remains bittersweet, marked by the acknowledgement that many are left behind. This creates a narrative of partial justice, where triumph for some is marred by failure for others.

Civil society also tends to dissect the policy in detail, using specific cases to illustrate how its technical aspects fail to align with reality. These narratives frequently stress that the overarching goal of the policy, i.e., supporting children, remains unmet due to flaws in the policy. The texts highlight two central themes: first, the *belang van het kind* (best interest of the child). Here, the argument is that while the policy purports to prioritise the child's best interest, in practice, it does not take children as a starting point but prioritises the state's interests. Second, there is the theme of the *menselijke maat* (human dimension). Here, the critique is that the policy's demands are seen as unreasonable, even inhumane, an unjust burden on applicants, and above all ignores the complex realities of living in irregularity.

Additionally, some texts link the *kinderpardon* to the broader consequences of abolishing the discretionary space for the state secretary in the *kinderpardon-deal*. Here again, the discourse is grounded in individual



stories—tales of irregular migrants navigating impossible situations—serving as evidence for the necessity of this discretionary space when all other policy options have failed.

*Until 2019, someone like Salim could appeal to the ‘discretionary authority’ of the State Secretary (...) the State Secretary could make an exception and still grant someone residency. This authority of the State Secretary was also called the ‘humanitarian valve’ of our asylum system: it was an opportunity to offer a humane solution if the rules turned out to be inhumane. (Amnesty - 30 November 2021)*

By using personal narratives, civil society organisations not only humanise the policy debate but also underscore the urgency of reform from a moral and practical standpoint.

## 5. Insights from Quantitative Comparison

When comparing the discourse on migration across media, politics and civil society, distinct patterns emerge in the language and themes prioritised by each domain.

In media discourse there is a notable international focus, especially on the United States. Words relating to US politics, such as *Trump* and references to the U.S.-Mexico border and the *wall*, appear significantly more in media than in politics. The term *illegals* is commonly used in the media, though *undocumented* also occurs more frequently than in political discourse. Politics, excluding US politics, talks about Rutte (then prime minister), but, compared to politics, frequent words also refer to local politics such as *wethouder* [Alderman], and *Groot Wassink* [the last name of the alderman in Amsterdam].

In contrast, political discourse, compared to media, is more focused on domestic issues and the mechanics of policymaking. Terms related to governance, such as *approach*, *resources*, and *execution*, are more prevalent in political texts. Politicians frequently use the term *alien* (*vreemdeling*) as a formal and legalistic term, which appears significantly more in political discourse than in media or civil society discussions. Moreover, in politics, there are more frequent mentions of crime and safety. Words like *safety* and *human trafficking* appear more often.

In contrast to media and politics, civil society organisations employ a more human-centred vocabulary. Moreover, there is more emphasis on civil society, words like *volunteer*, *donations*, and the names of various organisations highlight the community-oriented nature of civil society discourse. Moreover, terms such as *clients*, *support*, *counselling*, and *care* are much more frequent, emphasising providing aid and services to vulnerable populations. Civil society texts highlight specific shelter programs, using terms like *LVV* and *MOO*. Moreover, civil society is more likely to use the term *undocumented* than either media or political sources. There is also a stronger focus on people, with more frequent use of words like *visitors* and *inhabitants*, and a notable emphasis on women, as civil society texts use the female form of terms like *inhabitant* to explicitly refer to women.

## 6. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the corpus-based analysis shows that terminology around irregularity is specific to the different corpora (media, politics and civil society). Politics uses *(denied) asylum seekers* or *alien*, and civil society uses *undocumented*. The media is more diverse in terminology but is notably the only corpus in which *illegals* is frequently used.

The discourse about irregular migration in the Netherlands is deeply politicised. All three corpora speak about irregular migrants in relation to (national and local) politics and policies. Media and politics show many similarities in their narratives of irregular migration with regard to politics and the challenge to migration policy. Moreover, in both cases, irregular migration is framed as an European issue. Civil society attempts to humanise irregular migrants by focusing on their individual stories, not exclusively in relation to policy and politics. However, this humanisation often emphasises vulnerability and dependence on welfare. This narrative underscores the role of large NGOs in supporting irregular migrants.

Furthermore, the absence of irregular migrants' work activities from the media, political and civil society narratives highlights their persistent framing primarily in terms of welfare or social policy rather than, for example, as workers. However, part of this might also be due to the nature of our sampling method, as grassroots and migrant-led organisations were not included as much as the larger NGOs. As these larger NGOs have to a large extent been incorporated in the execution of social and welfare policy for irregularised migrants, this might have skewed the narratives.

Zooming in on the qualitative case of the *kinderpardon*, we observe how this is framed as a political issue and a challenge to political parties and migration policy, in media and politics. Interestingly, in both media and politics, regularisation is not seen as a humane response to system failures but as a loophole, weakening the overall migration regime and threatening its perceived effectiveness. Civil society, on the contrary, focusses on the individual stories of children and their families who applied for the regularisation and tries to humanise the *kinderpardon*. Sharing these stories, civil society celebrates the regularisation of those who have successfully applied. Simultaneously trying to show how the regularisation programme was ineffective for those who have applied and were rejected and those who couldn't apply.

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