Country report

Narratives about irregularised migrants in Poland

Mass-media, politics and social organisations

———

Kseniya Homel-Ficenes
Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska

February 2025

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This report provides results from the corpus analysis of media, political, and civil society texts conducted within Work Package 4, "Discourses, perceptions and counternarratives" in the project "Improving the living and labour conditions of irregularised migrant households in Europe" (I-CLAIM). This report presents quantitative and qualitative analyses of each corpus and compares them. The data was collected for 2019-2023 and included the most prominent narratives about irregular migration and the specific linguistic and terminological features used during this time.

The analysis reveals that dominant narratives around irregular migration were predominantly linked to attempts to enter Poland without sufficient documentation or bypassing legal channels rather than stay (overstay) or work-related aspects. The humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border was a central concern in all three corpora. These irregularities were framed within three main narratives:

- Securitisation, focused on border and national security, emphasising the role of control institutions and depicting migration as a dehumanised process,
- Rationalisation, concentrated on aims to develop migration management and control (e.g. about labour market),
- Humanitarianism, articulated primarily by social organisations, emphasises human rights protection, institutional violence, subjective experiences and the challenges migrants face.

The analysis also illustrates that other aspects of irregular migration did not attract significant attention. Work-related aspects were less salient compared to border crossings and arrivals, focusing on the irregular employment and work conditions experienced by migrants. The COVID-19 pandemic was not presented as in the collected corpora as a macro-topic, but as a context (e.g. related to a situation in migrant facilities).

Several differences were noticed between the corpora. Media and political corpora used uncountable nouns and large numbers (e.g. *thousands, flow*) to strengthen narratives of insecurity and dehumanise migrants. In contrast, the civil society corpus tends to emphasise the personal perspectives of individuals who experienced pushbacks and violence from the border guards, as well as activists and volunteers operating at the border. This corpus also highlights the role of public institutions in producing irregularities. It also included the most diverse representation of social categories, reflecting intersectional vulnerabilities (e.g., *ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+*). The media and political corpora reinforced narratives of migration irregularity through the lens of crime and crises (e.g., *trafficking, aggression*). The civil society corpus showed a different perspective on irregularity, emphasising the issues of institutional violence, xenophobia, and migrant discrimination. The study demonstrated that the civil society corpus provided counter-narratives to the politics and media corpora, focusing on humanitarian concerns and human rights violations as central issues in the representations of irregular migration.

Illegal appeared as a primary term used in all three corpora, as did plural forms of words *migrant(s), refugee(s), immigrant(s),* and *foreigner(s)* and uncountable nouns (e.g. *flow*) and large numbers (e.g. *thousands*) clearly dominate in the analysed material which illustrates that the narratives presented migration from the perspective of a threat and portrayed migrants mainly as collective *others*. Migration was also associated with control and borders. The analysis of the geographical dimension underlines the persistent division of EU/Western states with the predominance of a national Polish (Poland) context versus third countries, especially Belarus, the Middle East or African countries.

1. Introduction

The following report analyses narratives concerning irregular migration within media, politics, and social organisations in Poland. The empirical data spans five years between 2019 and 2023, which is a period of significant importance in the Polish context due to several major events influencing public debates and heightening the visibility of migration issues. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted transnational mobility and regulations governing residence and work. The state of epidemic emergency, introduced in March 2020, was lifted in Poland in July 2023, which consequently ended the legal provisions that extended the permitted stay of migrants in Poland[1]. The second significant event was the emergence of the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border in the summer of 2021, followed by the declaration of a state of emergency in border areas in September 2021 and the introduction of amendments to the Law on Foreigners, which legalised pushbacks in October 2021[23]. The importance of the above-mentioned issue is visible in the fact that the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border dominated the narratives in the collected materials. Another significant event impacting the studied migration narratives was the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In response, the Polish government introduced special legal measures to ensure the legality of stay and facilitate access to the labour market, health and social security for Ukrainian citizens[4]. From a formal perspective, Ukrainian citizens who arrived in Poland after February 24, 2024, had their rights in the above-mentioned areas aligned to those of Polish citizens. The analysis of empirical data shows that these special regulations were mentioned later in debates on racialised inequalities concerning migration policy and public attitudes towards migrants seeking protection in Poland. Lastly, two national political events significantly impacted the visibility of migration irregularities in the public discourse. During the parliamentary elections in October 2023, the former leading party, Law and Justice, included a referendum with two questions directly referencing migration (one on the border fence and another on the EU relocation scheme[5], framed in a way that emphasised the anti-immigrant rhetoric, which raised criticism and protests among human rights activists.[6] Our analysis indicates that the media and social organisations amplified this referendum framing within the studied corpora. The final political event impacting the analysed narratives was the so-called *visa scandal*, which occurred in the summer of 2023 and involved allegations of corruption within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Polish consulates.[7] The analysis demonstrates that, especially in the media and political corpora, this issue was referred to as one of the causes of uncontrolled migration to Poland and the negligence of the government in managing migration. This was further used as an argument to revise migration policies and regulations.

---

[1] Revocation of the state of epidemic emergency – consequences for the legal situation of foreigners, https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/revocation-of-the-state-of-epidemic-emergency--consequences-for-the-legal-situation-of-foreigners [accessed 12.11.2024].

[2] Fiałkowska K., Łukasiewicz K., Radziwinowiczówna A. (2021) Humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian frontier. Old and new diagnoses from external EU borders, CMR Spotlight 12(34).

[3] Access to the territory and pushbacks, https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/poland/asylum-procedure/access-procedure-and-registration/access-territory-and-push-backs/, [acessed 12.11.2024].

[4] Amendment to the law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country, https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/the-law-on-assistance-to-ukrainian-citizens-in-connection-with-the-armed-conflict-on-the-territory-of-the-country-has-entered-into-force, [accessed 12.11.2024].

[5] Referendum questions: Question 3: Do you support the elimination of the barrier on the border between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Belarus? Question 4: Do you support the admission of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa under the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy? https://referendum.gov.pl/referendum2023/en/pytania, [accessed 12.11.2024].

[6] Stanowisko organizacji społecznych w sprawie referendum ogólnokrajowego planowanego na dzień 15 października 2023 r., https://monitorkonstytucyjny.eu/archiwa/26241, [accessed 12.11.2024].

[7] Information on the investigation regarding the so-called "visa scandal", https://www.gov.pl/web/prokuratura-krajowa/informacja-o-sledztwie-dotyczacym-tzw-afery-wizowej, [accessed 12.11.2024].

As stated above, this report examines how irregular migration was constructed in the media, politics, and civil society during the defined period (2019–2024). Thus, our analysis focuses on the terminology surrounding irregularities, macro-topics that emerge in the selected materials, proto-narratives highlighting the most salient aspects of irregularities, and a comparison between the corpora.

Three separate corpora were created for the research: media, politics and social organisations. Each corpus included materials published between 2019-2023. For the media corpus, we selected four newspapers: *Rzeczpospolita*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Gazeta Polska Codziennie* and *Fakt* (see Table 1, p. 6) to cover media diversity in terms of ideological and political leaning as well as types of journalism (broadsheet vs. tabloid) and complied the database of 1,298 texts from the newspapers' online archives. The politics corpus was based on 164 political documents such as parliamentary speeches, President and Prime Minister statements, governmental reports, and local/regional strategies on migration governance. The civic society corpus consisted of 125 texts from a broad range of civic society actors, including NGOs, migrant organisations, advocacy groups, and radical right-wing and populist organisations. All analysed materials were published solely in Polish. Methodological details are published in a separate methodological note (Rheindorf & Vollmer, 2025).

2. The discursive construction of irregularity in the media

2.1. Data Sample

Our corpus is based on online editions of four major Polish daily newspapers representing diverse political perspectives: *Fakt*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Gazeta Polska Codziennie*, and *Rzeczpospolita* (Table 1). The two main criteria were taken into account during the selection of titles. First of all, the spread was estimated following sale results based on the data from the website https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/ and also the analysis of the most influential media in Poland provided by the *Institute of Media Monitoring* (https://www.imm.com.pl/). The second criterion was the diversity of perspectives from liberal to right-wing as well as a tabloid with no clear political leaning. The dataset encompasses 1,298 texts, amounting to a total of 11,134,328 tokens.

Table 1. The selection of media titles provides a broad spectrum of discourses in Poland:

Name of publication	Political leaning	Spread final quarter 2023	Quality	Number of texts	Number of tokens
Gazeta Wyborcza	liberal/central-left	40,020 (Q4 2023) 60,006 (2021)	broadsheet	500	623,067
Rzeczpospolita	central-right/ conservative-liberal	30,181 (Q4 2024)	broadsheet	198	156,068
Gazeta Polska Codziennie	right	10,579 (January 2021)	broadsheet	237	104,209
Fakt	represents different opinions	115,952 (Q4 2023)	tabloid	363	250,984
In total				1,298 texts	11134,328 tokens

2.2. Quantitative analysis

We selected the most frequent terms related to irregular migration from a list of 5,000 words. Due to the complexity of grammatical forms, frequencies for different forms of the same word were combined for the analysis (lemmatised). The ten most frequent individual terms (translated into English and summed up in all grammatical forms, both plural and singular) turned out to be: *border, Poland, Belarus, person, European Union, migrant, people), illegal, refugee, thousand, guard, immigrant, help,* and *child* (see Figure 1).
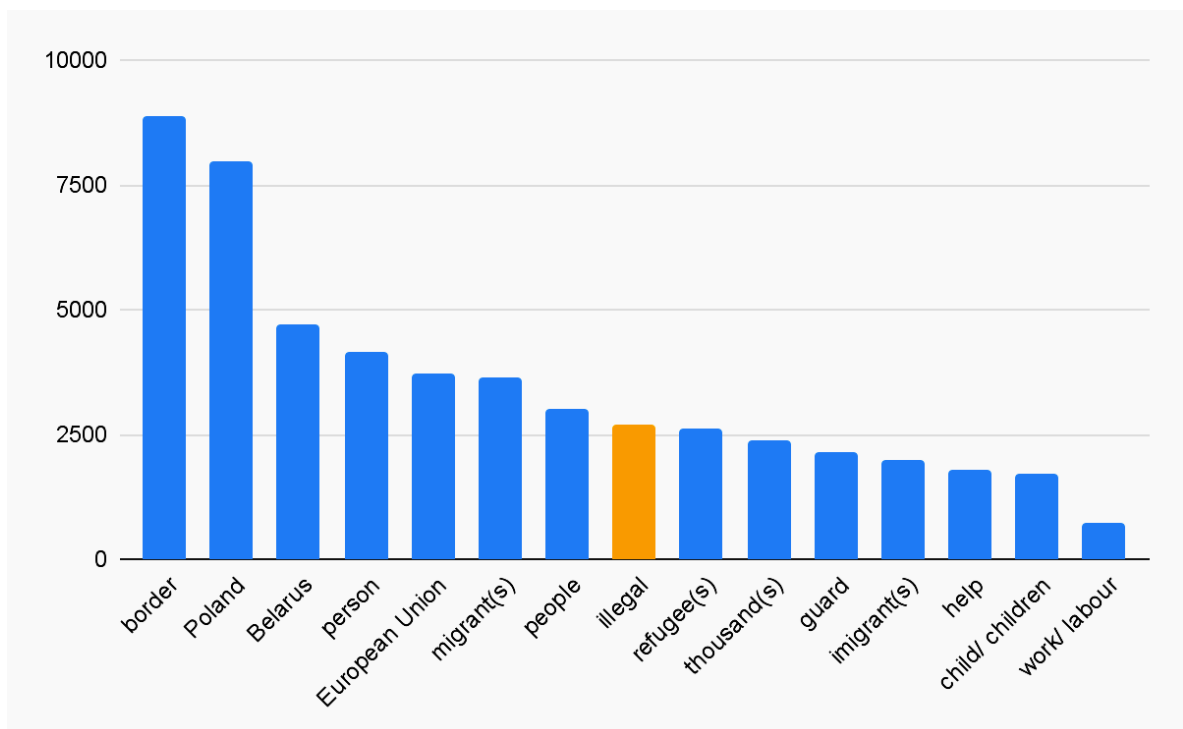

Figure 1: The salience of individual words by frequency (the media corpus)

As shown in Figure 1, the dominant semantic field surrounding irregular migration in Poland revolved around the issue of borders and entering the country. At the same time, the topics of stay and work remained less prominent. Discussions on irregular migration focused heavily on Poland and the Polish-Belarusian border. However, frequent references to the European Union also appeared, reflecting Poland's geopolitical position as an EU member, its role as a country with an external EU border, and its involvement in EU migration policy debates, particularly on EU relocation schemes.

The frequency list also provides insights into how irregular migration was framed through the lens of large numbers, with *thousand(s)* being one of the most visible terms. Such a perspective strengthens the narratives of migration as a threat. Additionally, the prevalence of plural forms of terms such as *person(s), migrant(s), refugee(s),* and *immigrant(s)* suggests a tendency to discuss migration in collective terms, emphasising its group rather than individual character. The list of top 10 frequent words highlights the linguistic tendency visible in the use of the terms *person(s)* and *migrant(s)* more frequently than *refugee(s)* or other terms.

An interesting aspect was noted with the high frequency (1,716) of the term *child/children*, reflecting a humanitarian dimension in the media's representations of irregular migration. Other terms related to family and households were less frequent: *family* (656), *mother* (138), *wife* (110), and *husband* (71).

Moreover, the frequency analysis showed the strongly noticeable predominance of the term *illegal* over other terms related to irregularity, with alternative terms being much less common (*uncontrolled, unregularized, irregular*). It was also important to notice that the term illegal was primarily collocated with terms that describe border crossings or people (*immigrants, migrants, persons*), which revealed the manifestation of dehumanisation present in media narratives. However, further differences emerged across the selected media outlets, indicating variations in how specific terms are emphasised, reflecting their editorial stances and political orientations. For example, *Fakt, Gazeta Polska Codziennie*, and *Rzeczpospolita* primarily presented irregularity concerning people (referring to terms such as immigrant/migrant), while in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the main collocations for the term *illegal* referred to borders and border crossings.

As mentioned, our analysis indicates that migrants' involvement in the labour market was largely absent in the context of irregular migration. The COVID-19 pandemic was also less evident in the corpus than expected. The border and humanitarian dimensions stood out as the most prominent. This can not only be related to methodological limitations (the analyses covered only 5,000 words in each corpus, see Annex 1) of the study focused on irregular migration but also reflects the country-specific aspect of the lack of discussion on essential migrant workers in Poland. Moreover, the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border, which began in 2021, dominated the migration-related discourse during the research period. COVID-19 was, however, included as part of the macro-topic of the crisis, which will be discussed further in the report.

The frequency analysis provided interesting insights into how the issue of irregular migration appears in media narratives. The predominance of securitisation underlines the framing of migration as an external threat (e.g. *created by the regime in Belarus*). Securitisation was also related to the rationalisation and the role of the state, government and control institutions in ensuring national security. This aspect was linked to the dimension of physical protection of the border (e.g. *fence, wall*) and the role of the Polish state in the region (e.g. *the protection of the external EU border, the protection of the Schengen area*).

Grouping frequencies of words with similar meanings, 11 macro-topics (Rheindorf & Vollmer, 2025) were identified in the media corpus. Within these macro-topics, multiple sub-groups were distinguished as essential for examining the media portrayal of various issues.

The figure below shows the overall frequencies of all macro-topics compared to one another:
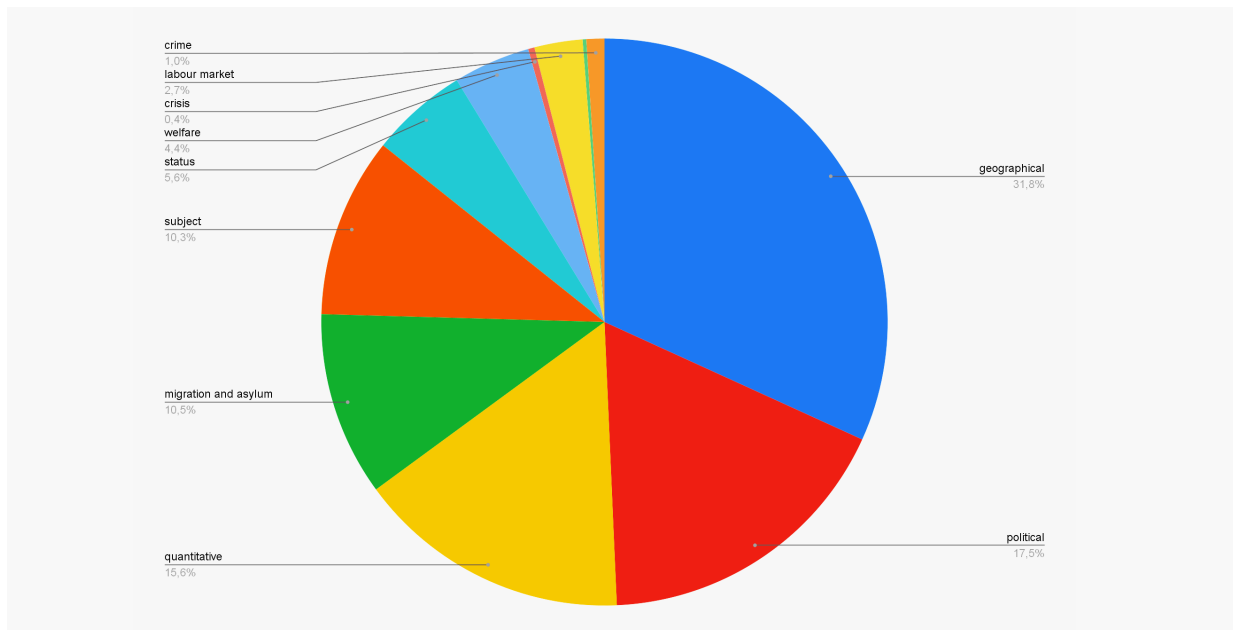
Figure 2: The salience of macro-topics (the media corpus)

The described macro-topics show how irregular migration appeared in the Polish mainstream media. The following macro-topics, categorised by frequency, are presented below, with attention to the most prominent terms and sub-groups:

1. **GEOGRAPHICAL** (sum frequency: 83,034) – this category covered references to countries and political entities (*EU, NATO, Schengen*) and, less frequently, cities and specific locations (e.g., *Usnarz, Podlasie*). Within this group, three main sub-groups were identified. EU/WESTERN/EUROPEAN AREAS, with a significant predominance of *Poland* and less frequently mentioned *Germany, the EU, France, Italy, Lithuania, Great Britain*, and the *USA*; NON-EU/NON-WESTERN EUROPEAN/NON-EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND REGIONS included *Belarus, Ukraine, the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria*, and *Russia*. Within this sub-group, terms related to *Belarus* remained particularly noticeable. The prominence of *Poland* and *Belarus* in geographical terms reflected the focus on the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border, which dominated Polish media coverage on irregular migration during the selected period. OTHER GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS encompassed more general references to certain places (e.g., *forest, road, territory, sea*).

2. **POLITICAL** (sum frequency: 45,705) – the second largest macro-topic encompassed three subgroups: POLITICS, LEGISLATION, AND REGULATIONS, which covers terms such as *policy, politics, power, act, declaration, international, migration*, and *internal*; THE STATE AND ITS INSTITUTIONS, which involved control institutions (*Border Guards, police, soldiers, uniformed services, court, spokesman*) and central administration (*government, prime minister, parliament, minister, head, party, opposition*); and LAW AND ORDER, which included terms such as *control, arrest/arresting, charge*, and *prohibition*. The high frequency of this semantic group illustrates that irregular migration in Poland was significantly politicised and portrayed as a political issue related to migration policy, national security, and the role of public institutions. Among these sub-groups, THE INSTITUTIONS OF CONTROL was the most prominent, with a prevalence of *Border Guards* over the police and military,

which highlighted the central role of this institution in managing migration and the emphasis on border control in the context of migration.

3. **QUANTITATIVE** (sum frequency: 40,818) – this macro-topic referred to numbers and uncountable expressions (e.g., *mass, wave, hundreds*). Three sub-groups were identified. The sub-group LARGE NUMBERS AND QUANTITIES was the largest group with terms such as *thousand(s), million(s), large, more, a lot, increase, wave*, and *inflow*, which emphasised the politicisation of migration and the sense of urgency and concern mentioned above. The second subgroup, MEDIUM QUANTITIES was less frequent and contained terms like *several dozen* and *several hundred*. The sub-group SMALL/SINGLE QUANTITIES covered terms such as *one, single, two*, and *none*.

The predominance of terms referring to large numbers and uncountable nouns reflected the media's focus on presenting irregular migration as an undefined, yet significant phenomenon.

4. **MIGRATION AND ASYLUM** (sum frequency: 27,418) – this macro-topic encompassed four subgroups. The most salient sub-group was BORDERS AND ARRIVALS, with terms emphasising forced border crossings or attempts to cross the border (terms such as *border, fence, wall, crossings, efforts entering/entries, forcing*). This aligned with the previously mentioned representation of irregularity linked to border crossings rather than migrants' residence. The presence of terms related to *expulsion* and *deportation* especially highlighted this aspect of irregular migration in the discourse. Meanwhile, the sub-group STAY underscored the temporal and institutional dimensions of irregularities by focusing on *migration centres, camps,* and asylum-related procedures. Within the STAY sub-group terms such as *stay* and *permissions,* were less frequent, while terms related to *visas* appeared more often, primarily in connection with the mentioned *visa scandal* that would be represented in the CRISIS macro-topic. Aspects such as *overstaying* or the *loss of regular status* did not appear in the corpus, suggesting a discrepancy in the discourse surrounding these important issues. The third sub-group RETURNS included terms that emphasised the role of control institutions, such as *pushbacks, expulsions,* and *deportations*. The sub-group MIGRATION AND MOBILITY consisted of various terms related to *migration*, such as *immigration, emigration, migration*, and *journey*.

5. **SUBJECTIVE** (sum frequency: 26,806) – this macro-topic contained three subgroups. The largest subgroup was SOCIAL CATEGORIES, which encompasses terms such as *person, people, group, society, children, women, men, citizen(s), resident(s)*, as well as ethnic or national groups like *Ukrainian(s), Syrian(s), Afghan(s),* and *Pole(s)*. Additionally, it involved references to religious groups such as *Muslim(s)*. The most frequent term within this subgroup turned out to be *person/persons*, which remained also one of the most frequently occurring terms in the entire corpus. Interestingly, there was a high frequency of the term *child/children* followed by *women/women*. Among the ethnic/national categories, the most frequent terms were *Poles*, followed by *Ukrainians* and *Syrians*, reflecting both the nation-oriented perspective and the prominence of these groups related to forced migration in the media discourse. The sub-group FAMILY was distinguished from social categories due to the specific focus of the research project. It includes terms such as f*amily, son, daughter, wife, mother,* and *father*. Within the third sub-group, SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES, the high frequency was also for terms like *death* and *die,* underscoring the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border.

6. **STATUS** (sum frequency: 14,503) – encompassed two subgroups: TERMS DESCRIBING PEOPLE ON THE MOVE, where most frequent terms were *migrant(s)* and *refugee(s)*, reflecting the dominant categories used in public discourse and challenges related to mixing these terms in the media. The second sub-group was TERMS OF IRREGULARITY, which included terms *illegal, uncontrolled, unregulated, irregular,* and *forced*. The most frequent term in this sub-group was *illegal* being the most frequent term related to irregular migration in the whole three corpuses.

7. For the **WELFARE** (sum frequency: 11,462) macro-topic, we identified four subgroups. The largest sub-group here was HEALTHCARE and other basic needs, which contained terms such as *health, social care, accessibility of care* and *hospital*. The second largest sub-group was ACTIVISM and AID with the terms *organisations, humanitarian, lawyer(s),* and *activist(s)*, referring to the role of civil society and legal advocates in supporting migrants. The term *help* (both as a noun and a verb) was the most frequent in this group and also appeared as one of the most frequent terms in the corpus, reflecting the significance of the representation of irregular migration in relation to the humanitarian crisis. The third identified sub-group VALUES encompassed terms *freedom, democracy,* and *solidarity*. The less frequent group constituted terms related to HOUSING, which might be linked to the focus on temporal accommodation facilities as mentioned above in the sub-group STAY.
It seems important to note that in the corpus concentrated on irregularities, terms related to welfare may appear less frequently compared to other aspects, such as *border crossing* or *institutions of control*. This indicates that, while present, such aspects may not dominate the media narratives surrounding irregular migration.

8. **CRISIS** (sum frequency: 9,480) – as a macro-topic, covered diverse aspects and included two key sub-groups. The largest sub-group was THE GENERAL NOTION OF CRISIS with terms *crisis, state of emergency, problem, danger, threat*. Term *crises* appeared most frequently in collocations with the words *migration, border, humanitarian, caused by*. The Polish-Belarusian border turned out to be a country-specific issue significantly important during the study period. Terms such as a *state of emergency* (in Polish, *stan wyjątkowy*) or *threat* in collocations with *Polish security* underline the concentration of the media discourse on national contexts. The semantic field around the term *crisis* included *refugee crises; climate crisis; political crisis; economic crises*. The second subgroup was COVID-19 which includes references to *coronavirus, pandemic, omicron, infection, quarantine* and was present but not as visible as might be expected, particularly when compared to other crisis-related sub-groups. It appeared in collocations with *rehabilitation, infections, illness(s), pandemic,* and *vaccination*. In the migration-related context, it was mentioned in the context of cases of COVID-19 in migrant facilities.

9. **LABOUR MARKET** (sum frequency: 7,172) macro-topic encompassed terms related to *working conditions, employers,* and *migrant workers*. Three main subgroups were identified: GENERAL LABOUR TERMS, covering the terms (*to*) *work* (noun and verb), *employer(s), employee(s), market*; LEGAL ASPECTS OF WORK with terms *employment, permission, contract*; and IRREGULARITIES IN THE LABOUR MARKET including *forced, grey market, and illegal* (in Polish, *na czarno*).

Interestingly, the term *employee(s)* appeared more frequently than *employer(s)*, and the term *forced* was more common than *grey market* or *illegal*. Any terms specified migrant groups (related to origin, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age) do not appear in this semantic field.

10. **RIGHTS** (sum frequency: 5,450) – this macro-topic primarily concerned human rights and specific legal protections (e.g., *the right to protection*). Within the media corpus, this macro-topic showed significant connections to the welfare dimension (*activism, support*) but was analysed separately due to the project framework. Among the terms included in this macro-topic, the most frequent were *rights* or *law* (a homonym in Polish), often appearing in collocations with terms like *international, human, humanity, protection*, and *the rule of law*. It is also worth highlighting the challenges related to the analysis of the term *law/rights*, as this term overlaps with the name of the ruling political party during the period covered in the analysis (*Law and Justice, PiS*). This dual meaning complicates interpretation, as *law* may refer both to legal rights and the political context associated with the party.

11. **CRIME** (sum frequency: 2,688) was the least frequent macro-topic. However, it was strongly connected with the aforementioned themes of border crossing and access to the country. The terms occurring in this macro-topic were *smuggling, smugglers, drivers, criminals, attacks, hate,* and *victims*. Although less frequent, these terms highlighted the criminalisation of irregular migration, emphasising its links with organised crime. Such perspective emphasised the salience of control institutions (sub-group THE STATE AND ITS INSTITUTIONS in POLITICAL macro-topic) in the corpus.

For further analysis, we focus on two macro-topics: MIGRATION and ASYLUM, and the LABOUR MARKET, as they allow us to reflect on two aspects of irregular migration—related to arrivals and work—and how the media corpus portrays these two aspects.

MIGRATION AND ASYLUM as a macro-topic provides an overview of how the semantic field around the irregular aspects of migration develops in the media corpus. A sub-topic that significantly predominated in the group was *border* and, more specifically, *border crossing* between Poland and Belarus. This reveals the two main perspectives of the *border* as a physical object to ensure national security and prevent migrations. Such terms as *fence, wall,* and *barrier* were used as synonyms. The other perspective was related to geographical and institutional terms that define access to the country. The semantic field around migration includes terms such as to *get through, to cross, to force, and to try (to cross)* in correlations with *illegal/ illegally/ unregularly/ without documents*. This underlines the presentation of irregular migration in media as a process related to transnational mobility.

Migration as an abstract term in media discourse has significant connotations with the *crisis/pressure* and *policy dimension*. The terms used to refer to irregular migration were *illegal* and *uncontrolled*. The semantic field of this term included also terms such as *path, Europe, UE*; quantitative terms as *massive, wave, problem*; active verbs *paralyses, triggers*. The term *labour migration* (in Polish, *migracja zarobkowa*) was also present in the collocations, but less frequently.
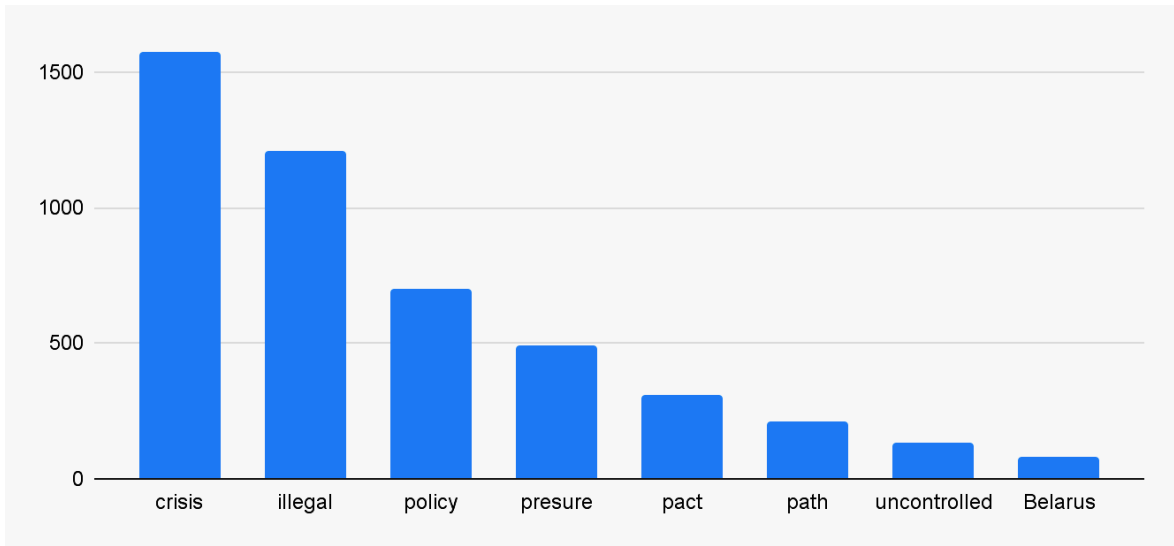
Figure 3: The collocations of migration by statistical likelihood (in the media corpus)

The terms *crossing* and *migrant(s)* occurred more frequently in collocation with the words *illegally* and *illegal*. References to migrants were presented through their plural male form and regions of origin (e.g., t*he Middle East, Africa*). Terms like *inflow* and *thousands* emphasised the quantitative aspects of migration in the media discourse, justifying the security-oriented framing.
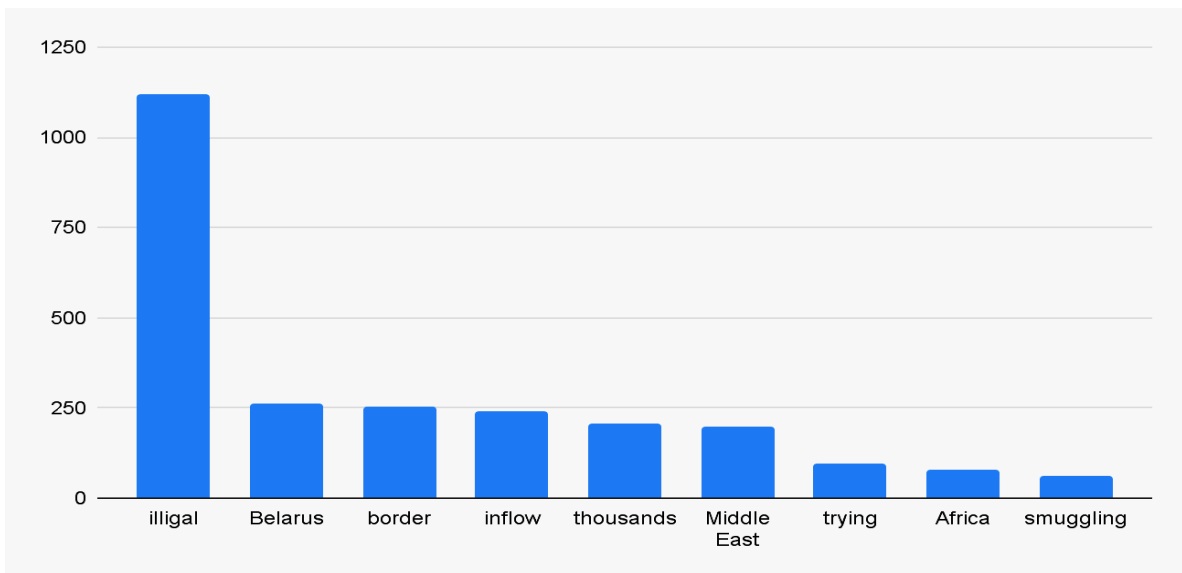

Figure 4: The collocations of migrant(s) by statistical likelihood (the media corpus)

LABOUR MARKET as a macro-topic provided some insight into the issue of migrant work and employment in terms of irregularity. Although this group was neither large nor frequent, it covered some interesting terms such as *grey market* or *illegal work* (in Polish, *na czarno*), referring to *irregular employment*. There was also an interesting correlation between the terms *work* and *forced*, terms related to work conditions such as *working hours without a contract* and *the obligation to receive a work permit*.

It was interesting to notice that *employers* in the context of irregular migration and irregularities of work were primarily associated with *legal requirements* of migrant employment. Interestingly, collocations referring to irregularities, such as *illegal entrustment*, were often linked to legal consequences (e.g. *fines*). Among migrant worker groups, *Ukrainians* appeared most frequently in collocations with employers.
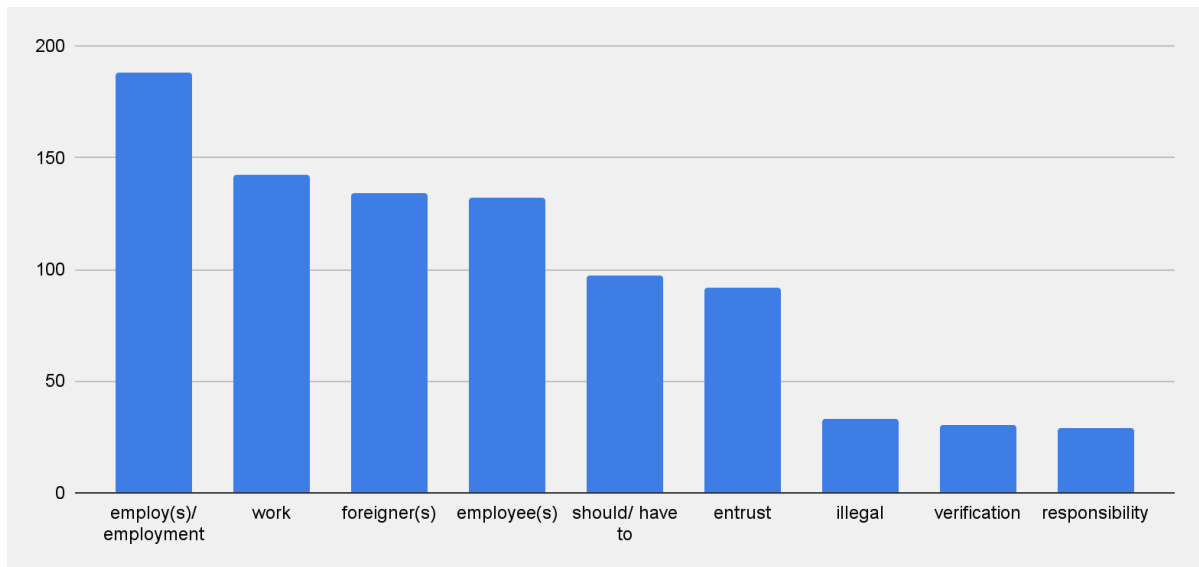

Figure 5: The collocations of employer(s) by statistical likelihood (the media corpus)

The analysis of selected macro-topics and key terms showed that irregular migration, within the mainstream media corpus, are linked to the representation of migration from the perspective of a threat, with a significant impact on crisis and pressure. This frames the representation of people on the move in a collective and dehumanised way. Terms such as *inflow* and *uncontrollable numbers* strengthened the narrative on insecurity and threat. While the labour market aspect was less visible in the corpus, it referred to isolated examples without framing it as a challenge or problem.

2.3.   Qualitative analysis

Our media corpus has been down-sampled for the narrative and social actors' analysis in the following way. Drawing on the quantitative analysis, we selected the following highly salient base words: *migration, migrant(s), refugee(s), work* and *border(s)* (in different lexical forms). They were used to build proto-narratives based on significant relations between them and strongly associated words (collocations). The proto-narratives were developed to include five narrative elements: 1) characters/actors, (2) actions/activities; facultative: (3) settings or circumstances, (4) means, tools and objects engaged with, (5) a moral evaluation or judgement.

The following proto-narratives were generated to nuance how irregular migration appears in the mainstream media:

Migration
The European Union's open-door policy has led to uncontrolled illegal *migration*, damaging Europe.
Lukashenka's regime artificially triggered a *migration* crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.
The Polish government pursued a liberal policy regarding the economic *migration* of Ukrainian citizens.
The wall/barbed wire is intended to stop illegal *migration*.

Migrant(s)

Due to the visa scandal, thousands of illegal *migrants* are arriving from the Middle East and Asia.

The Polish government opposes the harmful EU mechanism for relocating illegal *migrants*.

Poland needs economic *migrants* due to labour shortage.

Refugee(s)

In Poland, war *refugees* from Ukraine will receive assistance.

Groups of several dozen *refugees*, families with children, from Afghanistan or Syria are camping on the Polish-Belarusian border.

The Polish state is keeping women with child *refugees* in closed centres.

Work

Migrants *work* illegally in occupations where there is a shortage of workers.

Employers who entrust illegal *work* to a foreigner are subject to a fine.

Migrants from Ukraine often experience the risk of illegal *work*.

Border(s)

The *Border* Guard does not accept applications for protection and sends people to Belarus.

Groups of migrants are trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian *border* illegally.

The Polish government talks about the need to defend the eastern *border*.

Volunteers who help refugees at the *border* are stopped by officers.

Starting from the above list of proto-narratives, we chose 2-3 texts for each proto-narrative, representing their diversity, and analysed the mentioned articles, including the narrative, social actors, and process analyses. Our findings show the following noticeable patterns in the Polish media:

- Among social actors, various political actors were the most present in the studied material. The highest visibility was observed for those representing Polish government institutions (especially the government, the Border Guard) and major political parties, who were presented as active actors either 'owning' or participating in migration-related processes (e.g. managing migration policy). They were followed by the European Union and state actors such as Belarus and Germany. While the latter were also depicted as active agents, the representation of the EU looked more mixed, sometimes activated, other times passivated. Despite the thematic topic of the texts, migrants were not highly visible, being rather backgrounded, although there existed instances where they were presented as active, even possessing actors (e.g. intruders). Migrants tended not to be personalised but instead shown in an undetermined way. Civil society seemed to be rather suppressed in the analysed texts.

- Morals and evaluations remained visible in the narratives produced by the mass media.

- Different narratives were produced by the broadsheet and tabloid/populist media, with the first providing wider, more complex and multidimensional, contextualised narratives including various actors and different moral standpoints, and the second focusing more frequently on specific events, selected elements, and one dimensional moral or evaluation assessments.

This multifactor and multilevel migration depiction can be exemplified by the following article, which refers to migration as a politicised issue used in political competition in Poland. It is presented as the subject of EU complex and contested policy, a complex phenomenon related to various dimensions such as security, European cooperation and solidarity, and less prominent, labour shortages.

> *Law and Justice party's [PiS] actions regarding the referendum on migrants [during the parliamentary elections in October 2023] were sold as the implementation of a brilliant plan. (....) This shows how Donald Tusk struck PiS with a precise blow (...) He managed to show the discrepancy between the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the PiS government and the practice. The latter looks like this: thousands of foreigners come to Poland to work every year. That is why Jarosław Kaczyński had to use strong language in the interview for PAP to convince that he was credible in this matter. "Today, we are consistently opposing attempts to impose forced relocation of illegal migrants on Poland," he assured.*

> *The problem is that the regulations currently being discussed in the EU are intended to seal the EU's borders against the influx of illegal immigrants. Solidarity, on the other hand, means that a country will either accept refugees (i.e. people who, according to international law, can apply for asylum, not economic migrants), or give money to a country struggling with their influx, or provide it with other assistance — for example, sending its services to help protect the borders. It can also apply to the European Commission for exemption from solidarity if it is itself subject to migration pressure. That is why EU Commissioner Ylva Johansson wrote on Twitter that Poland could do this due to the presence of refugees from Ukraine.*

PiS argues that it cannot rely on the goodwill of the European Commission in such an important matter (....) PiS is trying to reassure its voters, who must be confused since they learned that the government they support is working on facilitations for economic migrants. Except that Kaczyński's party knows perfectly well that the Polish economy needs these migrants. (Rzeczpospolita_2023_07_07)

- The narratives about irregular migration were linked to other narratives. One related example can be the narrative about the Polish "normality" linked to the idea of its cohesion, traditionalism, and homogeneity, as well as Poland's role in Europe in defending traditional and Christian values and protecting Europe from outsiders, especially visible in *Gazeta Polska Codziennie*.

- The narrative about stopping *the influx of illegal migrants* and *protecting the border,* noticeable in the above quote, can be linked to the related narrative placing migration into the context of hybrid warfare. The below citation provides an example of the proto-narrative on the Belarusian regime fuelling the migration and crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. This warfare's association with migration can explain a larger focus on border protection than the lives and employment of migrants already residing in Poland.

- The dangerousness of migrants constructed concerning the hybrid war tends to be accompanied by their representations as posing other forms of threat. While broadsheet outlets present rather abstract and complex pictures, tabloids seemed to give more articulate narratives through characteristic examples, specific events and selected elements reflecting their simplistic emotion-evoking and sensation-seeking framing different than multicultural, pro-state or ethno-nationalistic discourses encountered in other types of the press (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2009). The above-mentioned point can be illustrated by the following quote on threats caused by desperate and determined migrants:

Dantean scenes in the border region of Podlasie. The immigration crisis is growing. People brought there by the authorities in Minsk, mainly from the Middle East, are still camping under the barbed wire on the Belarusian side. Most of them decide to illegally try to enter the territory of Poland. But some will not hesitate to risk their lives. On Sunday, there was a chase for the driver of a Peugeot who was transporting immigrants. He rammed an unmarked police car and wanted to hit another car. He was finally stopped. (...) Last Tuesday, a similar escape from a road check by a driver transporting illegal immigrants ended tragically. A Volkswagen driven by a Syrian collided head-on with a truck near Białystok. One of the passengers, who were also citizens of Syria, died. The driver was arrested, suspected not only of causing a road accident in which one person died but also of helping immigrants illegally cross the border. He faces up to eight years in prison. (M-Fakt-2021-10-18(3))

- The gender and racial markers could be visible in contrasting vulnerability and threat. Help was justified, particularly in the case of mothers with children fleeing the war in Ukraine or migrants in need of hospitalisation at the Polish-Belarusian border. In contrast, male migrants from Asian or African countries were associated with threat and aggressiveness (also constructed in a passive way, e.g. coming despite being unwanted and constituting a potential threat), as in the above example.

3. The discursive construction of irregularity in politics

3.1. Data sample

The data sample included the transcripts of parliamentary speeches (*Sejm, Senat*), documents such as President and Prime Minister statements, governmental reports, local/regional strategies on migration governance, exposes. In the following analysis, mainly longer written forms were included, while short notes on the statements of prominent politicians were omitted. In total, 164 texts with 982,832 were collected and used for the analysis.

3.2. Quantitative analysis

Out of a list of 5,000 words in the politics corpus, the most frequent terms were *Poland* and *law,* which defines the main perspective of public actors and the regulatory dimension. We can also observe the importance of the *EU/European context* in defining the geopolitical landscape and the political tensions related to national and European migration policies (e.g., *European relocation schemes*). It is worth emphasising that EU policies (e.g., *the Pact on Asylum and Migration, relocation schemes*) have been frequently referenced in political narratives to criticise the influence of EU institutions at the national level.[8] Such perspectives reinforced the notion of national autonomy and the political decisiveness of the Polish government in matters of national security. In this context, asylum-related issues, are often used to perpetuate a sense of reluctance and fear within society toward migrants and refugees.

---

[8] Świerkocka, O., Tymińska, A. (2024). Polityka migracyjna – wielka nieobecna kampanii. Narracje o migracjach w kampanii do wyborów samorządowych 2024 r.,
https://hfhr.pl/upload/2024/07/polityka-migracyjna-wielka-nieobecna-kampanii-samorzadowej.pdf
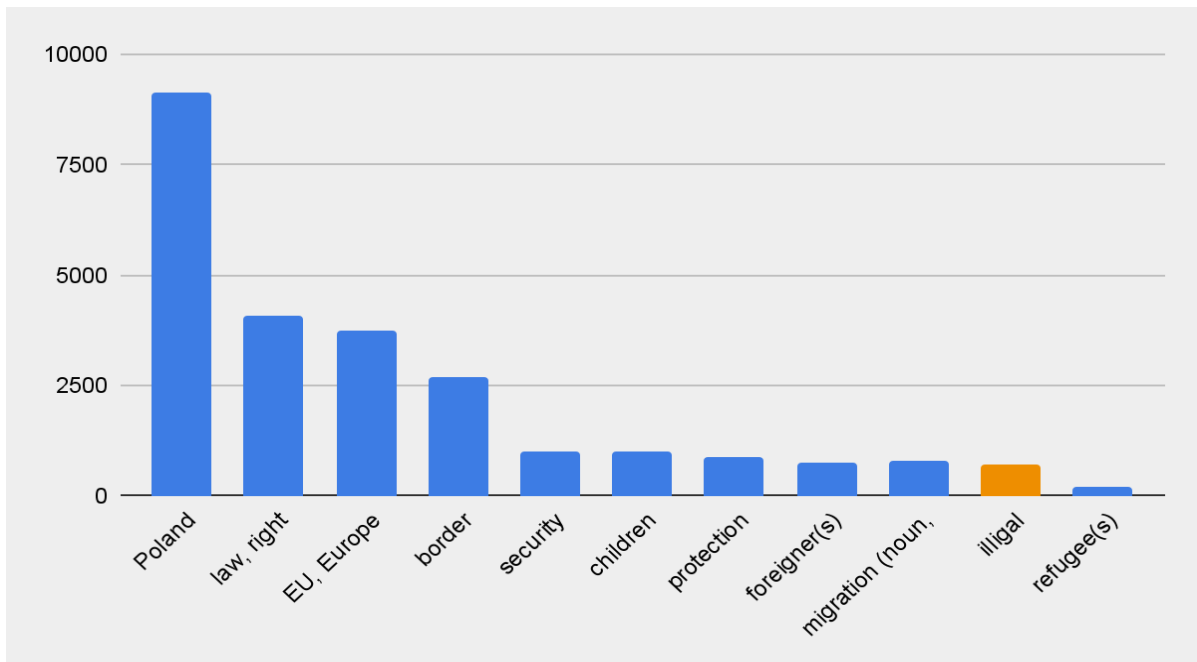
Figure 6: The salience of individual words by frequency (the politics corpus)

The most frequent words associated with irregular migration is *border*, followed by *security*, which might reflect the role and responsibility of public actors and regulations to ensure national security that political institutions prioritise. Border politics is perceived in terms of external threats (e.g., *destabilisation of the Polish and EU border* and *crises caused by the Belarusian regime*) and humanitarian crises. Interestingly, public institutions emphasised compulsion, both as the *instrumental exploitation of migrants by the Belarusian regime* (Sejm_2022_06_13) and as activity *forcing Poles to defend the eastern border* (Sejm_2021_04_13). This perspective was used to rationalise physical actions such as *pushbacks* and the reinforcement of the border *fence*. However, it also strengthens the dehumanisation narrative, presenting migrants and asylum seekers as the objects of exploitation by authorities and border enforcement institutions on both sides of the border.

Interestingly, the term *child/children* appeared frequently in the politics corpus, linked to the portrayal of children as a vulnerable group or a focus on child-centred issues (*child wellbeing*). Another noteworthy observation was the high frequency of the term *foreigners* instead of *migrants*, as seen in the media corpus. This is likely because *foreigners* is a legal term frequently used in Polish legislation. On the other hand, the term *refugee(s)*, which was expected to have a high frequency, appeared less often. *Refugee(s)* can be used in two meanings: first, as a general term to describe people on the move experiencing forced migration, and second, in a narrower legal sense, to refer specifically to individuals with refugee status. Public actors may prefer to use the term in its legal narrow sense and, as a result, employ it less frequently to avoid inconsistencies in terminology, unlike in the media or civil society corpora, where the broader usage is more common.

The graph also highlights that *illegal* is the main term used to describe irregular migration. Other terms that occurred were *without documents*, or *he/she/they do(es) not have a document*, which emphasised the issue of migration as arrivals to Poland without sufficient documents. In terms of how *illegally* manifests in the corpus, the analysis demonstrated the high likelihood of its appearance in collocation with terms that describe people (*migrants, immigrants*) or the phenomenon of migration (*immigration*). As a third dimension

appear terms related to *border crossings*. This shows that, similarly to the media, the politics corpus strengthened dehumanising narratives.

We identified 12 macro-topics, or large groups of semantically connected words, in the politics corpus. The analysis highlighted the significance of economy-related terms, which, however, were not directly related to migration but influenced the context in which the topic of migration was raised.

The graph below shows the overall frequencies of all macro-topics in comparison to one another.
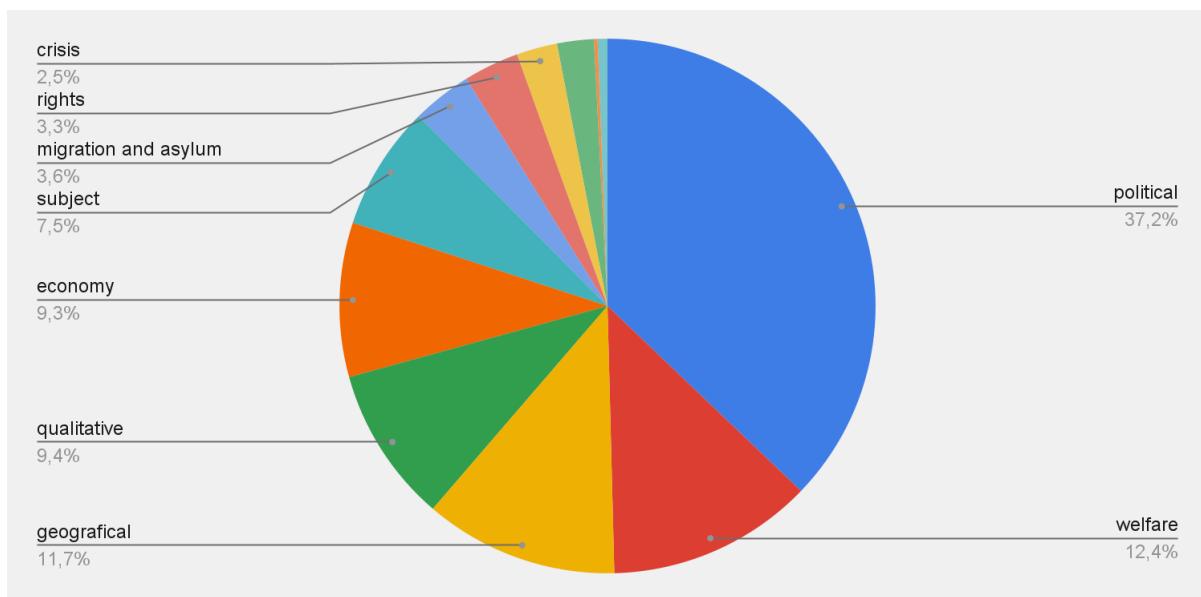

Figure 7: The salience of macro-topics (the politics corpus)

The following macro-topics, categorised by frequency, are presented below, with attention to the most prominent terms and sub-groups:

POLITICAL (sum frequency 71,204) was the largest macro-topic, framing irregular migration within political debates among key political actors, such as *party representatives*, *the prime minister*, and *the president*. Three subgroups were identified: POLICY AND LEGISLATION with terms *migration policy, security, order, regulations, national programmes*; STATE INSTITUTIONS, which incorporates *the government*, which was the largest in terms of frequencies in the group and covers terms *parliament, ministry, president, opposition*; and order and control institutions with such terms as a *tribunal, police, border guard, army*; SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS as a political actor in terms of migration issues. It encompasses such terms as *NGO, organisation, and foundation*. This was the difference in comparison to other analysed corpora, where civil society actors were not considered within the POLITICAL macro-topic, but for example HUMANITARIAN.

1. WELFARE (sum frequency 23,827) was the second largest macro-topic in the corpus with the subgroups: HEALTH, including *health, therapy, hospital, patient(s)*; CARE and access to care with such terms as *accessibility, care, support, social, insurance*; EDUCATION covering the terms *school(s), pre-schools, teachers, education*); VALUES AND NORMS including terms *solidarity, democracy, dignity, respect, stability* and other terms related to social life, such as *sport, community*, and *intercultural*). Although it was the second-largest macro-topic in the politics corpus, it did not encompass irregular migration.

2. **GEOGRAPHICAL** (sum frequency 22,418) – similarly to the other corpora, this macro-topic was significantly salient and encompassed several areas. Three subgroups reflecting the representation of migration as a political concern were identified. The largest was EU/WEST-EUROPEAN/WESTERN AREAS, which predominantly focused on the national Polish context, alongside terms such as *EU, Germany, France, Brussels, Schengen,* and *North-Atlantic.* This was contrasted with the significant visibility of NON-EU EUROPEAN and NON-EUROPEAN AREAS, where *Belarus* had the highest frequency, followed by *Ukraine, Iraq, Africa, Armenia, Afghanistan,* and *Asia,* areas often associated with migration processes or migration pressure. The final sub-group, OTHER GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS, included references to *forest(s), territory,* and *road(s),* highlighting spatial aspects of migration. Interestingly, from the comparative perspective, there was visibility in this group at the regional and municipal levels in terms of the names of cities (*Warsaw, Kraków*), regions (*Małopolskie, Podlaskie*) and administrative units (*gmina, voivodeship*).

3. **QUANTITATIVE** (sum frequency 18,043) macro-topic encompassed three sub-groups: UNCOUNTABLE TERMS, which was the largest in terms of its frequencies and predominantly contained words related to increase (*growth, increase*), scale (*huge, large, largest*) and frequency (*often, many times*); LARGE QUANTITIES including *billion(s), million(s), thousand(s)*; and LOW QUANTITIES with terms *one, first, two, twice, several dozen.* The prevalence of uncountable nouns and large quantities indicates that politicians, similar to the media, tend to reinforce a narrative of urgency and threat.

4. **ECONOMY** (sum frequency 17,886) - this macro-topic was distinguished as a specific category for the politics corpus and comprised terms related to economy, finances, and market (*budget, investments, finances, taxes, incomes, debt, inflation, entrepreneurship*). This macro-topic was frequent in the corpus; however, it did not relate directly to migration as none of these terms collocated with migration, migrants or other related terms (*border, refugee, foreigners*). Nevertheless, the high frequency shows the importance of the economic dimension at the political level, which also creates a context in which discussions about migration emerge.

5. **SUBJECT** (sum frequency 14,433) macro-topic included three subgroups: SOCIAL CATEGORIES, which covers terms *children, women, men, seniors, youth, people with disabilities,* categories related to ethnicity or origin (*Poles, Ukrainians*); religion (*Muslims*); civil statuses as *citizens, voters, residents*; FAMILY encompassing terms such as *parents* or *family*; SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES with terms *live, hope, fear, need, feel, emotions.* To a limited extent, this macro-topic related to irregular migration, and when it did, it was in the context of emphasising cultural distance and the selectivity of Polish migration policy.

6. **MIGRATION AND ASYLUM** (Freq 6,889) as a macro-topic was not frequent and consisted of the following sub-groups: ARRIVAL, which was the largest and comprised terms *border, visa, fence, entry*; STAY with terms *integration, adaptation, protection, centre, camp*; RETURN with various grammatical forms of the term *return, deportations, expulsions* characterised by its low frequencies in texts; TERMS OF MOBILITY with terms *migration, immigration, emigration, journey.* The focus on arrivals and border crossings showed that the narrative about irregular migration in this corpus aligned with that of the media.

7. **RIGHTS** (sum frequency 6,404) macro-topic encompassed the terms *right(s)* as a noun and an adjective, *rule of law*, *convention; international*, *protection*, *human*.

8. **CRISIS** (sum frequency 4,714) referred to various crises perceived from the political perspective, such as *migrant, pandemic, energy*, and *financia*l. Also, the terms *conflict, war, corruption, threat*, and *problem* were covered by this macro-topic. The sub-group COVID-19 was created in line with the research purposes. Within this macro-topic, we disregard the sub-topic of the *migration crisis*. Similar to the media corpus, it was significantly linked to the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border. This macro-topic was also interesting from a geographical perspective. For example, the term *state of emergency* was related to the national and regional levels —the *Podlaskie Voivodeship* in particular — but also linked the issue of *migration crises* in a region-specific context, appearing in collocations with *Latvia* and *Lithuania*. Additionally, it was associated with the geopolitical aspect of *the threat from the East*, which refers to the regime in Belarus, the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the hybrid conflict. Noticeably, the term *migration crisis* was used more frequently than the *refugee crisis*, which may correlate with the politicisation of the discourse surrounding the concept of a *real refugee* (Hargrave at al. 2023).

9. **STATUS** (sum frequency 4,247) included two sub-groups: PEOPLE ON THE MOVE with the term *foreigner(s)* as the most frequent, which also corresponds to the administrative and legal language. Interestingly, the term *refugee(s)* was not frequent in the corpus; and sub-group TERMS OF IRREGULARITIES, with *illegal/ illegally* and *without documents* as primarily used in political documents. The low frequency of this macro-topic indicates that the political corpus focuses more on the phenomenon of migration and its quantitative aspects rather than on the personalised dimension of individuals and their experiences.

10. **LABOUR MARKET** (sum frequency: 4,230) encompassed the terms *work, market, employer(s), employee(s), contract, permission*, and *remuneration*, as well as the indicated labour market sectors.

11. **CRIME** (sum frequency: 1,128) was not frequent in the collected materials; the group consisted of such terms as *aggression, attack, lie, violations, hate, crime*, and *exclusion*.

For further analysis, we focus on three macro-topics: MIGRATION and ASYLUM and LABOUR MARKET, to nuance the understanding of how irregularities of migration are embedded in the political corpus.

MIGRATION and ASYLUM macro-topic was consistent with the media corpus and referred primarily to the *border* (frequency: 2707). *Barrier* and *wall* were two other terms that highlighted security issues and the protective aspect of Poland's external border. The terms *crossing(s)* and *attempt(s)* frequently appeared in collocations with numbers such as *hundred, two hundred, thousands*, unquantifiable terms like *increase*, and the term *illegal*. This reflected the securitisation of migration as a political issue and a threat that requires a political response.

Migration in the politics corpus was presented similarly to media, often associated with *control, management, prevention,* or a *crisis.* It is important to highlight those two types of migration — *work (economic) migration* and *asylum (forced)* — occurred in collocations. This differentiation also reflected two forms of government response, such as the development of legal labour migration as an important factor for economic development and the prevention of uncontrolled transnational mobility framed as questionable forced migration. These two approaches can be seen in the developed proto-narrates, which we will present below.
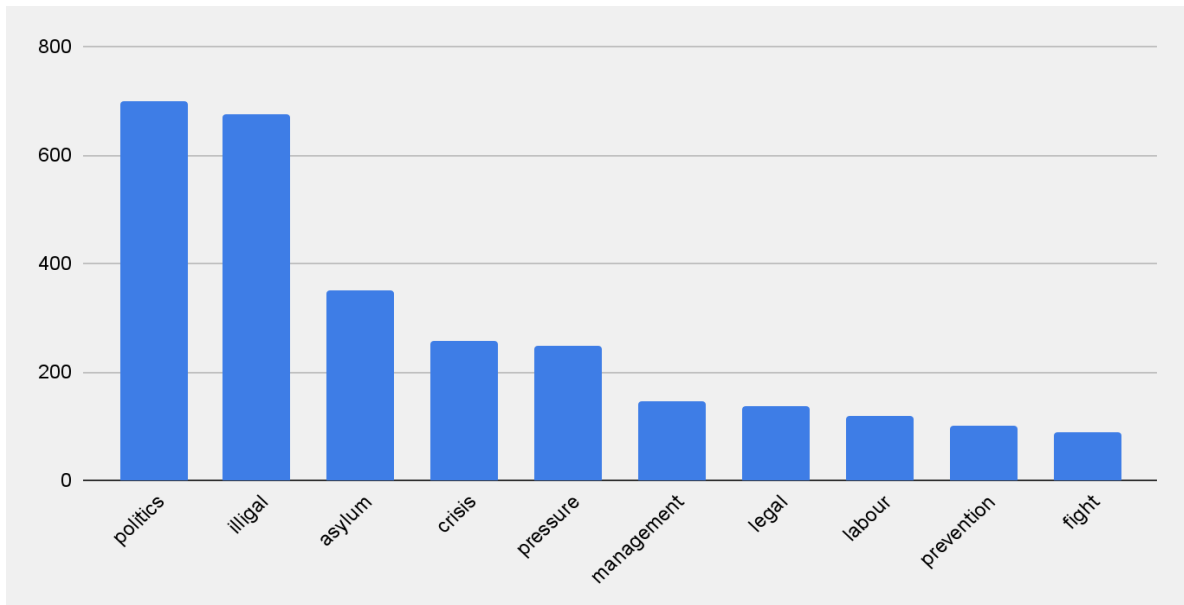

Figure 8: The collocations of migration by statistical likelihood (the politics corpus)

Comparing the representation of migration and migrants was interesting to observe some differences. An interesting dynamic was noticed with the term *migrant(s),* which, as in the media corpus, was most frequently used in its plural male form. In the political corpus, the term was associated with two main challenges: *irregular arrivals to Poland* (especially through the Polish-Belarusian border) and *the European Commission's imposed relocation scheme.* This perspective narrows down the narrative about *political crises,* allowing for the definition and elaboration of response mechanisms. Such an approach aligns with the narrative of rationalising control policies and the responsibilities of the Polish government at the EU level. *Syria, Africa,* and the *Middle East* were mainly mentioned as countries or regions of origin in the case of migrants arriving irregularly in Poland. These terms were also used in the context of irregular migration and the crisis at the border, emphasising the passivity of migrants (e.g., *deceived, pushed, brought, transported,* etc.) or, in line with anti-immigration rhetoric focusing on overuse or threats posed by migrants (e.g., *trying to break into our country)* (Sejm_2023_12_12); *treating our country as a transit state* (Prezydent_2023_10_06)). Both these perspectives contributed to the dehumanisation of people on the move in the political narratives.
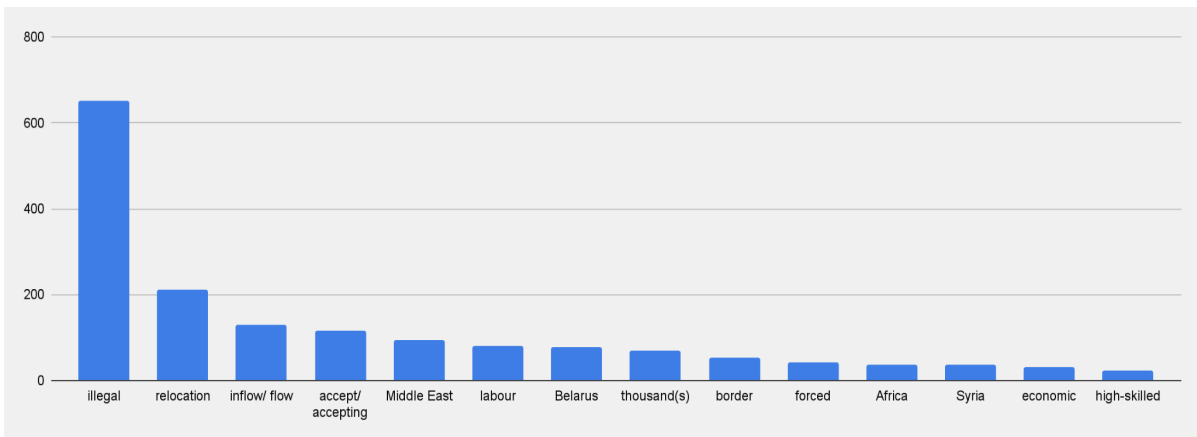
Figure 9: The collocations of migrant(s) by statistical likelihood (the politics corpus)

The LABOUR MARKET macro-topic in the political corpus included several sectors perceived as important to the Polish economy, such as a*griculture, construction,* and *mining.* The migration aspect appeared in collocations of the terms *employer(s)* and *worker(s),* with *Ukrainians* specifically appearing as a prominent migrant group in the corpus. Seasonal work was often correlated with legal migration, which reflects the discourse around labour-related migration in a country-specific context. Interestingly, the aspects of irregularities in employment were not visible in the analysed corpus.

Employers in the political corpus appeared as vital actors in migration-related issues, primarily due to their *demand for labour, workforce gaps* in specific sectors and regions, and *the legal aspects* of migrant employment. The analysis also highlights the high frequency of collocations with *organisations,* suggesting that employers were often depicted as an organised entity related to the government. The respective semantic field encompassed active verbs: *to employ, to perform, to recommend,* and *to state.*
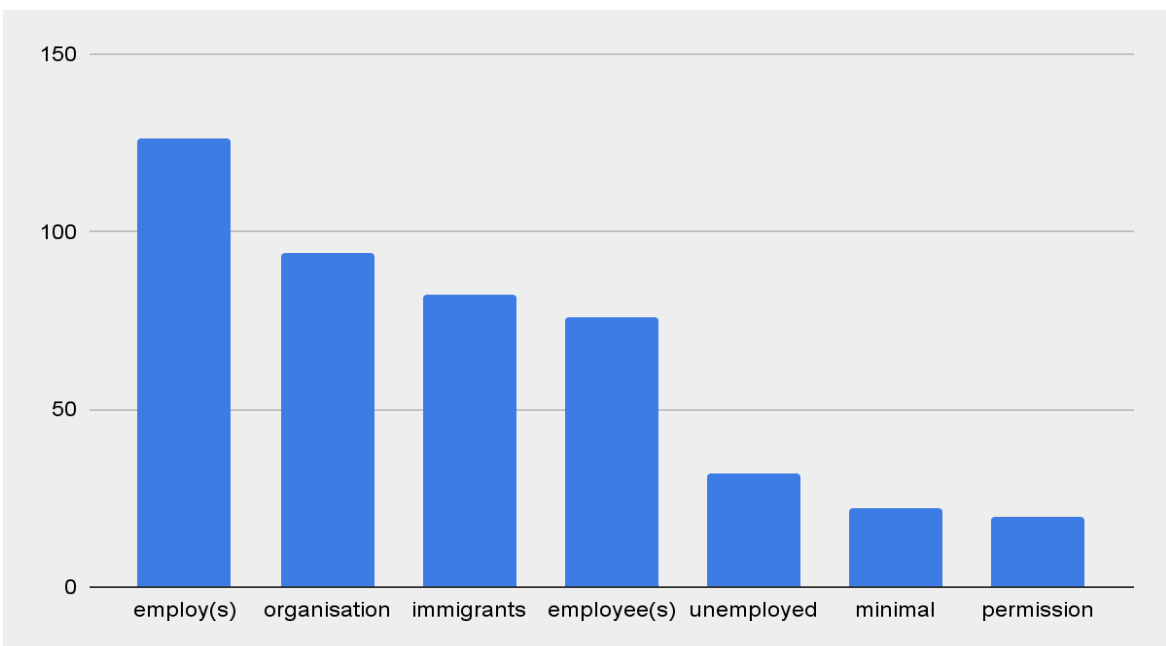

Figure 10: The collocations of employer(s) by statistical likelihood (the politics corpus)

The analysis of selected macro-topics and key terms showed that irregular migration, within the politics corpus, was associated with crisis, political challenges, and pressure at the border—predominantly the Polish-Belarusian border. These irregularities were linked to both the physical presence and border crossings by migrants, as well as a more symbolic perspective of pressure from external threats, primarily defined as the Belarusian and Russian regimes.

3.3. Qualitative analysis

Using the words *migration, migrant(s), refugee(s), employee(s),* and *border(s)* as our base words, we down-sampled our politics corpus and then identified and developed narrative structures into the following proto-narratives.

Migration
EU countries are struggling with the problem of illegal *migration*.
Poland is coping with the problem of illegal *migration* on the Polish-Belarusian border.
The response to the needs of the labour market is to support legal labour *migration*.

Migrant(s)
Poland is facing pressure from the illegal invasion of *migrants* from the Middle East and North Africa controlled by the regime in Belarus.
Migrant workers often work below their qualifications.
The visa scandal should be an impulse to analyse the system of legalising the stay of economic *migrants* in Poland and to formulate a better migration policy.

Refugee(s)
Poland provides significant assistance to war *refugees* from Ukraine,
The European Union treats Muslim migrants from the Middle East and *refugees* from Ukraine differently.
The European Union is trying to impose a mechanism for relocating illegal migrants, not *refugees*, to Poland.

Worker(s)
We do not accept illegal migrants, only legal *workers*, mainly Ukrainians, of whom employers are in need.
The refugee relocation mechanism and seasonal *worker*s are two completely different things.
The outflow of medical *workers* to the private market and abroad should be counteracted not so much by attracting doctors from Ukraine and Belarus as by improving working conditions for Polish doctors in the Polish public health system.

Border(s)
A barrier on the eastern *border* should stop illegal migration.
The *Border* Guard is responsible for protecting the state border, controlling border crossing, and preventing and counteracting illegal migration.
The *border* guard is taking women and children in need of help to Belarus.

Then, we chose some texts representing examples of the abovementioned proto-narratives which encompassed articulations of various basic structures. Based on this qualitative analysis, we made a few observations about the Polish politics corpus.

- There is a strong focus on border crossings (also prevented, e.g., *unauthorised attempts at the Polish-Belarusian border*), visas for workers or students (including frauds), and arrivals, with relative invisibility of migrants' stay and work in Poland.

- Impersonal and abstract rather than personalised and specific narratives are used

- Narratives about irregular migration are linked to other macro-narratives and clearly placed into political, and to a smaller degree, economic contexts. Migration is highly politicised and used to criticise major competing parties and enhance the rivalry between the opposition and the government (e.g. with accusations of wrongdoing). Migration is used to confront EU migration policy, specifically the relocation scheme and migration pact.

- Morals and evaluations are strongly present.

- Some narratives were particularly emotional and persuasive (populist), reduced to simplified statements combining ideological, political and pragmatic references.

To illustrate the above-mentioned findings, we cite excerpts from a parliamentary speech of the Prime Minister:

As Law and Justice, we know perfectly well that security is at the top of the list of values that guide us. Security must be a key point that we deal with because security is the foundation. (Applause) (…) Let us remember, ladies and gentlemen, whoever does not look after their interests, the interests of Poland, will have to look after the interests of foreign countries. (Voice from the audience: Bravo!) (Voice from the audience: Exactly.) (…) We Poles know perfectly well what compassion is, and solidarity is, but no one will teach us solidarity. (Voice from the audience: Where did you learn that?) …and especially not the Germans will teach us solidarity. It is some kind of paranoia that the Germans responsible for such crimes, who should pay us reparations, today still dare to call on us for solidarity. This is not a migration pact, it is a dictate, it is a dictate that aims to change Europe culturally as well. Let's be honest here: it aims to destroy, rape the existing European structures. I can see this clearly in many other European Union countries - it is happening. We do not consent to illegal migration nor any payment for migrants not accepted. We will not agree to this. (…) Our borders, Honourable House, are of course sacred and that is why today, I agree with the voices of some previous speakers, also from the opposition, also from the Confederation, that it is the external borders that must be protected, we have been emphasising this for 8 years. They must be effectively protected.

Just as in June 2018, being in the minority, we effectively blocked this madness, this terrible mistake of the Merkel and Tusk tandem. Tusk, who blackmailed us, and threatened us with consequences, remember this country, who called for a quick, precise plan of when we will accept refugees from the Middle East and Africa. (…) That is why I am calling on everyone, I am calling on the entire Honourable House to vote for this resolution, which will unequivocally condemn this entire pseudo-pact, the dictate of the European Commission. Because we are focused on security and sovereignty, the highest values in the decalogue of Polish values. (Applause) (Voice from the audience: This is no longer catching.) That is why we will remain very determined in defending these values. Thanks to Law and Justice, Poland will continue to be safe, will be white and red and will be a strong state. Thank you very much. (Sustained applause) (Voice from the audience: Bravo!) (Some MPs stand up and chant: This is Poland! This is Poland! This is Poland!)

In this text, the narrations of security, patriotism and sovereignty are underscored. It uses highly emotional and persuasive rhetoric that generates reactions from the audience. The speech can be contrasted with more composed expert narrations from less politically prominent government representatives in more substantive focused debates.

4. The discursive construction of irregularity in civil society

4.1. Data sample

The data sample consisted of 125 texts (including 571,499 tokens) from a wide spectrum of social organisations, including NGOs, migrant organisations, advocacy groups, and radical right-wing and populist organisations. Particularly valuable material covers reports from advocacy organisations and their reports that present organisations' statements or activities. We did not use short textual messages from social media profiles for methodological reasons.

4.2. Quantitative analysis

The analysis of frequent individual terms showed that out of a list of 5,000 words, the social organisations corpus predominantly focused on the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. Notably, the salient term *right(s)* referred to *human rights, the right to apply for international protection*, and its *violations*. This perspective can also be perceived as critical of the rationalisation of force or violence for national security that emerged in the media and politics corpora. Among the terms representing people on the move, *person/persons* (in Polish, *osoba/osoby*) occurred the most common, reflecting the (linguistic) trend of using phrases such as *person(s) with migration/refugee experience* or *migrant/refugee person(s)* (in Polish, *osoba/y z doświadczeniem migracji/uchodźstwa or osoba/y migranckie/uchodźcze*). However, the term *foreigner* was also unexpectedly high in frequency, primarily due to its use in document titles (e.g., *Report on the Situation of Foreigners*) and its status as a legal term, as seen in the politics corpus.
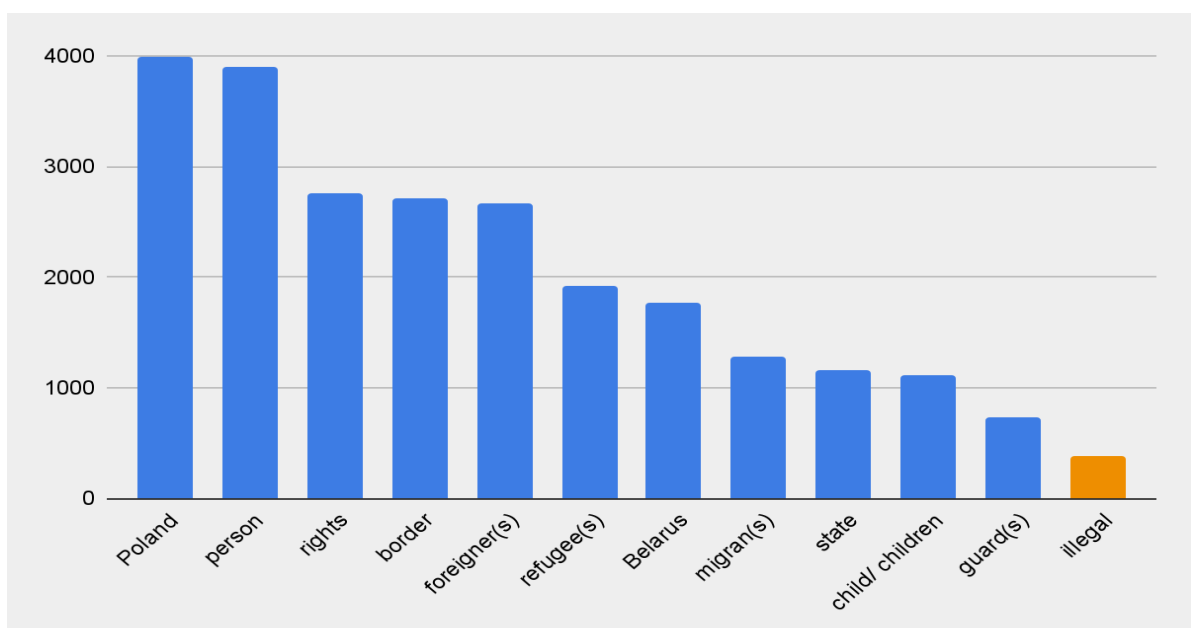

Figure 11: The salience of individual words by frequency (the civil society corpus)

Similarly, as in the case of the other corpora, *illegal* was the most frequent term related to irregular migration, often used in collocations with *crossings, arrivals, stays,* and institutional forms of oppression like *expulsions, push-backs, and deportations.* Another term used was *unregular* (in Polish, *nieuregulowany*), while *undocumented* or *irregular* did not appear in the frequency list.

The analysis of the frequencies of top words revealed further differences between the politics and media corpora. It showed that the civil society corpus emphasised the perspective of people on the move rather than the institutional approach, as was presented earlier in the political corpus, giving more visibility to personalised stories or evidence collected by activists. The texts originating from civil society also moved away from presenting migration as an undefined or quantified phenomenon, as noticeable in the media corpus. They tended to underline humanitarian narratives and human rights, especially through uncovering the violation of the law (national and international). The terms related to rights or legal regulations (*right to protection, freedom*) or risks and the experiences of being objectified (*forced, ignored*) also featured visibly.

Likewise, the previously described corpora, 12 macro-topics, reflected the context in which irregular migration is portrayed in the civil society corpus. Within these macro-topics, the most salient subgroups were illustrated with the examples of most characteristic terms for this corpus. The corpus-specific HUMANITARIAN macro-topic was distinguished as more salient than in the other two corpora.

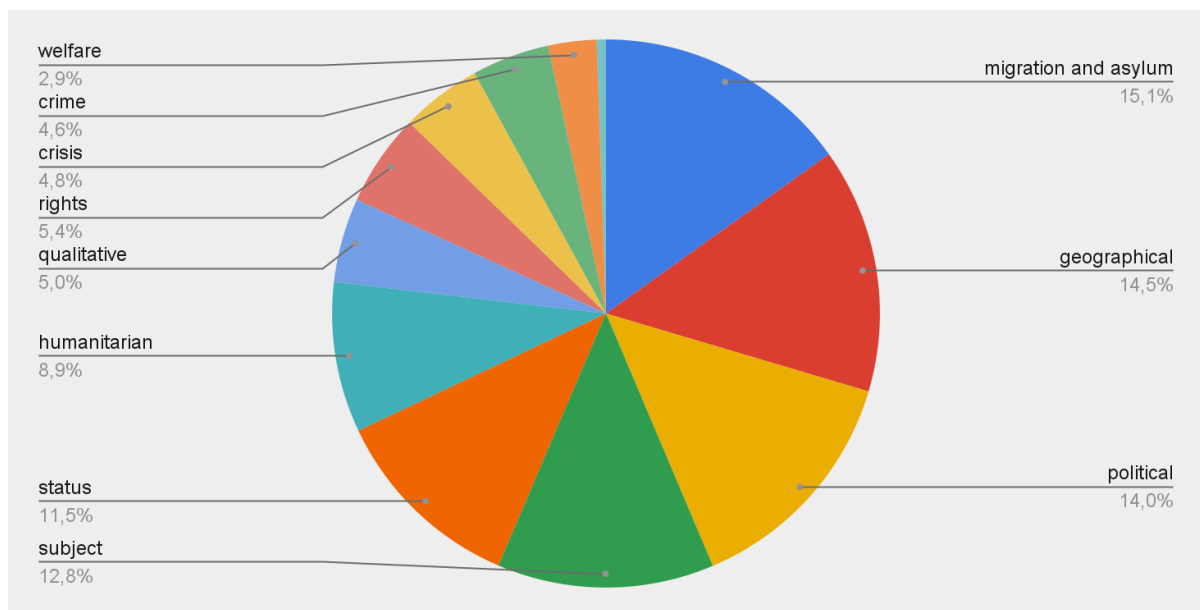Below, Figure 12 presents the cumulative frequencies of all macro-topics.

Figure 12: The salience of macro-topics (the civil society corpus)

The following macro-topics, categorised by frequency, are presented below, with attention to the most prominent terms and sub-groups:

1. **MIGRATION AND ASYLUM** (sum frequency: 21,782) was the largest macro-topic and included five sub-groups: ARRIVAL with terms *border, fence, wall, cross, arrive(d), run away*; STAY with terms *stay, integration, migrant centre, camp, ghetto, shelter*; the sub-topic RETURN with terms *deportation* and

expulsion; ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES with terms *procedure, application, refusal, granting protection, temporal [protection, stay]*; MOBILITY TERMS encompassing *journey, migration, relocation* and *transit*. The visibility of this macro-topic and the complexity of the sub-topics show that the civil society corpus was the most developed in terms of presenting irregular migration. It also accounted for various aspects in which irregularity may arise (e.g. *restrictive migration policy*) and the potential impacts it may have.

2. **GEOGRAPHICAL** (sum frequency: 20,806) similarly to media and politics corpuses, these macro-topics was significantly visible and included sub-groups as EU/WESTERN EUROPE/WESTERN COUNTRIES AND AREAS including *Poland, Germany, EU, Lithuania, Italy, Holland, Norway, Great Britain*; NON-EU/EUROPEAN/WESTERN COUNTRIES AND AREAS with terms *Belarus, Ukraine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, Israel, Vietnam, Asia*. REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL DIMENSION IN POLAND encompassed cities and locations as *Warsaw, Usnarz, Kraków, Wrocław, Białystok, Gdańsk, Kielce*; OTHER GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS with terms *forest, mud, territory, borderland, local*.
   While the EU/WESTERN EUROPE/WESTERN COUNTRIES AND AREAS subgroup was the most frequent, the NON-EU/EUROPEAN/WESTERN COUNTRIES AND AREAS subgroup was more diverse.

3. **POLITICAL** macro-topic (sum frequency: 20,202) was the third most visible macro-topic, indicating that civil society portrayed irregular migration as a political issue while also critiquing restrictive policies and administrative actions. These macro-topics covered three subgroups: POLITICS AND LEGISLATION, including such terms as *migration policy, state, law, legal act*; STATE INSTITUTIONS with a few main sub-topics of administration (*parliament, ministry, party, office*) and institutions of control (*police, border guards, soldiers, prosecutor's office*); LAW AND ORDER which encompasses terms such as *control, prohibition, monitoring, detainment, complaint*.

4. **SUBJECTIVE** (sum frequency: 18,422) is a highly diverse macro-topic with the following major sub-groups as: SOCIAL CATEGORIES related to age (*minors, children, youth*), gender (*women, men, LGBTQ+*), race (*Black*), ethnicity and nationality (*Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Roma, Syrians*), religion (*Islam, Muslim*), other social groups (such as *hooligans, students*), civic groups (*citizens, residents*); FAMILY with terms as *family, son, father, wife*; SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE referring to *illness, fear, life, death, experience, forced, in need, psychological state*. It is worth highlighting that, compared to the media and politics corpora, the civil society corpus predominantly emphasises the subjective perspective of irregular migration, particularly in terms of the risks to individuals due to restrictive and selective migration policies. This macro-topic in this corpus provided an important perspective on the situation of children and minors with migration and refugee experience. Particularly relevant from a research perspective were issues such as the *detention of children during asylum procedures* and the danger they face at the Polish-Belarusian border. Analysing the term *child/children* as one of the most frequent terms in the subject, macro-topic provides a broad perspective on issues concerning migrant minors, whether accompanied by parents or unaccompanied ones. The collocations of this term encompassed such terms as *detention, single women* or *single mothers*, and situations where children were at the border or stuck between Belarus and Poland. The term also collocated with words such as *victim(s)* of human trafficking and other groups considered vulnerable, highlighting their precarious situations and particular risks they faced in such contexts.

5. **STATUS** (sum frequency: 16,615) included terms such as *migrant(s), foreigner(s), immigrant(s), refugee(s)*, and *stateless person(s)*. The terms *foreigner(s)* and *refugee(s)* were the most frequently used. The term *stateless person* appeared in this corpus, unlike in the other corpora. Additionally, the Polish neologism of *nachodźcy* ("*invaders*") also occurred here in the context of the anti-migrant discourse displayed within some radical right and populist society organisations.

6. **HUMANITARIAN** macro-topic (sum frequency: 12,771) was unique for the corps and covered terms initially analysed as the RIGHTS, WELFARE, and SUBJECTIVE macro-topics. However, due to the strong connection with the humanitarian crises — in particular at the Polish-Belarusian border — we decided to create a separate category. This macro-topic consisted of three subgroups: THE HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, which covered terms *NGOs, activists, researchers* — especially *the Border group* and *the Researchers at the Border, activist groups*. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE, with terms *help, intervention, support, protection, care, advocacy*); and HUMANITARIAN SITUATION, which incorporated terms *search for, in need, to need* (in Polish, *potrzebować), vulnerable*. The visibility of this macro-topic reflects differences in the portrayal of irregular migration compared to the media and politics, strengthening the humanitarian narrative. It contrasts the narrative of danger and threat with the perspective of risks experienced by individuals at the border, as well as emphasising the urgency of help and humanitarian response.

7. **QUANTITATIVE** (sum frequency: 7,159) was significantly less visible than in media and politics. This macro-topic included the following sub-groups: UNCOUNTABLE TERMS and terms *wave, massive, increase, explosion*; SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES which included *thousands, millions, hundreds*; QUANTITY-RELATED TERMS encompassing *percentage, few, a lot, large, numbers*.

8. **RIGHTS** (sum frequency: 7,834) was a macro-topic that encompassed terms such as *rights, law, the rule of law* (Polish: *praworządność), convention, international, human*, and *protection*. The most frequent term *rights* (2,199) was often associated with humans and citizens and linked to institutions (e.g., *ombudsman, tribunal*) and the violations of rights.

9. **CRISIS** (sum frequency: 6,868) covered the following sub-groups: THE COVID-19 pandemic with terms *pandemic, coronavirus, epidemic*; WAR-RELATED with terms such as *invasion, war, conflict, genocide;* The sub-group THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER CRISIS was distinguished due to the significance of this aspect in the corpus. From the crisis perspective, the border crisis was portrayed through terms such as *special zone, problem, crisis, drama, necessity*, and *threat*.

10. **CRIME** (sum frequency: 6,581) macro topic presented a different perspective than the media and politics, introducing the aspects of injustice and violence from institutions. The macro-top included the following sub-groups GENERAL TERMS which covered *crime, threat, smuggler(s), smuggling, assault, persecution*; CRIME AND DISCRIMINATION related to gender, race, and ethnicity (*xenophobia, racism, neo-fascism, anti-Semitism, anti-Ukrainian, discrimination, homophobia*); VICTIMS including terms *victim(s), attacked, beaten*.

11. **WELFARE** (sum frequency: 4,113) macro-topic encompassed the following three sub-groups: HEALTH with terms *health, hospital, medics, ambulance*; HOUSING and terms *to live, apartments, housing*; NORMS AND VALUES encompassing *solidarity, dignity, democracy, freedom*.

The sub-group of HEALTH dominated in the macro-topic, mainly due to the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border and the conditions faced by people stopped or subjected to push-backs. It also reflected the role of the voluntary group *Medics at the Border*.

12. **LABOUR MARKET** (sum frequency: 785) was the least visible macro-topic, primarily featuring the terms *work* (as both noun and verb) and *workers*. Interestingly, the term *employers or* examples of work-related irregularities *(ex. work in a grey area* (in Polish, *na czarno)* did not appear in this corpus.

Similarly to the previously discussed two corpora, the civil society corpus was analysed through three selected macro-topics—MIGRATION and ASYLUM, CRISIS, and SUBJECT—to examine the context surrounding the representation of irregular migration:

MIGRATION and ASYLUM macro-topic referred to *arrival, stay, return,* and mobility terms as in politics and media corpora. However, the most interesting aspect of this macro-topic was the focus on *detention, temporary accommodation*s for migrants (such as *migration facilities)*, and other terms that presented Poland's anti-migrant and anti-refugee policy. From the perspective of irregular migration, the presence of terms related to the refusal of asylum applications and expulsions (e.g., *deportations, pushbacks, returns*) was also noteworthy. The approach criticising the Polish restricted policy can be seen as a counter-narrative to the politics and media discourses, underscoring the irregularities imposed by institutions (e.g. using the term *illegal* for the state's actions). For instance, *pushback(s)* (in Polish, *wywózki)* correlated with terms such as *illegal* and *lawless* (in Polish, *nielegalne, bezprawne)*, *dangerous,* and (migrants) *missing*.

Migration as a term in the social organisations corpus brings a broader perspective beyond the crisis and policy dimensions featured in the previous corpora. This term also appeared in collocations with *instrumentalisation* and *criminalisation,* raising questions about irregularities in policy responses and violations of rights, such as access to asylum procedures.
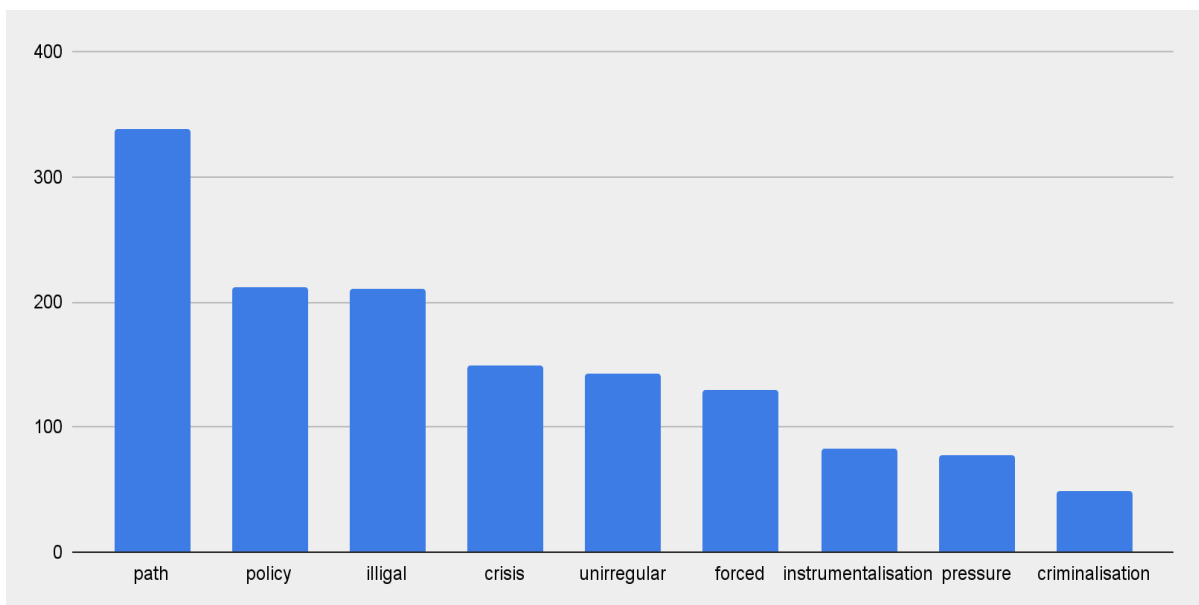

Figure 13: The collocations of migration by statistical likelihood (the civil society corpus)

The term *migrant(s)* occurred in the Social Organisations corpus in plural male and plural female forms, highlighting a more inclusive linguistic approach than in the politics and media corpora. Similarly to migration-related terms, the term *migrant(s)* correlated with terms emphasising power imbalances in policy responses, with collocations such as *dehumanisation, send back*, and *uniformed services*.
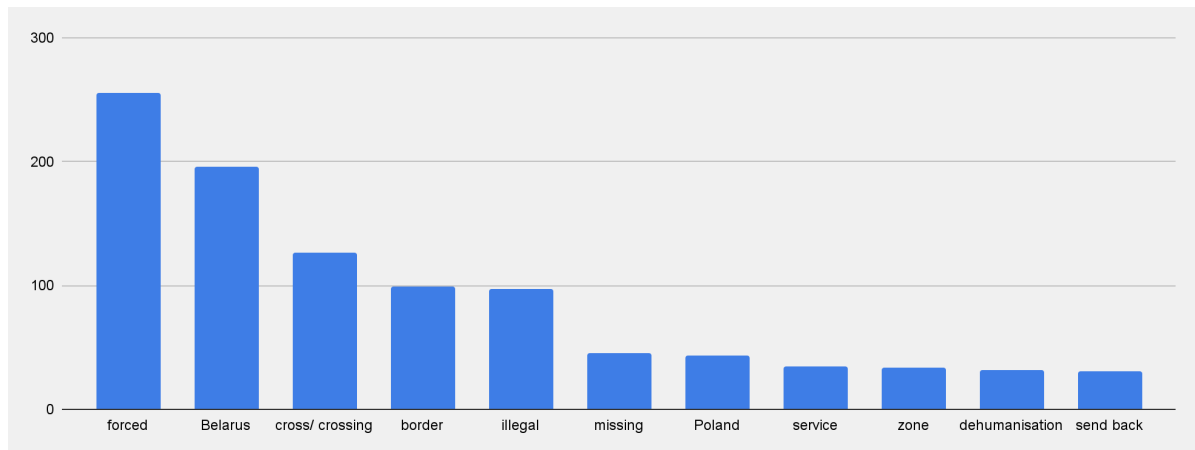

Figure 14: The collocations of migrant by statistical likelihood (the civil society corpus)

As mentioned earlier, the CRISIS macro-topic encompasses several key sub-groups, each highlighting different aspects of recent challenges. However, a particularly prominent theme is the ongoing situation at the Polish-Belarusian border, which highlights the complexities and political tensions, emphasising the immediate challenges migrants face, broader security concerns, and human rights dimensions.

The term *crisis* in this corpus predominantly referred to the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. Collocations also underlined its continuity (ongoing character) during the period covered in our research. Interestingly, while both terms *migration crisis* and *refugee crisis* appeared in this corpus, social organisations underlined the problem of using these terms to shift responsibility for legal violations onto people on the move rather than on instrumentalisation and repressive practices by the government and control institutions. As a counter-narrative, social organisations advocated for the phrase humanitarian crisis as a more appropriate term.
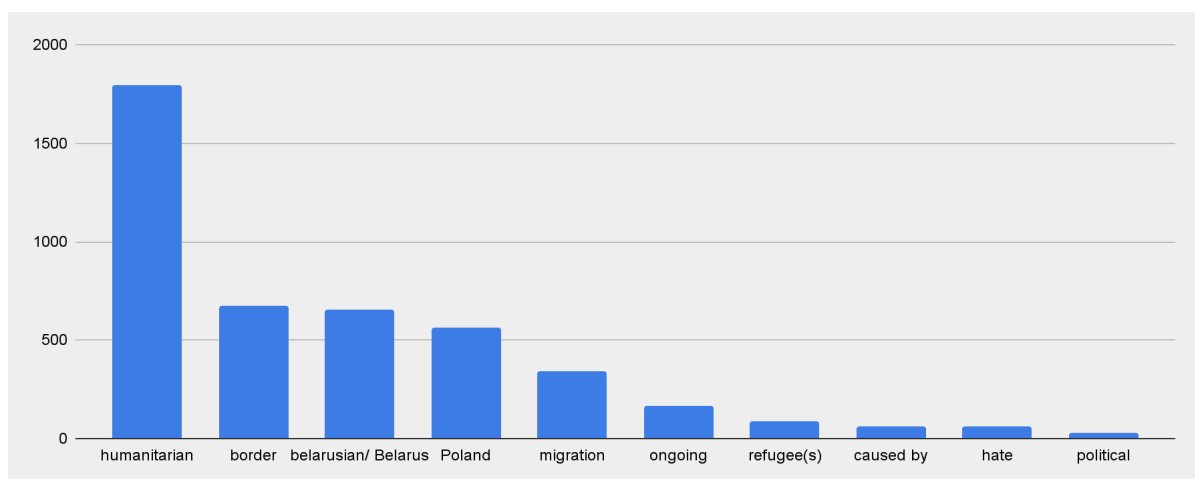

Figure 15: The collocations of crisis by statistical likelihood (the civil society corpus)

The analysis of selected macro-topics and key terms showed that irregular migration, within the civil society corpus, is linked to the crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border, similarly to the previous corpora. However, there are significant differences, as irregularities in this corpus are associated with power asymmetries and institutional violence, such as *pushbacks* and *detentions*. The civil society corpus also offers a more subject-oriented perspective, with one of the most salient topics being the situation of migrant children.

4.3. Qualitative analysis

The quantitative examination of the Civil Society corpus allowed us to downsample the material and identify narrative structures around *migration, migrant(s), refugee(s), child(ren)*, and the *border*, producing the following proto-narratives representing the mentioned corpus:

Migration
Poland needs a long-term *migration* policy.
Push-back policies are an example of the criminalisation of *migration* and the dehumanisation of people on the move.
EU countries are applying a push-back policy under the pretext of fighting illegal *migration* and human trafficking.

Migrant(s)
The forced expulsion of *migrants* to Belarus is a serious violation of human rights.
The organisations provide humanitarian assistance to *migrants* and migrants crossing the Polish-Belarusian border.
Irregular border crossing does not make a *migrant* illegal.

Refugee(s)
Roma *refugee*s from Ukraine experience discrimination.
Politicians and the media play a significant role in strengthening Poles' hostility towards *refugees*.
The majority of Poles are in favour of accepting *refugees* from Ukraine.
Families from Afghanistan remain in Usnarz Górny without access to the procedure for applying for *refugee* status.

Child(ren)
In the border forests, pregnant women and *children* experience violence.
Unaccompanied *children* are held in guarded centres for foreigners.
Institutions in Poland do not sufficiently take into account the obligation to protect the best interests of the *child* in refugee procedures.

Border(d)
Activists are accused of helping to organise illegal *border* crossings.
The Border Guard is obliged to accept an application for international protection even in the event of an attempt to illegally cross the *border*.
Illegally crossing the *border* becomes the only way to get to Polish territory, escaping persecution.

Drawing on the above-listed proto-narratives, we identified and analysed the selected texts to investigate emerging narrative structures. Our findings suggest the following characteristics of the Polish social organisations' narratives.

- Although Polish social organisations use both impersonal and personalised narratives, the visibility of the latter is prominent, particularly distinguishing the social organisations corpus from the political one. The civil society narratives encompassed some highly individualised and specified examples of individuals and groups.

- The social organisations' narratives made children and, to a minor degree, women and families particularly noticeable, and they referred to different, sometimes intersectional, vulnerabilities.

- These narratives tended to be focused and concise rather than combining narratives about irregular migration with other narratives.

- Strong morals and evaluations were also the feature of the civic society narratives.

- The narratives of social organisations were more sensitive to and reflective of the significance of the terms used, e.g. differentiating between migrants and refugees. They endeavoured to produce and promote counter-narratives, e.g. framing as illegal certain practices of the Polish state (e.g. not accepting applications for international protection, forcing migrants to return to Belarus, keeping minors in guarded and detention centres) or showing how Ukrainian forced migrants are privileged in contrast to other forced migrants.

- Authors and those speaking in the analysed texts constituted rather coherent and homogenous narrators (except for representatives of radical right and populist organisations), often positioning themselves as both activists and experts.

As an example of these narrative regularities, we include an excerpt from the research and activist collective *Researchers on the Borders*:

(…) The practice of push-backs is an extreme example of delegalisation and criminalisation of migration. The authorities' recognition of crossing the "green border" as a threat to state security resulted in the refusal to recognise the subjectivity of a person in terms of the possibility of applying at all, although the application of such a cause-effect relationship is not supported by legal regulations (….) In the report of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the authors use the phrase "where the law does not reach" to describe what happens in the forest on the border. An equally apt description could also be "where the law goes blind". (….) Negotiating visibility often turned out to be a more effective form of ensuring access to the procedure than purely legal measures. Available reports indicate that deportations also occurred in the case of unaccompanied minors. For example, in October 2021, there were reports of two teenagers from Congo who, despite being assigned a guardian, disappeared from Polish territory, and on New Year's Eve of the same year, the Ocalenie Foundation reported live on attempts to prevent the third deportation of a sixteen-year-old Syrian. (….) Since much has already been written on this topic, I will limit myself to observing that most statements regarding the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border fit either into securitisation narratives (justifying the dehumanisation of migrants with the state security) or into the discourse of political and humanitarian care represented primarily by entities providing assistance. (C-Researchers on the Border_2023_03).

The above quote uses morally loaded narratives referring to the law and humanitarian values and using personalised examples to show the consequence of the criticised practices.

5. Comparative insights

5.1. Quantitative comparison

The *keyness* analysis of the politics corpus (compared with the media) highlighted economic terms like *investment*, *budget*, and administrative terms related to local government. Migration-related terms did not stand out in this analysis, suggesting the prevalence of economic perspective and other crisis-related issues as more salient. However, both the politics and media corpora shared a similar focus on *border security*, viewing the border as a fenced space and a site of irregular crossings, with the government's role framed in protecting the border. The national and EU perspectives appeared in terms of the rationalisation of protection and control in response to external threats, mainly from the Belarusian authoritarian regime. Both corpora strengthen the narrative of the instrumentalisation and politicisation of irregular migration through the lens of migrants' arrivals while overlooking aspects related to migrants' stay and work. Both corpora also reinforced the dehumanisation of migrants. While the media discourse heavily emphasised securitisation, focusing on presenting migration through numbers and countable nouns, the political discourse adopted a rationalisation perspective, framing irregular migration in terms of migration policy and the intensification of control mechanisms, even if these violate human rights (with less moral weight given to such actions). It also confronted irregular migration with other migration-related issues, such as the need for labour migration.

While all three corpora focused on irregular border crossings, the Civil Society corpus offered a different perspective. When comparing civil society and media corpora, key terms (with high *keyness*) such as *violence*, *human*, *protection*, *hate*, and *detention* underlined the main difference. This shows that the human rights dimension was much more present in the narratives of civil society organisations. Compared with the politics corpus, characteristic terms in the civil society corpus contain *refugee(s)*, *foreigners*, *violence*, *protection*, *detention*, and *rights*. There was an interesting difference regarding the term *refugee*, which was not salient in the political corpus. This suggests that in the Civil Society corpus, the irregular migration was presented in the context of violations involving individuals seeking international protection in Poland or the conditions of their stay. This comparison showed that the civil society corpus provided a counter-narrative to the politics and media corpora, focusing on humanitarian concerns and human rights violations as central issues in the discussions of irregular migration. Noticeably, the term *employer(s)* did not appear in the Civil Society corpus as in the other corpora.

5.2. Qualitative comparison

The qualitative analysis of the three corpora demonstrated the following substantial differences between them. *Migrants* remained the most visibly included and personalised in the Social Organisations' corpus, while the least in the political one. Those two corpora referred predominantly to different narratives - the former to the law and values while the latter to politics and economics. The media narratives could be described as the most complex, including narratives from the civic society and politics, but with the predominance of the latter (visible in the larger presence of political actors than those representing the social organisations and mainstream narratives than counter-narratives).

6. Concluding Remarks

The corpus analysis of the three corpora reveals that *illegal* remained the primary term for irregular migration, consistently used in the politics corpus. In the media and civil society corpora, other terms such as *unregistered*, *unregulated*, and *irregular* appeared less frequently.

Analysis of the macro-topics and sub-groups also highlighted differences between the corpora. The media corpus emphasised the scale of migration, often portraying migration as overwhelming and challenging. The politics corpus featured significantly the economic dimension. It was visible in the representation of *labour-market migration* in contrast to forced migration, such as the *EU relocation scheme* and *forced migration from regions like the Middle East and Africa*. It also reflected the representation of migration through the perspective of Polish interests (mainly related to the labour market), causes (*insufficient EU policy or external threat from the East*), and consequences (*crisis*) of political decisions. The social organisations' corpus emphasised the *humanitarian dimension*, focusing on rights limitations, such as *the denial of access to asylum procedures*, *push-backs*, *discrimination* or *xenophobia*. The quantitative analysis followed by the development of proto-narratives and qualitative analysis allowed for the identification of main narrative directions within the three corpora:

- A securitisation narrative presents migration in unquantifiable terms, and migrants represented collectively.

- The rationalisation narrative emphasises the role of institutions and control measures in ensuring security and order, normalising institutional violence and denial of migrants' rights to access international protection. It also encompasses references to labour migration in terms of its selectivity and the provision of needed labour force shortages.

- The critical human rights narrative focuses on human rights, the right to protection, and the individual experiences of migrants, especially at the border.

Although irregular migration in the three corpora occurred in the normative context of the violation of administrative procedures (e.g., *border crossings without documents*), the civil society corpus underlined moral grounds for the right to apply for international protection in case of the lack of documents. A second interesting point is related to the issue of security. While the media and political corpora focus on national security threatened by the presence of migrants, civil society brings the alternative vision of security based on legal and moral foundations and free from institutional violence (*a safe border is one where no one dies*).

The qualitative analysis of the three corpora revealed substantial differences: *migrants* were most visibly included and personalised in the civil society corpus, which emphasised the narratives of *human rights* and *individual experiences*, while the political corpus focused on *policy* and *economics*, which strengthened the context of the racialisation of migration policy. Individual stories were rather not provided in the political corpus. Media narratives were the most complex, bridging elements from the social organisations and political discourses but demonstrating a strong focus on the political security-oriented perspective rather than counter-narratives.

List of References

Amendment to the law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country, https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/the-law-on-assistance-to-ukrainian-citizens-in-connection-with-the-armed-conflict-on-the-territory-of-the-country-has-entered-into-force, [accessed 12.11.2024].

Fiałkowska K., Łukasiewicz K., Radziwinowiczówna A. (2021) Humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian frontier. Old and new diagnoses from external EU borders, CMR Spotlight 12(34).

Access to the territory and pushbacks, https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/poland/asylum-procedure/access-procedure-and-registration/access-territory-and-push-backs/, [acessed 12.11.2024].

Grzymala-Kazlowska A. (2009). Clashes of discourse: the Representations of Immigrants in Poland Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies Vol.7(1).

Hargrave, K., Homel, K., Dražanová, L., (2023). Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile (2022). London, Overseas Development Institute.

Information on the investigation regarding the so-called visa scandal, https://www.gov.pl/web/prokuratura-krajowa/informacja-o-sledztwie-dotyczacym-tzw-afery-wizowej, [accessed 12.11.2024].

Referendal questions, the question 4, "Are you in favour of admitting thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, in line with the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?", https://referendum.gov.pl/referendum2023/en/pytania, [accessed 12.11.2024].

Revocation of the state of epidemic emergency – consequences for the legal situation of foreigners, https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/revocation-of-the-state-of-epidemic-emergency--consequences-for-the-legal-situation-of-foreigners [accessed 12.11.2024].

Rheindorf M., 2019, Revisiting the Toolbox of Discourse Studies Postdisciplinary Studies in Discourse, New Trajectories in Methodology, Open Data, and Visualisation.

Rheindorf M., Wodak R., (2018). Borders, Fences, and Limits—Protecting Austria From Refugees: Metadiscursive Negotiation of Meaning in the Current Refugee Crisis, Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 16:1-2, 15-38.

Rheindorf M., Vollmer B., (2025). Methodological Note: Corpus-based discourse analysis of migration-related discourses in media, politics and civil society, https://i-claim.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Methodological-note_Discourse-analysis_MR_BV.pd

Stanowisko organizacji społecznych w sprawie referendum ogólnokrajowego planowanego na dzień 15 października 2023 r., https://monitorkonstytucyjny.eu/archiwa/26241, [accessed 12.11.2024].

Świerkocka, O., Tymińska, A., (2024).Polityka migracyjna – wielka nieobecna kampanii. Narracje o migracjach w kampanii do wyborów samorządowych 2024 r.,

https://hfhr.pl/upload/2024/07/polityka-migracyjna-wielka-nieobecna-kampanii-samorzadowej.pdf

Tymińska, A., (2022). Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej (2021/2022). https://hfhr.pl/publikacje/granice-nienawisci.

Annex 1. Methodological note

In the following note, we describe several challenges encountered at the stages of collecting material and conducting the analysis.

First, the most significant challenge was access to materials, and this was relevant for each corpus. There were no general databases including the selected newspapers such as *LexisNexis* (recommended in the consortium), while the costs of services from external media monitoring agencies were too high. For the representative of tabloids, we decided to use *Fakt* instead of the initially planned *Super Express* due to the lack of possibility of using any archive of the latter. All materials for the corpus were collected manually. The internal search option and archives were generally used to search for materials by keywords. We used keyword combinations for the search, and due to the grammatical complexity of the Polish language (e.g., *declensions*, etc.), it was necessary to search for different forms of words across several media websites. The option to search by lemma also generated additional workload and challenges.

Similarly with the politics corpus, it was necessary to search various public websites of central and local administration manually. Internal search engines were used to identify texts referring to irregularities of migration. On the *Polish parliament* website, documents from parliamentary sessions (reports, interpellations, questions) are available; however, these documents cover entire sessions, so for archiving purposes, following instructions, entire files were used. This posed a significant challenge for further corpus analysis and interpretation of the results. A large part of archived material was unrelated to migration and irregularities, which could impact the results of our study (e.g. macro-topics appearing in the corpus).

In the case of civil society organisations, there was no single database that collected materials, statements, or reports published by civil society organisations. First, we had to identify such organisations with the support of our impact partner (*Association for Legal Intervention, SIP*), and then manually archived relevant materials based on keywords. Another limitation also constituted the exclusion of the social media content of selected organisations because we noticed that these platforms (especially *Facebook*) often serve as their primary channels of communication. Social media, however, was used to review content disseminated by selected organisations. If a report, statement, or appeal was found on social media, the document was downloaded directly from the organisation's website. Access to narratives from far-right and populist organisations was also limited. The most challenging yet was to identify such organisations. Furthermore, we observed that migration irregularities were not a primary focus for such organisations; their narratives tended to be anti-migrant, anti-refugee, and racist, which did not align with our general keywords. Expanding the analysis to include the above-mentioned keywords would require using them into the political and media corpus.

Our keywords for text search encompass the combinations of different forms of terms *migrant(s)/ refugee(s)/ foreigner(s)/ asylum seeker(s)* and *irregular/ illegal/ undocumented*.

The collected empirical material was analysed using the *AntConc* software. The quantitative analyses included several steps: the analysis of frequencies of the most salient terms, the identification of macro-topics/semantic fields (using collocations analysis),) and the comparative analysis of corpora (using the

keyness function). Several challenges can be encountered during the quantitative analysis. First of all, there were limitations of the selected programme. *Excel* files were generated using the 5,000-word option, the program's maximum capacity for data analysis. Therefore, due to the large size of the uploaded material, some migration-related content was not included in our analysis.

The complexity of the Polish language makes it difficult to work with the *AntConc* software and analyse collected empirical material. First, challenges related to multiple grammatical forms of the same term. For example, in the Polish language, nouns change their forms based on declensions (cases), gender (masculine, feminine, neuter), and number (singular or plural), verbs are conjugated based on tense, person, number, and gender. Adjectives change according to gender, number, and case, aligning with the nouns they describe. This complexity made analysing the frequency of the terms and their collocations particularly hard (e.g. in terms of automatic searchers, creating frequency lists, and grouping terms into micro-topics). To deal with this, we worked with *Excel*, first, to group different forms and then summarise their frequencies.

Another challenge was related to the multiple meanings of terms that impacted our work on macro-topics. For example, *border* refers to the state's border but also to the activist group called *Border Group* (*in* Polish *Grupa Granica*). This meant that working on macro-topics and sub-groups and measuring their visibility within copra required not only grouping and counting grammatically varied terms but also taking into account their different meanings. That is why sometimes the same terms occurred in several macro-topics, for example, *law* as a term related to the name of the leading party *Law and Justice* and Polish and international law (in the politics macro-topic or the humanitarian macro-topic).

Morphological and grammatical complexity also posed challenges in the analysis of the semantic fields. Since base words appeared in numerous variations, we decided whether to use lemmas rather than terms in their most frequent grammatical form. However, when searching for collocations for particular *lemmas*, the program generated collocated terms in their various grammatical forms, which complicated the analysis of semantic fields and forced us to manually count the likelihood of exact words in various forms. Moreover, there was the problem of interpretation due to the co-occurrence of the same word in different contexts, for example, *border* appearing in phrases like *border crossings* or *border guard*. Therefore, the careful analysis of grammatical forms and context of the terms used was required, which complicated the creation of proto-narratives.

For the qualitative analysis, seven base words were chosen to create proto-narratives. Four base words remained constant across all three corpora: *migration*, *migrant*, *refugee*, and *border*. The remaining three were specific to each corpus: *work* for the media corpus, *employee/worker* for the politics corpus, and *child/children* for the civil society corpus. In total, 48 proto-narratives were constructed. The *KWIC* (*Key Word in Context*) function was used to extract relevant textual materials for these proto-narratives, resulting in the selection of 94 texts for detailed analysis (40 for the media corpus, 30 for the politics corpus, and 34 for the civil society corpus).

Additionally, proto-narratives for one base word frequently contained other base words. For instance, the base word *migration* appeared in proto-narratives for *borders* within the political corpus. Another major challenge was selecting diverse texts for analysis. The *KWIC* function sometimes selected the same text multiple times and did not include texts from varied media outlets, civil society organisations, far-right groups, and political parties. Consequently, proto-narratives did not fully capture the internal diversity within corpora. Another significant issue arose with the media corpus, where selected texts for proto-narratives often turned out to be citations from political documents (from the politics corpus) or expert opinions. To address this, we revised the selection process for analysis. Tabloids such as *Fakt* also cited social

media posts from entities like the *Border Guard* or politicians' tweets, which added complexity to the analysis. Additional complications were evident in the politics and civil society corpora due to the limited number of collected materials, making it challenging to find sufficient texts for certain proto-narratives. An additional challenge was a broad range of topics covered within a single text, for example the EU relocation scheme, labour migration and the priorities of migration policy in the context of national security. The dense interplay of these themes made it challenging to analyse and extract relevant content for further analysis.

i-CLAIM Consortium

Utrecht University

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage

UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Katholische Hochschule Mainz
Catholic University of Applied Sciences

CEPS

THE JOINT COUNCIL for THE WELFARE OF IMMIGRANTS
JCWI

actionaid
REALIZZA IL CAMBIAMENTO

Centrala

ASSOCIATION FOR LEGAL INTERVENTION

CONFEDERATION SYNDICAT EUROPEÆN TRADE UNION

ENAR

Deaconess Foundation

KATHOLISCHES FORUM LEBEN IN DER LEGALITÄT

FAIRWORK

Contact info

iclaim@uu.nl

For press inquiries:
I-CLAIM Communications Manager
miriam.mir@ceps.eu

Follow us

www.i-claim.eu

I-CLA!M

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