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Improving the Living
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of Irregularised Migrant
Households in Europe

Country report

Narratives of Irregular Migration in Finland

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Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings of a corpus-based study on narratives of irregular migration in the domains of media, politics, and civil society in Finland. The data consists of text material from a five-year period (2019–2023) and includes news articles, parliamentary transcripts, ministry statements and the blogs and reports of civil society organisations. From this vast data, comprising more than 5,000 pieces of text, public narratives around irregular migration and migration-related debates are analysed. Corpus linguistics is used as a method of quantitative inquiry, followed by a qualitative reading of down-sampled texts.

Narratives are connected to questions of power. It is of crucial social concern who decides which topics are publicly discussed and debated and what kind of words and representations are used and by whom. Those who may influence discourses and terminology used in the media and the sociopolitical sphere have power over meaning (Rheindorf & Wodak 2018). Moreover, public discussion of different migrations is related to the way they are practically managed through legislation, administrative procedures, and bordering practices. In migration-related debates, constructions of "us and them" define some groups as outsiders from society as a community of value (Anderson 2013).

Our analysis revealed that the public narratives related to (irregular) migration in Finland revolve around the border crisis, on one hand, and the figure of the asylum seeker, on the other. While there are some discussions in the media and civil society about irregularised people and their rights, such discourses are relatively rare compared to discourses about asylum or work migration. However, in both the spheres of media and politics, the use of terminology is often incoherent. It is not uncommon to see terms such as refugee, asylum seeker, migrant and immigrant used interchangeably one article or speech. Moreover, people crossing borders are often described as an arriving faceless mass. This increases the challenge of analysing discourses about irregular migration, but it also reveals an important lack of coherence – and perhaps knowledge – in public migration discourse.

In the sphere of civil society, among organisations devoted to improving the rights and living conditions of precarious migrants, the use of terminology is accurate and the tone in which these issues are discussed is somewhat different to the other two societal domains. Civil society actors tend not to sensationalise or appeal to emotions and instead prefer to use reasoning founded on rights and law. The variety of texts in the media is wide, ranging from concise news pieces to longer, in-depth articles. In the latter, personal stories of individual migrants are often employed as a narrative tool, sometimes in a manner that invites reaction and debate. The shorter news pieces, on the contrary, typically overlook migrants as agential individuals and discuss them as the topic of a debate, law or event. The domain of politics includes a wider range of narratives and ways of discussing the topic, from fact-based and neutral to provocative and sensationalist.

None of the three corpora contains extensive discussion on irregular migrants as workers, aside from some articles where their vulnerability to exploitation is highlighted. In general, questions related to migrant work are often approached in a problem-centred tone, highlighting issues of illegality or exploitation. Moreover, in the politics corpus, discussion on the right of different migrant status groups to work is approached from the perspective of the Finnish state and different Finnish stakeholders, such as the agricultural sector. The topic of the debate concerns the potential benefit or cost to the Finnish state or stakeholders, and migrants' views on the matter are almost completely overlooked. The Finnish word for undocumented, "paperless", is most often encountered in relation to questions of access to health, welfare, and social services, and such people are treated more as the targets of welfare-state policies than as agents in their own right.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study on the discursive construction of irregularity in Finland. Through corpus analysis, it compares public narratives in the spheres of media, politics, and civil society, respectively (see Rheindorf 2025 for details on the methods and process). For all three corpora, the data are first presented. Then the quantitative analyses are discussed, including the most frequent words and their collocations, and semantic groups are formed from these high-frequency words. For each corpora, a qualitative analysis is performed for a selected number of texts from the vast data. The texts are down-sampled based on proto-narratives that are representative of the corpus. Some examples of proto-narratives and the individual texts that represent them are discussed in more detail to demonstrate the kind of narratives that occur in each corpus, the kind of language used in terms of word choice and tone and the kind of reasoning or legitimisation that is employed. The report concludes with some remarks on the quantitative and qualitative comparison of the corpora.

1.1. Limitations of the data

A significant challenge in conducting this study was the morphological complexity of the Finnish language. Due to the numerous possible inflections of any given word and the immense productivity of the language – an almost endless number of compounds can be constructed, and these again can be inflected in numerous ways – the task of calculating frequencies and analysing the collocations of such words is laborious. Moreover, many words do not retain their stem "intact" when inflecting (e.g. child -> children's *lapsi-> lasten*; woman -> women's *nainen-> naisten*). Consequently, we faced some difficulties conducting the basic steps of the analysis, such as making lists of frequent words. To check the frequency of a word, it was first necessary to calculate all the different inflections of that word. For example, in the media corpus, the Finnish word for "refugee" comprises 519 inflections (of a refugee, from a refugee, to a refugee, being a refugee...) and combined words (a refugee situation, refugee woman, boat refugee...). Since this task of calculating the different forms of each word was performed manually in Excel, and it involved decisions about which compounds to include and exclude, some inaccuracy is possible. However, as the data set is large, this should not seriously compromise the reliability of the results or the relative frequency between words and between corpora.

2. The discursive construction of irregularity in the media

2.1. Data Sample

Our media corpus includes 4,833 articles and 2,354,586 tokens, i.e. words and numbers. Articles were identified using specific search terms in the online archives of three major Finnish news media outlets, of which one is the public news service and national broadcasting company (YLE), another is the largest daily newspaper (*Helsingin Sanomat*), and the third is the largest evening paper (*Iltalehti*), which could be characterised as tabloid but one that also includes more serious news reporting. The English equivalents of the search words used were asylum seekers, undocumented, illegal entry, deportation, exploitation at work, human trafficking and residence permit. Although we searched for the Finnish equivalents of "undocumented", or "paperless", we found few articles about undocumented migrants compared to the other groups (see 2.2.1). The news media is imprecise about the terms they use to describe different groups of migrants, and the same people may be referred to with different terms in one article. Moreover, the news media use tags ("asylum seekers" etc.) in articles to aid searching, and the tags may not always correspond exactly to the content of the article.

2.2. Quantitative analysis

Our quantitative analysis began by going through the 1,500 most frequent words in the media corpus and selecting those relevant to our inquiry.[1] We gathered semantic groups around the most salient words and tested their collocations, i.e., the words that frequently feature alongside those words. In this section, we present some key findings related to the most frequent words and how they are used in the corpus.

The most frequent words relevant to our inquiry in the media corpus are[2]:

Frequently occurring words in media corpus	Frequency	Normalised frequency
Finland	26647	11.32
EU and Europe	12868	5.47
Russia	8980	3.81
Border	8549	3.63
People	8528	3.62
Arrive/come	7937	3.37
Asylum seeker(s)	748	3.29
Country	6769	2.87
Police	5782	2.46
Government	4753	2.02
Work (noun)	3963	1.68
Decision	3461	1.47
Human trafficking	3257	1.38
Migrants	3131	1.33
Officials	3001	1.27
Refugees	2933	1.25
Ukraine	2839	1.21
Ukrainian(s)	2513	1.07
Greece	2580	1.10
Those who arrive, "arrivers"	2338	0.99

A significant absence from the list is, in fact, irregularity. The Finnish language lacks a direct translation for "irregular migrant", and the term "illegal migrant" is seldom used. Instead, the word "paperless" is quite commonly employed, and the term "residing in the country illegally" is employed by some official institutions, such as the

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[1] The data collection was planned by Paula Merikoski and Marika Lammi, and most of the data collection and initial Antconc analysis was conducted by Marika Lammi. The remaining part of the quantitative analysis, formulating proto-narratives, the down-sampling of texts, qualitative analysis as well as writing this report was performed by Paula Merikoski. Lena Näre commented on the report drafts and participated in decision-making throughout the process.

[2] Unfortunately, it was almost impossible to separate words that refer to the EU and Europe, as the word European can relate to both. Consequently, they are counted together. The same applies to Russia (*Venäjä*), as those words also include words that refer to Belarus (*Valko-Venäjä*), which comprise appr. 1300 of the Russia words.

Immigration Service. Regardless, it is interesting that the Finnish words/phrases "paperless" or "illegally in the country" were not sufficiently frequent to make the list of top words, even though we used them as search terms when gathering the data. A quick conclusion that can be drawn from this is that discussion of irregular migration in Finland is dominated by discourses about asylum-seeking. The figure of an asylum-seeker is the figure of irregular migration in Finland. Moreover, the word "migrant" (*siirtolainen*) is more often used in relation to other geographical locations, for example Greece, rather to migration to Finland, whereas "immigrant" (*maahanmuuttaja*) and "asylum seeker" (*turvapaikanhakija*) are common.

The corpus covers the years between 2019 and 2023, and we can see how the war in Ukraine and the border "crisis" at the Finnish-Russian border in autumn 2023 dominate the corpus. The narrative of people arriving across the Eastern border from Russia can be read almost directly from the most frequent words. The corpus also covers the COVID-19 pandemic years, but the pandemic features much less prominently than these two other crises. In Finland, the pandemic was seldom discussed in relation to migration, and migrants were not at the centre of the discourse on essential workers, which probably explains the low salience of pandemic words in the corpus.

The semantic groups we formulated have the following sum frequencies, which illustrate the relative prevalence of different themes in the corpus. (For examples of words in the groups, see Appendix 2.)

Semantic groups in media corpus	Sum frequency	Norm. frequency
Labour (incl. economy subgroup)	34241	14.542
• economy	1774	0.753
Crisis	3280	1.393
Crime	20265	8.607
Quantities	14684	6.236
Geography	82217	**34.918**
Politics (incl. law and order subgroup)	44115	18.736
• law and order	13424	5.701
Migration and asylum (incl. subgroups)	82277	**34.943**
• borders	23780	10.099
• arrival	23894	10.148
• return	4635	1.968
• asylum	10340	4.391
Status	17235	7.320
Rights	2008	0.853
Subject (incl. subgroups)	26247	11.147
• social categories	5747	2.441
• family & household	10201	4.332
• subjective experience	10299	4.374
Welfare (inc. subgroups)	12863	5.463
• benefits and social security	1213	0.515

• education		2391	1.015
• housing		7126	3.026
• health(care)		2133	0.906

2.2.1. *Remarks about the semantic groups "labour" and "status"*

The semantic group **Labour** contains few high-frequency labour-related words. However, the group includes numerous different terms and phrases: the words related to work are productive words, as they form the basis of many combined words. In addition to the more general words, we included some specific words reflecting our sector interests. Among those, berry-picking and cleaning-related words were relatively frequent. "Cleaning" collocates strongly with the word "exploitation". Moreover, the word "worker" has a high likelihood of collocating with words such as foreign, from abroad, salary, extortion, exploitation, cleaning, and restaurants.

As the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for irregular and precarious migrants are a key perspective in I-CLAIM, we also ran collocation tests for coronavirus (*koronaviiru**). While a strong public discourse was evident in some countries during the peak pandemic years about migrant labour and migrants' role as key workers, in Finland such discourses were less prominent. The collocation test revealed that COVID was not discussed in relation to migration or labour in this corpus. Instead, the strongest connections were with words related to the disease itself or to societal matters (symptom, tested, vaccine, quarantine, restrictions, etc.)

Within **Status**, we compared the prevalence of different legal or quasi-legal migration status words in the form of a table for all three corpora to reveal which groups of migrants were prominent in each sphere. In the media corpus, the relative prevalence of different terms is the following:

	Frequency	Norm. frequency
asylum seekers	7748	3.291
migrants	3131	1.330
refugees	2933	1.246
immigrants	1946	0.826
"paperless"	939	0.399
illegally	539	0.229
total	17236	7.320

As we can see, asylum seekers are by far the most discussed group of migrants. Below, is a list of frequent collocations with these words. When viewing these words, some narratives emerge.

Asylum seekers: arrive, from Russia, through, to the border, last year, over, amount, Eastern border, Rwanda, Greece, who came, negative, underaged, decision, to the border crossing site, invasive alien species,[3] Mediterranean, without guardian, to Europe, reception centre, Iraq

Migrants: Belarus, cross, to Europe, IOM, Greece, border, EU, Mediterranean, Libya, Polish, Turkey, Italy, thousands, illegally, from Africa, attempting, to the US, Mexico, Lithuania, rescued, Russia, Canary Islands, back, Lampedusa, as a tool, …

Refugees: UN, UNHCR, this year, Moria, Ukraine, Greece, Lesvos, island, Turkey, million, Geneva (convention), European, Finnish refugee advice centre, Syria, Congolese, as asylum seekers, to Finland

Immigrants: generation, percentage, local population, employment, social security, integration, employment level, in Finland, Russian, return migrants, highly, insulted, to society, sexual health advisors, work-based, educated, higher education

"Paperless": in Helsinki, in Finland, health care, comparable to,[4] Global Clinic, Deaconess Institute, in the country, illegally, in a condition, emergency shelter, health services, urgent, unprotected, basic education

Illegally: in the country, to the country, border, to Finland, reside, cross, migrants, people, as children, (English) channel, to live, how many, to the US, organised, terrain, attempted, aliens, to Britain, placed

We can observe that some groups are discussed in relation to Finland or movement to Finland while others refer to movements elsewhere. The word "asylum seeker(s)" is much more likely to appear with "to Finland" than "refugee(s)". Similarly, "migrants", which as a status is much less defined than asylum seeker or refugee, is used less in conjunction with Finland. Interestingly, "migrant" is the only word with which verbs such as drown and die appear.

In addition, it is noteworthy how infrequently the word "paperless" appears compared to the other status words, and the same is true of "illegally" ("illegally in the country" is one of the official terms). Looking at the collocations of "paperless", we can observe how strictly it seems to be confined to the sphere of NGOs and the discussion on whether undocumented people should have access to health care. Based on this corpus, the Finnish media seldom discusses irregular migration as an important societal phenomenon, which might also mean that in contrast to some other countries, it is not constructed as a major threat. Moreover, based on this initial analysis, discussion of undocumented people's participation in the labour market seems to be completely absent. Instead, such people are merely seen as recipients of emergency services, such as health care or shelter services, rather than as members of society who go to work or school and live their everyday lives among us. Furthermore, the fact that undocumented people often work in societally essential sectors is rarely mentioned.

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[3] In 2019, a member of parliament from the populist Finns party compared asylum seekers to invasive alien species and was also prosecuted for it. This incidence caused so much discussion in the media that the word appeared on the collocations list.

[4] A person in a situation comparable to "paperlessness" is a typical way of referring to people who are not technically undocumented but due to their status remain outside welfare services, for example EU citizens who have not registered their stay in Finland.

2.3. Qualitative analysis

Based on the quantitative analysis briefly summarised above, we formulated 15 proto-narratives around five base words prevalent in the corpus: asylum seekers, Ukrainians, migrants, the government, "paperless". While "paperless" is not one of the most frequent words, it is our particular topic of interest, so we decided to include it in the analysis.

Asylum seekers	arrive in Finland (from Russia, from Ukraine, from Afghanistan).	attempt to cross the Eastern border from Russia.	have received a negative decision — what to do with them?
Ukrainians	are fleeing to Europe and receive temporary protection.	live in home accommodation with local families.	apply for municipal rights and are settling in Finland.
Migrants	cross the border illegally / are being pushed back illegally.	are being weaponised/ instrumentalised by hostile states.	are rescued by volunteers in the Mediterranean.
The government	plans to close the Eastern border.	introduces restrictions to migration policies.	aims to increase work-based immigration.
The "paperless"	are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking.	What should be done with the paperless who cannot be deported?	now enjoy access to basic health care (and it costs X.)

Based on these proto-narratives, we down-sampled 30 texts for closer narrative analysis. The chosen texts include both shorter news pieces and longer feature-style articles and opinion pieces. All three news media outlets are represented in them. Below, three illustrative examples of proto-narratives are chosen to demonstrate how certain groups are discussed in the media:

2.3.1. *"Asylum seekers attempt to cross the Eastern border from Russia"*

We focus now on the first example of the proto-narratives. Articles and shorter news reporting on mobility at the Eastern border in autumn 2023 mostly consist of factual reports rather than opinion pieces, at least on the surface. The evening paper *Iltalehti* does occasionally employ sensationalist headlines, evoking a sense of crisis or alarm, but the articles themselves are usually relatively calm and are written in a matter-of-fact style of reporting.

An article on the subject published in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* on 20 November 2023 is titled "Arrival of asylum seekers has moved northwards on the Eastern border — this is what we know", with the sub-headline "Tens of asylum seekers arrived in Finland on Monday." The article explains that 51 people had crossed the border that day, using one of the northernmost crossing points as those in the South-East had been closed the previous week. The prime minister is interviewed at the border site. He states that "the phenomenon has strengthened" and claims it is clear that the pushing of people to the border in an instrumentalised manner will continue despite the decision to close some of the border points. "We are preparing further actions. And we will execute them fast if necessary", he remarks. His tone is severe and aims to reassure citizens in the face of the looming "crisis" entailed by the "strengthening phenomenon" of migration to Finland.

While the tone of the article is neutral, a close reading reveals that the words of the prime minister – leader of a government that has introduced historically strict changes to Finnish migration policy – are taken at face value. The reporter does not challenge him on his statements about instrumentalization or ask whether the further measures he hints at to restrict movement at the border are actually necessary, or even legal. Moreover, the reporter fails to ask about either the rights of those crossing the border or the numbers of migrants, which is still relatively low, even compared to autumn 2015. In this way, the measures planned by the government, which are simultaneously heavily criticised by legal scholars, among others, are neutralised and naturalised by the news media. The border "crisis" is a mediatised struggle over meaning which conflicts with legal regulations and international conventions (see Rheindorf & Wodak 2018). The arrival of "tens of asylum seekers" is presented as a legitimate reason for rather extreme legal measures by way of omission of any critique or question. By contrast, when the Finnish media reported on "instrumentalised migration" on the Polish or Lithuanian borders with Belarus in 2021 and 2022, and the harsh measures these countries employed, the human rights aspects of the issue were far more widely covered. For example, journalists interviewed local activists who helped migrants survive in winter conditions.

The people who arrive in Finland are seldom described in detail; they are referred to as a mass of people, "arrivers", rather than individuals with unique characteristics. A typical illustration includes pictures of several men, often young men, arriving with their suitcases on foot, or sometimes by bicycle. Women are rarely pictured, families slightly more often. Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola (2024, 140) studied the gendered visual imagery found in media depictions of arrivals at the border during the asylum "crisis" of 2015 using material from mainly the same media analysed here. She argues that visual media narratives reinforce problematic gendered imaginings of borders, protection, and nationhood. Nine years later, similar imagery is again employed. However, longer feature-style articles provide more in-depth information about the experiences and motivations of migrants arriving in Finland. These pieces paint a more human picture of the figure of "the asylum seeker at our border", explaining why they cannot stay in Russia or return to their home country.

2.3.2. *"Migrants are rescued by volunteers in the Mediterranean."*

Articles narrating migration in the Mediterranean region typically employ a humanitarian narrative, describing the appalling conditions in Libyan detention centres or accidents or rescue attempts occurring at sea. These articles typically voice the opinions of smaller volunteer organisations or experts in larger organisations such as the UNHCR. For example, an article headlined "People are starving at the detention centres in Libya" (YLE 21.3.2019) describes how migrants are malnourished, how they live in small, crowded rooms with no toilets where they cannot sit or lie down, and how some have been sold at slave markets in Libya. However, it is striking that there is no mention of the EU's deal with Libya (see, for example, Näre et al. 2024); instead, Libya's internal problems are emphasised. Nonetheless, migrants are typically presented in an understanding way as vulnerable people in pitiful circumstances, without blame or judgment of their decision to migrate. At the same time, such articles rarely offer an in-depth analysis of the geopolitical reasons behind these humanitarian catastrophes; in particular, the EU's responsibility for the crisis is seldom raised directly. Moreover, when it is mentioned, it is often voiced by a volunteer rescuer or activist rather than by the UN or the journalists themselves. The depoliticization of migrants' plight is typical of a humanitarian narrative in which humanitarian organisations, rather than promoting a radical political agenda, simply aim to ensure that states respect the existing rights of migrants (Calarco 2024).

2.3.3. *"The paperless are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking."*

Narratives about irregular migrants working in Finland are not frequent in the corpus, but those that we found are typically longer, more investigative articles. They often present migrants' personal stories alongside expert opinions. For example, in an article titled "*Asha cut Finnish people's hair from morning until evening and got paid 100 euros a month*" (YLE 11.8.2019), the journalist depicts three people, all young men from Iraq and rejected asylum seekers, currently living without a residence permit in Finland. This is perhaps the most recognisable figure of an undocumented migrant in Finland. One of the men works in a barbershop, one in the forestry sector and one in a car wash. The article explains the limitations of the labour inspection system and criticises police procedures such as turning migrants away from police stations when they come to report a crime or failing to categorise exploitative situations as serious crimes.

The article depicts a situation where larger structures allow exploitative employers to evade punishment and people without residence permits are considered easy prey for such employers. While the article raises an important issue and is clearly sympathetic towards the plight of its protagonists, it offers no solution to the problem. This is typical of such journalism, which aims to open up certain worlds but not take sides or suggest political interventions. In a way, the reader is left feeling hopeless: undocumented people are presented as victims in a sad, desperate and unchangeable situation. One of the interviewees sums up his situation towards the end of the article as follows: "How could I describe this? I feel that my life has ended. There is no life or humanity."

3. The discursive construction of irregularity in politics

3.1. Data sample

The politics corpus includes 725 texts and 10,698,863 tokens – the large number of tokens per text is explained by the length of the documents in the corpus. The texts include transcripts of parliamentary sessions, the statements and assessments of relevant parliamentary committees, government proposals, content from political party websites and relevant ministry reports and press releases. The same search terms used with the media corpus were employed to find texts containing relevant discussion, and in addition to those used in the media corpus, some more specific terms were added, such as "availability assessment", according to which the Employment Office considers whether a sector has a sufficient potential local workforce to cover its needs or whether it should also be open to foreign workers, i.e. a sector through which a non-EU citizen can apply for a work-based residence permit.

During the period under investigation, 2019–2023, two quite different governments were in power in Finland. The first in office (2019– 2023) was Sanna Marin's (social democrats) centre-left-green government, including the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, Greens, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party. Then, in spring 2023, right-wing parties won the parliamentary elections, and later that year Petteri Orpo's National Coalition Party formed a conservative government together with the populist Finns Party, the Christian Democrats and the Swedish People's Party. Thus, references to "government" occur in quite different contexts depending on the year. The latter government is openly anti-migration, introducing historically harsh changes to immigration laws and policies and tightening social and welfare policies. The populist Finns Party is the second largest government party, and its main agenda is limiting immigration. Accordingly, they discuss migration far more than the more pro-migration government before them. The Finns Party has gained popularity over the years by employing a "welfare nationalist" political agenda with an exclusionary migration approach framed as the saviour of the welfare state (Pyrhönen 2015).

3.2. Quantitative analysis

The analysis began by going through the 2,000 most frequent words in the corpus and, as with the media corpus, combining different conjugations of some of the top words to grasp their actual frequency. Most words relate to Finland, the EU, politics, legislation, numbers, economics, and the state, unsurprisingly given the context.

Frequently occurring words in the politics corpus	Frequency	Norm. frequency
Finland	65582	6.130
law/legislation	34054	3.183
EU & Europe	30218	2.824
people/human(s)	22763	2.128
The Finns (party)	19899	1.860
Covid	11121	1.039
million	12855	1.202
The National Coalition	8584	0.802

Among the names of political parties, and in fact among all the words, the right-wing populist Finns Party ranks extremely high on the list (norm. freq. 1.860). While they are not the largest party in parliament, they seem to grasp every opportunity to voice their opinions. Moreover, as in the media corpus, *they* are often discussed, as they commonly make the most flamboyant and outrageous comments.

After an initial analysis of the most frequent words, some semantic groups were combined. The politics data includes a wider range of discussions and topics than those relating to (irregular) migration. One parliamentary session can last several hours, and migration-related discussions may occur for five minutes here and 10 minutes there. Thus, one should be wary of drawing conclusions about the presence of some words. For example, discussions on social benefits may be frequent, but the topic may not have been discussed in relation to migration or migrants but, instead, to legislative changes to the responsibilities of municipalities, for instance.

Semantic groups in politics corpus	Frequency	Norm. freq.
Labour (incl. economy sub-group)	130282	12.177
• economy	39520	3.694
Crisis	10917	1.020
Crime	17514	1.637
Quantities	78544	7.341
Geography	168900	15.787
Migration and asylum (incl. sub groups)	61568	5.755
• borders	9066	0.847
• arrival	14806	1.384
• return	3857	0.361
• asylum	12350	1.154
Status	8491	0.794
Rights	23137	2.163

3.2.1.   Remarks about the semantic groups "crisis" and "status" in the politics corpus

Among the **crisis** words in our politics corpus, the COVID crisis and the economic or euro crisis were the most salient crisis frameworks. Crisis in general is an extensively used word in political speech, and it is employed in combination with a wide variety of situations and contexts: the mental health crisis, debt crisis, crisis adaptability, etc. There are 1,057 different versions of the word crisis (*kriis*) in the corpus (freq. 11653, norm. freq. 1.089) This perhaps indicates that the political discussion has become ever more sensationalist, as any kind of political issue seems to be presented as a crisis. Aside from these combined words, collocations reveal the contexts in which the word crisis is often situated, and unsurprisingly the "Ukraine crisis" is among the top collocations. Interestingly, an extremely high likelihood was found for it to appear with the word "agriculture": a common political discourse concerns the repeated crises in the Finnish agricultural sector. Slightly surprisingly, perhaps, the "border crisis" is not among the most salient crisis discourses in the corpus.

When examining the most salient words in the **status** group, where we compared the prevalence of different legal or quasi-legal migration status words, the relative prevalence of the words differed somewhat from the media corpus.

	Frequency	Norm. frequency
immigrants	4069	0.380
asylum seekers	1984	0.185
refugees	834	0.078
illegally	660	0.062
"paperless"	654	0.061
migrants	291	0.027
total	8491	0.794

The total normalised frequency of status words is rather low (0.794) compared to the media (7.320) and civil society (8.347) corpora. However, the relative rarity of these words does not indicate a lack of discussion of migration in political contexts; rather, their low frequency is due to the large size of the politics corpus, where, consequently, no individual word or topic is extremely frequent. Nonetheless, it is interesting to study the relationship of words to each other. "Immigrants" are by far the most discussed migrant figures in the context of politics, followed by asylum seekers.

Interestingly, among the three corpora, the politics corpus includes the widest range of words to describe migrants and mobile people. On the one hand, many official terms are present, such as "person residing in the country illegally", which are used in ministry reports or government proposals. On the other hand, we encounter imaginative and often defamatory language used in parliamentary speeches, where the figures of "invaders", "invasive alien species" and "bearded children" emerge along with the notion of "harmful immigration" and "shopping for social benefits".

Collocations of key words in the status group, in the order of highest likelihood:

Asylum seeker(s): right to work, to Finland, negative, received, refugees, legal protection, Iraqi, number of, decision, illegally, arrived, to the country, residence permit,…

Migrants: as tools, to Europe, hybrid, Belarus, IOM, to push/direct, enemy, at the border, to prepare, to use, Poland, Russia, to destabilise, …

Paperless: situation comparable to, persons, residing, illegally, in Finland, health care, right to, treatment, …

Illegally: remains, to persons, negative, social welfare, asylum decision, deportation decision, into detention, asylum seekers, costs, …

Asylum seekers' right to work receives the highest likelihood of all words or phrases related to asylum seekers. This has been a matter of heated debate in Parliament for many years, as some political parties suggest widening the right to work while others propose narrowing it, so it "does not give the wrong signal", meaning one should not use the asylum route for economic migration (see 3.3.1). However, after the outbreak of war in 2022, Parliament was unanimous about extending the right to work to those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The deportation of rejected asylum seekers, on the one hand, and better legal assistance, on the other, have also been topics of intense political debate from one year to the next. By contrast, the collocations with the word migrant reveal a narrative in which "enemy forces push migrants to Europe's borders" as a form of hybrid operation. In the case of irregular people and those who are "paperless", the discussion revolves around two key themes: whether undocumented people should have access to health care, how much it would cost, and whether they can be deported.

3.3. Qualitative analysis

In this section, we examine some texts in the politics corpus to discuss the narratives employed in the political domain in more detail. Based on the key words and their collocations presented above, the following proto-narratives have been constructed for the politics corpus:

Asylum seekers	ought (not) to have the right to work.	should be returned if denied asylum.	will /should have better legal protection.
Ukrainians	are fleeing the war and need our help.	are a necessary source of labour.	are fighting bravely for all of Europe.
Migrants	Economic migrants need to be returned.	Migrants are being used as tools in hybrid operations (Russia, Turkey, Belarus)	A flood of migrants (from the Middle East, Libya) is coming to Europe.
The EU	The EU needs a unified asylum and migration policy.	People are crossing the EU's external borders.	The EU has failed in its asylum policy.
Immigration	Immigration is needed when it's work based.	The costs of (harmful) immigration are considerable (and threaten the welfare state).	Uncontrollable immigration undermines our security.

3.3.1. *Asylum seekers should not have the right to work*

Whether asylum seekers are primarily humanitarian subjects or also potential workers is a topic of debate in Finland. A argument regularly employed by most right-wing parties and politicians is that they should not be allowed to work because it sends an ambiguous message. The previous social-democrat-led government (2019–2023) proposed a legislative amendment to widen asylum seekers' right to work and also allow them to continue even after a negative decision on their asylum status. This was partly due to worry about the need for labour in the agricultural sector. At the beginning of the first pandemic summer, it remained unclear

whether foreign seasonal workers could be allowed entry. The political right, then in opposition, was strongly against the amendment. The parliamentary Administration Committee, led by the National Coalition Party, a right-wing opposition party at the time, produced a report about this proposed amendment stating that as many agricultural jobs in the spring required professional skills, asylum seekers would be of little help. However, the report goes on to suggest that when the harvest season arrives and low-skilled jobs become open, "the possibility of using asylum seekers in these jobs will increase… Although widening the asylum seekers' right to work would have little meaning for sectors that are crucial for our security of supply, locally and for some individual farms it might be significant." The report states that according to their estimates, only a few dozen or at best a few hundred people would find work in sectors crucial for Finland's security of supply, but that due to the urgency of the report, the matter had not been investigated thoroughly. Moreover, the report fails to explain how the figures mentioned above were calculated. Reading the report, it becomes clear that asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers are seen as a potential reserve army of labour, but, even as such, they are judged to be of little significance. Moreover, the report conveys no sense of concern for the asylum seekers' own benefit in the question of their right to work and whether their wishes are heard; nor does it show any appreciation of the diversity of people and skills in this group, which comprises thousands of people of different origins, ages, skills, and education (Administrative Committee report 27 May 2020)

The MP Mari-Leena Talvitie, from the National Coalition Party, explains in a parliamentary session soon after that "[t]he National coalition's starting point here is that those who have received a negative decision should leave the country to their countries of origin as soon as possible, and, if they do not, that undermines the credibility of the whole asylum system." This reflects the common rhetoric portraying people as either passive asylum seekers or active workers, and if an asylum seeker is active in the labour market, it supposedly undermines the legitimacy of their asylum claim. In this narrative, the legitimacy of the entire asylum system rests on maintaining rigid categorisations and preserving an extremely narrow understanding of deservingness. The MP goes on to explain that asylum seekers are not the solution to the labour shortages experienced by the agricultural sector. In the debate, Sheikki Laakso, an MP from the populist Finns Party, takes over and explains how the government's proposal is "based on ideology alone". He goes on to state that "the Finns Party will not tolerate it if the asylum system is bypassed by giving them work in the fields, which will be of no use anyway. It is not the fault of we Finnish people that only a handful of asylum seekers have found a job." In one sentence, he manages to claim that asylum seekers would be useless workers "in the fields", meaning agriculture, which he does not justify, and that asylum seekers rarely find work, which is simply untrue. Moreover, he continues to present the government's suggestion as ideological and ends his speech by remarking that "such ideological proposals have no place in Parliament in times of crises such as this" (full parliamentary session 2 June 2020). Calling someone an idealist instead of a rationalist is a common rhetorical attack. Although the discussion at hand began from the starting point of "using asylum seekers in certain jobs", it quickly turned into a question of ideology, where a strong denial of asylum seekers' right to work was nonetheless depicted as rational, despite the need for labourers in the sectors in question.

4. The discursive construction of irregularity in civil society

4.1. Data sample

The civil society corpus includes 305 texts and 268012 tokens. It differs from the other two corpora in some significant ways. First, it is smaller than the other two, as there are few NGOs or other organisations that deal with the issue of irregular migration in Finland. We included texts from 17 organisations, which is rather good coverage (for a full list of organisations, see Appendix 1). Racist and xenophobic groups are not well established in Finland, and much of their discourse occurs in closed internet groups, which we did not include in the data as the aim was to grasp public narratives. Ultimately, we chose some pieces from three organisations that had written about the issue on their websites.

Second, all pieces of text were hand-picked from the chosen actors' websites, so the corpus is far more focused and curated than the other two. This means that the civil society corpus is comparatively "dense", which must be considered during its analysis. For example, different kinds of "rights" or mentions of "residence permits" will necessarily appear alongside "undocumented people" because these are organisations that work with the question of migrants' rights and regularisation.

4.2. Quantitative analysis

As mentioned above, the corpus differs from the other two corpora, as can be observed in the list of most frequent words:

Frequently occurring words in civil society corpus	Frequency	Norm. frequency
Finland	2784	10.388
right(s)	1796	6.701
human rights	1561	5.824
people	1348	5.030
The EU	951	3.548
law	873	3.257
Amnesty Int.	851	3.175
protection	848	3.164
children	836	3.119
asylum seekers	812	3.030
"paperless"	701	2.616
human trafficking	699	2.608

As with the other two corpora, the frequencies of different status-related words were calculated. The prevalence of "paperlessness" was found to be much greater than in the other corpora, where undocumented migrants were the least mentioned status category.

	Frequency	Norm. frequency
asylum seekers	812	3.030
"paperless"	607	2.265

refugees	445	1.660
migrants	152	0.567
immigrants	117	0.437
illegally	104	0.388
total	2237	8.347

Given that most texts concentrate on social rights, status and legislation, we did not form full semantic groups from the most frequent words. Instead, we investigated the collocations of some of the most frequent and relevant words.

4.2.1. *Collocations of some frequently occurring words:*

'"*Paperless*" – in a situation, in Finland, live, status, persons, exploitation, necessary, residence rights, services, residence, day centre, health,...

Asylum seekers – migrants, legal protection, rights, to Finland, refugees, improve, negative, decision, (without a) guardian,...

Collocations with "paperless" include words related to services, basic rights, and practical welfare provision. Moreover, the question of migration status and residence permits and rights is clearly discussed, which sets this corpus apart from the other two. Vulnerability to exploitation features in this corpus as well. In the case of asylum seekers, legal protection and other words related to asylum procedures, such as a negative decision, are typical collocations. Worthy of note is also the direction of movement in these two cases: asylum seekers are coming *to* Finland whereas undocumented people are *in* Finland.

Children and families are rather salient words in the civil society corpus, and their collocations reveal a heavily rights-based discourse:

Children – best interest, rights, primarily, UN, unaccompanied, assessment principal, family, primacy, parents, life,... For the possessive form, *children's*, we also find detention and reunification, although mainly the same kinds of collocations appear.[5]

The word "illegal" also collocates with terms such as illegally deported or illegal pushbacks. Thus, illegality in this corpus is discussed in relation not only to staying in the country or mobility but also to state actions, which sets this corpus apart from the other two. Moreover, the word "deportation" has a high likelihood of appearing with words such as immoral and violent, which demonstrates a clearer stance taken against deportations as a means of migration management.

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[5] In the Finnish language, the word child(ren) is *lapsi/lapset*, and can be searched for with *laps**. However, the word children's has a slightly different stem, *lasten*, and to incorporate all forms would mean searching with *la**, which is too wide a term. Therefore, a collocation test was performed for *laps** and *lasten*, but some conjugations may nevertheless have been missed.

4.3. Qualitative analysis

Due to the size and limited lexical breadth of the corpus, we ended up with two narratives based on each base word, such that they would not overlap excessively.

"Paperless"	need (and by law have) access to basic rights and welfare.	are extremely vulnerable to exploitation at work.
Asylum seekers	right to legal protection has been severely eroded.	Rejected asylum seekers require residence permits.
Children	and their families need to have access to services.	Unaccompanied children require better legal protection.
Human rights	are being jeopardised by deportations.	Finnish migration policy should respect human rights.
Human trafficking	Recognition of cases of human trafficking should be more effective.	Victims of human trafficking require better support and exit structures.

As these proto-narratives suggest, moral statements are typical of the civil society corpus. Much of the discourse revolves around the rights or services that irregular migrants ought to have. Binding human rights conventions and the law are often used as justifications for why certain groups should possess rights, or why certain groups should not be deported or detained. Moreover, children's rights are particularly often raised, more so than in the other two corpora.

4.3.1. *Denied asylum seekers who cannot return require residence permits.*

The citizens' initiative Permission to Live (*Lupa elää*) was an attempt to find a solution to regularise asylum seekers who arrived in Finland before 2017 and still lacked a residence permit. Such asylum seekers comprise a large proportion of irregular migrants in Finland. If a citizens' initiative gathers 50,000 signatures from the public, it will proceed to Parliament for consideration and may result in legislative changes. This occurred, for example, in 2014 in the case of the marriage law, which was amended to include same-sex couples after a successful citizens' initiative accompanied by strong media attention. The Permission to Live initiative also passed the threshold and was presented to Parliament, but, due to strong political resistance, it failed in its main goal, securing residence permits for those in administrative limbo. The proposal is written in a clear and coherent manner, using simple sentences, a neutral choice of words and fact-based justification.

> *At least 5,000 people have lived for six years in insecurity and at risk of being undocumented, which is an exceptional figure in Finnish society. The situation increases the grey economy and makes people living in an in-between state vulnerable to exploitation. Prolonged asylum processes, "paperlessness" and the insecurity of residence permits cause significant humanitarian and psychological problems and health issues. The unreasonably long asylum processes and the increase of "paperlessness" cause significant costs to society. The situation cannot be remedied by removal procedures — it is not possible to return many of the people in prolonged processes even by force. The integration of people stuck in a legal in-between state is delayed, which also leads to economic and humanitarian costs.* (Permission to Live 2021; translation PM)

Instead of appealing to the readers' emotions, the proposal appears to employ reasoning that suggests the assumed reader is interested in the economic aspects of the matter more than humanitarian values. The individual harm caused by impasses in the residence permit system is mentioned throughout the text, followed typically by a sentence emphasising the health effects or society's benefit, such as "[d]ifferent studies have found that mental health issues are typical among those who have sought asylum" or "[l]osing the human capital and labour of those who have already found a job is harmful to society as well." This is a typical strategy used by civil society actors who advocate for changes that are unpopular in mainstream politics, which is dominated by right-wing or centre-right ideologies. The discourse thus operates within the existing, dominant narrative rather than attempting to challenge it. Thus, this discourse may, unwillingly, help maintain the idea that migration should benefit society at large or at least not incur high costs. It would be interesting to study further whether such economic reasoning helps advance the political goals of these civil society actors and manages to convince those who have initially opposed these goals.

5. Comparative insights

5.1. Quantitative comparison

In order to compare the three corpora quantitatively, a keyness test was performed in Antconc. This reveals which words are more likely to appear in one corpus in comparison to a reference corpus (see Rheindorf 2025 for more detail).

Media to politics and civil society

The so-called Finnish border crisis of 2023 is present in each corpus. However, in the media corpus, the event is discussed more as a spatial and agential event than in the politics or civil society corpora. In particular, words such as border, Russia, border guard and asylum seeker are far more likely to appear in the media corpus than in the politics corpus. By contrast, words related to the legislation that followed the crisis are discussed with greater frequency in the politics and civil society corpora. The media texts are also more likely than the political documents to use active verbs. Moreover, instances where the voice is given to a narrator are more frequent in the media corpus than in the other two corpora: says, tells, according to, etc. The media is also likely to discuss events and places elsewhere, such as Greece and Turkey. Interestingly, the word Russia is more likely to appear in the media corpus, although diplomatic and trade relationships with Russia, Russia's attack on Ukraine and the border "crisis" are also key themes in Finnish politics. It is possible that in parliamentary sessions colloquial expressions such as "Eastern neighbour" are also used. Furthermore, different kinds of policy reports may mention foreign powers in general or hostile states without explicitly naming Russia. When compared to civil society, similar differences are found. Many of the high keyness words and phrases relate to the border crisis or international places and events.

Politics to media and civil society

The high keyness words in politics are related to the sphere of politics itself. For example, in comparison to civil society, The Speaker, MP, knock, and other such words are often repeated in parliamentary sessions. Words and phrases related to economics or sums of money feature more strongly in the politics corpus than in its civil society counterpart, for example "economy", "billions" or "money". As the corpus is vast, it was necessary to scroll through several hundred high keyness words to find points of interest. For this reason, it was more illuminating to analyse negative keyness in the case of the politics corpus to one of the other two corpora, as this method helps reveal some migration-related words. The word "(immigrant) integration" is

more likely to appear in the politics corpus than in the media corpus, while most migration-related words are more likely to appear in the media corpus than in its political counterpart. Integration is not among the high frequency words in the politics corpus, but its salience is highlighted when comparing the corpora.

Civil society to politics and media

When the civil society corpus is compared to the politics corpus, words related to human trafficking and the rights of asylum seekers or undocumented migrants appear strongly, and all status categories in general are more likely to be mentioned. Moreover, children and families are likely to be discussed in the civil society corpus, while these words are relatively rare in the politics corpus. When they are discussed in political documents and speeches, they are rarely found to collocate with migration-related words. Similarly, in comparison to the media corpus, children appear more frequently. Most high keyness words relate to migration issues and specifically to rights (such as human rights or the child's best interest) or administrative procedures (such as family reunification or income requirements).

5.2. Qualitative comparison

In this section, the three corpora are briefly compared from two perspectives: tone and depictions of agency. When examining the tone employed to discuss the issue at hand, differences appear between the three corpora. Perhaps surprisingly, the sphere where the most colourful language and drama can be found is politics. However, only right-wing politicians employ these narrative tactics, such as mockery. Often it is directed at the political left for being "ignorant" or "naïve" in failing to take the assumed threat posed by migration seriously. Nonetheless, when discussing migration-related topics, most politicians do not engage in humour, make light of the serious issues involved or present some groups of people in a negative light. Therefore, the range of expression in the politics corpus is wider than in the other two corpora.

The media is the most likely sphere for emotive language which evokes empathy. In this corpus, a clear contrast is evident between types of reporting. Short news pieces are, at least on the surface, neutral in tone and aim for objectivity. Longer pieces, however, introduce individual stories to which readers can relate, thus bringing them closer to the protagonists through the description of their sentiments and thoughts. Moreover, there is a contrast between reporting from "here" and reporting from "there": migrants in a difficult situation far away, such as the Mediterranean, are more likely to be discussed with a humanitarian narrative of suffering and empathy, whereas migrants at the Finnish borders are more likely to depicted as a faceless mass or potentially suspicious.

The civil society texts differ from their political and media counterparts in two ways. First, they are the most consistent, and thus the range of different sentiments, narrative tactics and tones is the narrowest. Moreover, they typically present a clear problem that needs to be addressed. Moreover, instead of appealing to emotions, the use of language is neutral and the argumentation is supported by reasoning based on economic benefits, human rights and international and national laws and conventions.

In terms of agency, the three corpora are somewhat similar, and migrants are rarely depicted as agents other than subjects of arrival. A good example was presented in 3.3.1, where politicians debated whether "we", Finnish society, should *use* asylum seekers in certain jobs. In the politics corpus, negatively depicted agency, such as a narrative of migrants pretending to be something they are not, is sometimes used. The clearest exceptions to these examples are the longer media articles, where individual migrants' stories are presented in-depth, such as the extract presented in 2.3.3. In general, the civil society texts are not particularly agential,

as they tend to be fact-based rather than story-like and focus on policies, services, or laws. A typical key phrase, or a proto-narrative, in a civil society text is that "irregular migrants need/ought to have/are entitled to …" – a statement of entitlement rather than agency or voice.

6. Concluding Remarks

The narratives of work and labour are interestingly one-sided when it comes to undocumented people or people living in an irregular situation, in contrast to "immigrants", who are seen as labouring subjects. In all three corpora, there is little discussion of irregular migrants as workers, aside from some articles where their vulnerability to exploitation is highlighted. In general, questions related to migrant work are often approached in a problem-centred tone, highlighting issues of illegality or exploitation. In the politics corpora, the right to work is discussed (in the form of a highly divisive debate) while in the media the focus is on "horror stories" of exploitation. The discussion on the right of different migrant-status groups to work is approached from the perspective of the Finnish state and different Finnish stakeholders, such as the agricultural sector. The topic of the debate is the potential benefit or cost to the Finnish state or stakeholders, and migrants' perspectives are almost completely overlooked. Exploitation and human trafficking are also typical frameworks for discussing the issue in civil society organisations, where many texts relate to rights violations and the exploitation of foreign workers, although in a less personal tone than in the media, where individual stories appear. As some of the NGOs chosen for this data deal with rights-advocacy issues, it is perhaps unsurprising that the discourse revolves around these themes. However, positive depictions of migrants as workers are almost completely absent from the three corpora, except for a few stories in the media, where employment is used to depict an individual migrant as a hardworking and deserving person. By contrast, in the politics corpora, the worth of migrants as workers is itself debated.

Analysing the gender dimension of these narratives quantitatively is a somewhat challenging task due to the lack of gender pronouns in the Finnish language. Moreover, in the types of texts studied here, it is unusual to refer to people directly with gendered words, such as women, men, girls, or husbands; instead, status categories are used, or, in the case of the media, the names of the people portrayed in the article are presented. Nevertheless, we performed some analysis of the issue. For example, we found that the word for "man" was more frequent than "woman" in the media corpus, perhaps pointing to the tendency in public narratives to perceive the figure of an asylum seeker or irregular migrant as male (e.g. Griffiths 2015; Prokkola 2024). By contrast, the word "woman" and its derivative forms are more frequent in the civil society corpus. This may be because of the prevalence of rights-based discourses in civil society organisations and a gendered understanding of deservingness, which is quite widely adopted. Moreover, when found in the corpus, pejorative words are more often associated with men, such as "bearded child", referring to adult men posing as children in order to gain asylum. Legitimate refugees are vulnerable and victimised, and often feminised. This image conflicts with dominant cultural forms of masculinity, and the figure of a "bogus asylum seeker" is generally imagined to be male and is associated with gendered suspicions and expectations regarding agency (Griffiths 2015, 473).

Some level of confusion around the categories used to describe migrants is typical, in particular, of the media corpus, although less so for the civil society texts. For example, in the media corpus, a single article may use several terms to describe people crossing the border: asylum seeker, migrant, immigrant, refugee, and so on. This reflects the findings of the I-CLAIM work package on the political and legal infrastructure of irregularity: various terms, both administrative and everyday, are used interchangeably and sometimes

inconsistently by different societal actors, even within the same institution, and there is often no established term (Näre et al. 2024). Moreover, many of the key concepts of the I-CLAIM project lack a widely used and established Finnish equivalent, most importantly "irregular migration".

In 2023, the media attention directed at the border "crisis" facilitated the current government's attempts to pass a law closing the border to asylum applicants, in practice, legalising pushbacks. The law was deemed unpassable by an overwhelmingly wide range of legal experts, as it was against the Finnish constitution and international laws and agreements. Furthermore, it was the target of intense criticism. Nevertheless, despite legal experts' recommendation that the proposal should not be submitted to a plenary session of Parliament, the Constitutional Committee passed it on to MPs for a vote, where it received the required majority. Polls suggested a large part of the nation believed the new law was necessary, which inevitably motivated some politicians, in fear of losing support, to back it despite their recognition that it breached constitutional and international law.

In all the corpora, migrants are rarely discussed as agential. Verbs, quite simply, do not have a high likelihood of collocating with words relating to migrants. Moreover, those verbs that do collocate are usually related to movement: arrive, come, attempt and so forth. Actors such as the government or a minister are far more likely to appear in a sentence that includes a verb, especially an agential verb, such as decide, or another verb that signifies voice: say, assert, suggest, according to, and so forth. Consequently, our findings show that in the Finnish public narrative about irregular migration and migrants, the people speaking are not in an irregular situation themselves. Moreover, in this narrative, irregular migrants seem to "exist", "be", "receive" or "be denied" more likely than "do" or "say". Thus, we suggest widening the public narrative on irregular migration, not just in terms of how we discuss the issue but also in terms of who speaks and what kind of agency is evoked by these narratives.

The political discourse where migration is perceived as a threat to the safety of the nation and the state has intensified in the 21st century. Indeed, previous research by Jaana Palander and Saara Pellander (2019) reveals a shift in Finnish political narratives regarding security and migration. In the 1980s, when the first Aliens' Act was introduced, political discussion related to the contents of the act highlighted both the security of the nation and also the need to safeguard the rights of migrants. Even in the 1990s, when migration to Finland increased, threat narratives were still relatively rare (Palander & Pellander 2019). However, the early 2000s witnessed a rise in anti-immigration political narratives as the Finns Party, with their anti-migration agenda, rose to prominence, first in municipal elections in 2008, and then in parliamentary elections in 2011. Since then, it has become more common to express quite restrictive views on migration in the sphere of politics, and migration debates have intensified (Pyrhönen 2015). Our analysis supports this view, and we can observe that rather harsh language has become the norm in political debates and society at large. In terms of who dominates the public discourse, both in politics and the media, our findings suggest that it is the right-wing populists. This finding may be important to convey to liberal-centre and left-wing politicians: allowing populists to dominate the discussion on migration may have severe consequences for migrants' lives and migration laws and policies. There is undoubtedly room for counternarratives through which a more humane perception of migration and migrants could be communicated.

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8. Appendix 1: Corpora

		Texts	Tokens
Media	YLE news	2595	
	Helsingin Sanomat	1129	
	Iltalehti	664	
	Total	**4388**	**2 354 576**
Politics	Plenary sessions	321	
	Materials from political parties	197	
	Press release	130	
	Committee report	26	
	Government proposal	26	
	Committee statement	25	
	Total	**725**	**10 698 863**
Civil society	Amnesty	76	
	Finnish Refugee Advice Centre	60	
	The Finnish Refugee Council	38	
	Deaconess Foundation	36	
	Victim Support Finland	19	
	HEUNI	18	
	Free Movement Network	11	
	HE 112/2022	8	
	Permission to Live initiative	6	
	Support for Asylum Seekers	1	
	Without permanent residence	2	
	Finnish Red Cross	5	
	Global Clinic	3	
	Physicians for Social Responsibility	3	
	Blue-and-Black Movement	7	
	Finnish Sisu	6	
	Finns Party Youth	6	
	Total	**305**	**268 012**

9. Appendix 2: Examples of words in the semantic groups

This list of examples is from the media corpus, but aside from a few exceptions, the words within the groups were similar in all three corpora.

Labour: work, labour, worker, employee, employment, unemployment, labour force, work-based, workplace, work permit, visa, labour market, working life, discrimination (at work), collective agreements, unions, labour inspection, working hours, traineeship, work culture, wages, salary, to hire, company, and so forth.

Crisis: different crisis compounds (refugee-, euro-, financial-, border-, climate-, -management, -country. -moment…), and words such as threat, catastrophe, flood, burden, etc.

Crime: victim, suspect, illegal, extortion, offence, conviction, human trafficking, criminal investigation, etc.

Quantities: millions, thousands, etc. and words that quantify or describe an increase or decrease.

Geography: country names, as well as some general geographic terms, such as city, municipality, regional and local.

Politics: law, legislation, police, parliament, party, PM, MP, etc.

Migration and asylum: undocumented, migrants, Migri (The Finnish Immigration Service), residence permit, etc. Asylum words: reception, process, seeking, policy, etc. Border words: controls, guard, Frontex, closure, crossing, etc. Return words: deportation, deterrence, detention, return, refusal of entry, etc. Arrival words: come, arrive, cross, bike, instrumentalised, attempt, to Finland, to Europe, etc.

Status: asylum seekers, "paperless", refugees, illegally (in the country; residing)

Rights: basic rights, right to, etc. Words denoting rights are most often used in relation to other words (the right to health care, for example).

Subject: Includes words related to social categories or household membership as well as subjective experience: man, woman, mother, father, child, Muslim, Christian, parenthood, live, die, illness, etc.

Welfare: social security, benefits, health care, education, sickness, housing, etc.

In the case of semantic overlap, a word can feature in several groups. For example, "refugee mother" can be in both status and subject groups.