Utrecht University

(Seeking) Asylum in the Netherlands: Experiences of and Challenges to Sustain Human Security of Afghan Forced Migrants

Master thesis International Development Studies

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Utrecht, August 2022

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MSc International Development Studies

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Source: Muheisen, M. (2016)

Abstract

Through adopting a human security approach, this research aims to explore what implications forced migration movements have on experiences of, and challenges to sustain, human security of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands. The human security approach places individuals and communities, instead of states, at the centre of security. At the core of human security are three freedoms that are fundamental to human life: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity. Fourteen semi-structured interviews with Afghan forced migrants who arrived in the Netherlands between 2007 and 2021 form the basis of this research.

This research sheds light on the predominant insecurities and conditions that drove Afghan migrants to flee. Participants fled from situations severely endangering their personal security, such as persecution and shootings. A combination of structure and agency determined when participants could flee, which routes and channels they could use, and which destinations were reachable. Financial resources appear to be an important factor in the abilities to move.

Participants reported several insecurities in the Netherlands. They did not experience any threats to their freedom from fear. Hence, seeking asylum often involved temporal uncertainties, which gave rise to unworthiness and feelings of indignity. Some participants reported discrimination or inequality because they perceived to be treated unequally by authorities to other migrant groups. Moreover, when migrants became irregular, they often experienced livelihood tensions, threatening their freedom from want. Receiving refugee status diminished most of migrants' insecurities. However, some felt pessimistic and experienced feelings of indignity due to the long time they spent waiting. Last, participants reported difficulties with finding jobs that match education and work history in Afghanistan, as well as instances of discrimination as possible sources of feelings of indignity.

This research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Afghan forced migrants' human security in the Netherlands, as well as to a more broad narrative concerning human security and displaced lives of forced migrants fleeing from places of conflict.

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been able without the support of several people, which I therefore would like to thank. First, I want to thank all the participants in this study for their willingness to share their stories in such detail, despite the sensitivity of the topics. Thank you for your heartfelt welcome and being so kind and open to me. Second, I want to express my gratitude towards the people from Huis van Vrede for their enthusiasm about this research. Without their help and breakfasts on Sunday, I would not have been able to find participants and obtain such valuable information. Third, I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor Romain Dittgen for his guidance throughout the research process and writing the thesis. Last, I thank my fellow students for being in this thesis process together, and making the endless library days more fun.

Celine van Laer

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List of Abbreviations

AZC	Asylum seekers centre (*Asielzoekerscentrum*)
COA	Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (*Centraal Orgaan Opvang Asielzoekers)*
EU	European Union
IND	Immigration and Naturalization Service (*Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst*)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
RTA	Reflexive thematic analysis
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Afghanistan and its citizens have been experiencing instability and conflict for more than four decades, starting in 1979 when the Soviet military invaded Afghanistan to build a pro-Soviet government, which disrupted the country's public institutions and economy (Bizhan, 2018; NPR, 2021). The Islamic fundamentalist group, the Taliban, ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until the invasion of the United States (US) in 2001. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan according to the Sharia law, implementing strict laws for the whole population based on extremely conservative interpretations of Islam (Tronc & Nahikian, 2018). Afghan government officials, security forces, people who worked with international troops, and people who were perceived to be ´against´ the Taliban often feared for their lives because of the risk of being persecuted. In August 2021, the Taliban reassumed power in Afghanistan, leading to fear and frustration among the population (Sakhi, 2020). However, even between 2001 and 2021 "Afghanistan was a failed state, weak and fragmented and unable to provide either effective services or protection to its citizens" (Bizhan, 2018, p. 1016). The US invasion in 2001, triggered by the 9/11 attacks, was the start of an Afghanistan War which lasted two decades. The US launched state-building operations in Afghanistan to make the transition to a stable, self-sustaining democracy, that could survive following the withdrawal of external support (Brownlee, 2007). However, US efforts failed to bring security and peace to Afghanistan, direct a successful democratization transition, and accomplish reconstruction and economic development of its citizens (Azami, 2020). Subsequently, Afghan citizens experienced daily insecurities and loss of opportunities in the face of chronic conflict.

As a result of cycles of instability and conflict, millions of Afghans have decided to flee the country. Filippo Grandi, the 11th United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), pronounced Afghanistan's displacement crisis as "one of the largest and most protracted in UNHCR's seven-decade history" (UN Refugees, n.d.). Even before the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021, the country produced ten percent of the world's international refugees. In 2020, a total of 2.8 million Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers were living outside Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2022). 2.2 million were living in the neighbouring countries Iran and Pakistan. Besides, 557,000 Afghan refugees were living in European countries (Aljazeera, 2021; UNHCR, 2022).

1.2 Problem statement

Refugees, asylum-seekers and irregular migrants flee to another country to safeguard their lives and persevere their freedoms, with the hope for a better future elsewhere. They flee from dangers such as war, violent conflict, human rights violations and discrimination (Fisher, Martin & Straubhaar, 1997). It is probable that Afghan forced migrants are in less physical danger in destination countries, such

as the Netherlands, and thus that their physical safety is more 'secure'. Nevertheless, this narrow view on security is not sufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of people's security, as it does not take into account (changes in) people's livelihoods. As Takizawa (2011) argues, "even if refugees are granted asylum in a country, that does not mean refugees are free from victimization and their human rights are fully protected. Many refugees remain in vulnerable conditions in the country of asylum" (p.24).

The Netherlands is historically known as so called 'gidsland' (guiding country) for the implementation of human rights (Franko et al., 2019). Together with other Northern European countries, such as Norway and Sweden, the Netherlands has a strong global reputation as promotor of inclusion, equality and tolerance. Yet, the Dutch asylum system is often criticized. The Red Cross has proclaimed the accommodation situation for asylum-seekers as 'inhumane', and harmful to the health and safety of asylum-seekers (Red Cross, 2022). Dempsey (2022) describes Dutch asylum camps as places of "governmentality, surveillance, control, exclusion and embodied geopolitical violence" (p.408). Moreover, scholars determined that the strict interpretation of immigration rules in the Netherlands causes unfair treatment of asylum-seekers, denying 'genuine' refugees asylum, and restricting them to rebuild their lives (Geertsema et al., 2022). When asylum-seekers become irregular migrants, they risk material deprivation, social isolation, and mental and physical illness (Kuschminder & Dubov, 2022). Even when migrants are legally recognized as refugees, they may face challenges, including discrimination and inequality in the labour market, as well as in the housing market and the education system (Cordaid, 2019).

Mrs. Sadako Ogata, the 8th UN High Commissioner for Refugees, highlighted the double nature of forced migrants' security: not only are they insecure in their country of origin where they are fleeing from, but when they decide to flee they also "start a precarious existence" (Ogata, 1999, Paragraph 1). To provide a more holistic understanding of Afghan forced migrants' security, requires an approach that reaches further than safety from violent conflict, and takes into account all elements of people's security. The concept of human security places individuals and communities, instead of states, at the centre of security. Human security is concerned with all forms of threats and vulnerabilities that endanger people's survival, livelihood and dignity. In doing so, it hopes to protect and enhance three fundamental freedoms that are the essence of life: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity.

1.3 Research aim, objectives and questions

The primary aim of this research is to explore what implications forced migration movements have on experiences of, and challenges to sustain, human security of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands. In doing so, this research sets out the following objectives: (1) to analyse what predominant insecurities and conditions drove the 'decision' to flee Afghanistan, as well as to what degree Afghan forced migrants experienced agency in their migration decision; (2) to examine how Afghan forced migrants experience(d) freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity in the Netherlands, and what challenges are to sustain these freedoms; (3) to investigate in what ways Afghan forced migrants' legal status in the Netherlands influence these experiences and challenges. Resulting, the main research question that guides this study is:

What implications do forced migration movements have on experiences of, and challenges to sustain, human security of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands?

The main research question will be answered with the support of the following five sub-questions:

1. What were the predominant insecurities and conditions of Afghan forced migrants that drove the 'decision' to flee Afghanistan? To what degree did Afghan forced migrants experience agency in their migration movement to the Netherlands?
2. How do Afghan forced migrants experience freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity in the Netherlands? What are/have been challenges to sustain these freedoms?
3. In what ways do forced migrants' legal statuses in the Netherlands influence their freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity?

1.4 Development relevance

At the end of 2021, there were 89.3 million forcibly displaced people in the world, as a result of fear of persecution, conflict, violence, human right violations and events seriously disturbing public order (UNHCR, 2022). Almost two thirds were refugees and asylum-seekers. The global forced migration population has more than doubled since 2010. According to the trend, numbers are expected to rise in the future. Afghan refugees make up the third largest group of refugees in the world. Factors such as continued political instability and enforcement of strict rules by the Taliban, combined with economic and other insecurities in Afghanistan may result in new waves of refugees. This research informs us about the displaced lives of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands. At the same time it contributes to the broader narrative about human security and displaced lives of the wide-ranging population of forced migrants fleeing from places of conflict. To safeguard human security, at present and in the future, and work towards improvements of forced migrants' freedom from fear, want and indignity, it is crucial

to understand different human security experiences, as well as threats that (Afghan) forced migrants encounter in their daily lives.

As Vietti and Scribner (2013) argue, the human security framework can help to "point to solutions that will help make the migration process more rational and humane" (p.27). Knowledge about the conditions that create human insecurities and challenges in the Netherlands can inform international organization, the Dutch government, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The identification of immediate needs and insecurities of all forced migrants can help international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UNHCR facilitate humane international migration, and better ensure international protection of refugees, asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. Moreover, knowledge about the challenges and difficulties that recognized Afghan refugees experience in the Netherlands, and how these change over time, can help the government and NGOs address these challenge and work towards lasting solutions to refugees' problems in the Netherlands. Also, it can contribute to refugees' participation and long-term integration in the society in a way that preserves and enhances their dignity. Altogether, this research aims to promote people-centric policies to protect individuals from insecurity that could pose threats to their survival, livelihood and dignity.

1.5 Scientific relevance

This research makes several contributions to existing research on forced migration and human security. First, through exploring human security experiences and challenges of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands, this research enhances knowledge about (Afghan) forced migrants' human security in developed destination countries. "Human security is relevant to people everywhere, in both developed and developing countries" (UNDP, 1994). Forced migrants may face different challenges, such as difficulties with accessing the labour market (Lee et al., 2020) and socio-cultural challenges (Rezaei, Adibi & Banham, 2021). However, research that explicitly studies forced migrants' experiences through a human security lens are largely limited to human security issues that come with irregular migration channels, such as human trafficking, or unsatisfactory conditions in refugee camps (e.g. Yousaf, 2018; Berti; 2015). There remains a knowledge gap in the literature in understanding human security experiences and challenges of (Afghan) forced migrants in developed countries. Second, no studies were found that explore the temporal dimension of migrants' human security. Time and temporalities remain little explored in migration literature (Griffiths, 2014; Hughes, 2022). This research adds to the knowledge about temporalities of human security experiences, as well as how time and temporality influence the lived experiences of migrants.

Last, forced migrants are often portrayed as a "homogeneous mass of needy and passive victims" (Turton, 2003, p. 7), fleeing from violent conflict and persecution. However, this study recognizes that there is not one story of the Afghan migrant. As the UNHCR states, "there are as many reasons for moving as there are migrants" (UNHCR, 1993, p.13). Migrants are embedded in social,

political, and historical situations (Turton, 2003), which can lead to different combinations and degrees of human (in)securities. Furthermore, migrant-specific situations shape the capabilities they have, not only in whether to move or not, but also "when, where and how to move" (p.12). This study contributes to the debate about forced versus voluntary migration, by shedding light on different forced migration stories, as well as analysing the degree that people experienced agency in their migration decision-making.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical and conceptual framing that the thesis is based upon through a review of the literature on human security and forced migration. Chapter 3 sets the context of (forced) migration in the Netherlands by presenting the Dutch asylum system and reviewing existing literature on forced migration realities in the Netherlands. Chapter 4 displays the methodology used in the research and elaborates on the research approach, data-collection and data analysis. Moreover, this chapter discusses the ethical considerations, positionality of the researcher, and two methodological limitations encountered during this research. In chapters 5 and 6, the research findings are presented. Chapter 7 provides an discussion of the main research findings. Last, chapter 8 concludes the research by answering the main research question, considering limitations to the research, and introducing ideas and recommendations for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research explores implications of forced migration movements on Afghan forced migrants' human security in the Netherlands, using a human security perspective. This chapter sets out an examination of the theoretical and conceptual embedding of the research. I outline the concept of human security and its three fundamental freedoms. Moreover, I sheds light on the phenomenon of forced migration, as well as the structure/agency debate regarding migration theory. Hereafter, I describe the securitization of migration in the EU and the contemporary refugee regime, which shape migrants' experiences. This chapter concludes with an overview of the literature on displacement and human insecurities.

2.1 Human security

2.1.1 Defining human security

The concept of human security looks at security issues from a human perspective (Ogata, 2002). It has been part of academic and policy discourses since it was first promoted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994). According to Tzifakis (2011) human security has become a successful security discourse thanks to its normative approach and moral position "grounded on a concern for individuals (instead of states) as referent objects of security" (p.364). The concept has been used widespread in several academic disciplines, official documents, and government policies. However, the interdisciplinary appeal of human security has led to different interpretations of what human security and threats to human security are, which has inhibited the emergence of a comprehensive theory or a coherent security practice. In 2003, Alkire discussed how there were over thirty definitions, posing a 'whirlwind' of definitions of human security. She attempted to provide a conceptual model for human security which leaves room "to incorporate many operational expressions of human security, which can be understood to be not ´competing conceptions´ but rather appropriate initiatives to protect human security in concrete circumstances" (p.6). This thesis will rely on the working definition that she adopts in her conceptual model, in which she defines the objective of human security as "to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long term human fulfilment" (p.2).

Despite its conceptual unclarity, there is consensus that the concept denotes a shift from the state as referent of security, to human individuals and communities as referents of security (Alkire, 2003). Traditionally, security issues have been linked with state sovereignty, state security and the potential for conflicts between states and threats to countries' borders (Taylor, 2004; UNDP, 1994). Yet, scholars have debated the traditional view on security, highlighting a change in understanding security threats (e.g. hunger is now perceived as a security threat), and the emergence of new security threats (e.g. 'new wars') (e.g. Newman, 2010; Rozborová, 2013). As Newman (2004) asserts, traditional security policies have failed to deliver security to a significant part of the people in the world and "security can no longer

be conceived of solely as defence of national territory against 'external' military threats under state control" (p.186). He argues that "for many people in the world – perhaps even most – the greatest threats to 'security' come from internal conflicts, disease, hunger, environmental contamination or criminal violence" (Newman, 2010, p.78-79). Although these threats are not new, the traditional view on security has put these threats at the periphery. In addition, the 'new wars' literature emphasizes that, although international wars still occur, they have largely been replaced by intrastate wars, which form new threats to people's security (Kaldor, 2001; Newman, 2010). These new wars often occur together with a weakening of state capacity and the provision of public goods, spread of criminality, corruption and inefficiency, growing organized crime and disappearing political legitimacy (Kaldor, 2001). Thus, during the last 30 years it has been recognized that border control by armed forces is ineffective against threats to people's security, such as hunger and disease. Resulting, the international community has shifted its attention from 'security of the state' to 'security of the people', which does not replace but complements state security.

Although human security approaches agree that people should be at the centre of security, some disagree about which threats individuals should be protected from (Newman, 2010). The narrow(er) approach to human security is closer to the traditional view on security as it is concerned with political violence, the consequences of armed conflict for individuals, and the dangers posed to civilians by repressive governments and situations of state failure (Newman, 2010; Roberts, 2005). However, in this study I adopt a broad(er) approach to human security that is concerned with all forms of threats and vulnerabilities from all sources, including "chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression … and sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities" (UNDP, 1994, p.23). This approach is presented in the 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994) and adopted by Alkire (2003). It has received support in policy circles, in particular from the Commission on Human Security, which was established in January 2001. Incorporating Alkire's working definition of human security, the Commission's (CHS, 2003) report defines human security as the protection of:

> "the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms— freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations … [and] give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity" (p.4).

Moreover, human security has the characteristic of universality (Tzifakis, 2011). It is concerned with the security of every individual in every country, and is not limited to people who live in poverty or conflict. As explained in the Follow-up Report of the UN Secretary-General (UNGA, 2012), "as evidenced by the recent earthquake and tsunami in east Japan and the financial and economic challenges

in Europe and the United States of America, today, people throughout the world, in developing and developed countries alike, live under varied conditions of insecurity" (p.5). The UNDP's (1994) concept of human security provides a multidimensional framework that integrates seven distinct but interrelated categories where a threat to security (i.e. insecurity) can be found: political, economic, personal, community, environmental, food and health security. In this way, the concept of human security provides a "holistic understanding of the constitution of vulnerability in our world" (Thomas, 2004, p.353). Table 1 defines the seven categories and possible threats to human security.

Table 1

Human security categories and definitions based on UNDP (1994: 25-33)

Human security category	Definition	Possible threats
Economic security	Having an assured basic income, usually from paid work or, as a last resort for those unable to obtain an income, from some public financed safety net.	Persistent poverty, unemployment, monopolization of resources
Food security	Having physical as well as economic access to basic food.	Famine, unavailability of (quality) food
Health security	Living under conditions that permit the prevention and treatment of diseases that might be infectious or parasitic, related to malnutrition and unhygienic living conditions, or linked to unhealthy lifestyles.	Deadly infectious diseases, unsafe food, malnutrition, lack of access to basic health care
Environmental security	Safety from sudden and permanent damages through the environment due to both human-made and natural causes.	Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, pollution
Personal security	Absence of physical violence from the state or other states, from violent individuals and groups, from gender-based violence, and from violent adults.	Physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence
Community security	Security individuals derive from their membership in a group where they experience a sense of belonging and cultural identity, being safe from losing one's traditional relationships and values, and from inter-group (e.g. ethnic or sectarian) violence.	Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity based tensions
Political security	Living in a society that honors basic human rights and freedoms and is not affected by state repression.	Political repression, human rights abuses

2.1.2 Freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indignity

At the core of the human security approach are three freedoms that are fundamental to human life, and address people's survival, livelihood, and dignity. Freedom from fear and freedom from want were introduced in the 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994). Freedom from fear has history in the human rights literature and is one of the fundamental rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 (UN General Assembly, 1948). Freedom from fear involves the protection of individuals to direct threats to their physical safety and integrity, such as physical abuse, violent conflict,

human rights abuses, persecution and death (Hanlon & Christie, 2016; Tadjbakhsh, 2014). Freedom from wants promotes the security of (continuation of) daily living. It emphasizes people's basic needs and economic, social and environmental aspects of life and livelihoods (Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, 2010). This involves, among others, having a roof above one's head, having physical and economic access to basic food for yourself and your family, and being protected from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles.

Human dignity has been part of the human security discourse since the emergence of the concept. The 1994 Human Development Report states, "human security … is a concern with human life and dignity" (UNDP, 1994, p.22). However, freedom from indignity was gradually recognized as one of the fundamental freedoms in the 2000s when the human rights agency received more attention (Tadjbakhsh, 2014). Consequently, it was presented as an integrated part of human security in the follow-up report on human security of the UN-Secretary-General in 2012 (UNGA, 2012).

The idea of human dignity is omnipresent in human rights discourses, in law, religion, the media, literature, politics, and ethics. Schroeder and Bani-Sadr (2017) highlight the wide range of settings in which dignity is used, ranging from football games to refugee crises. Whose dignity is at stake, and what dignity means, depends on the context. According to Kant, human dignity implies the innate worth of all human beings (Sensen, 2011). Sennet (2003) argues that this innate worth should not only be respected by others (societal respect) but should also be recognized in one's own eyes (self-respect). At the core of human dignity is autonomy, the ability to think for oneself and make one's own decisions (Sensen, 2010). According to Beyleveld and Brownsword (2002), people's dignity resides in the notion of empowerment. People should be empowered to actively and freely pursue their interests and goals without interference from others. Collste (2014) suggests that the concept of human dignity carries two meanings. First, the principle that every human being has intrinsic and equal value, and hence that there should be no inequality, discrimination or exclusion. Second, that decent conditions are needed for life to be dignified, including freedom, access to education, the absence of repression and the protection of other human rights. Thus, human dignity is about respect for people's innate and equal worth, as well as improved quality of life and the enhancement of human welfare in order that people can make choices and seek opportunities that empower them, and develop their full potentials (Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, 2010).

Table 2 summarizes the three fundamental freedoms of the human security approach. The freedoms seldomly exist in isolation. Threats to a freedom often directly or indirectly affect other freedoms. For example, unemployment can affect people's livelihoods and their freedom from want. However, not being able to find a job can also result in feelings of unworthiness and indignity.

Table 2

The three fundamental human security freedoms and examples of threats (UNDP, 1994)

Freedom	Protection of people's…	Examples of threats
Freedom from fear	Survival	Physical abuse, violence, conflict or war, persecution, death.
Freedom from want	Livelihood	Unemployment, food insecurity, health threats.
Freedom from indignity	Dignity	Inequality, exclusion, discrimination, not being able to develop full potential, feelings of unworthiness/powerlessness.

2.2 Forced migration

2.2.1 Defining forced migration: refugees, asylum-seekers and irregular migrants

The IOM defines a migrant as someone "who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM, 2019, p.132). In migration studies, migrants are often categorized based on their motivations for moving to another country (Castles, 2006). Scholars often use a forced-voluntary dichotomy when explaining migration movements, with the former group being migrants who are forced to leave their houses because of conflict, violence, risk of persecution, and natural and manmade disasters, and the latter group migrating through free choice and seeking better material conditions, such as economic improvement (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Castles, 2006; Erdal & Oeppen, 2018).

Forced migration includes different legal or political categories. Migrants qualify as refugees when they meet the criteria set forth in the 1951 Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (1951 Convention), which defines a refugee as someone who:

> "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (UNHCR, 2019, p.18)

There are also migrants who are not (yet) perceived and treated as refugees. Asylum-seekers are migrants who seek international protection and who may experience the same threats as refugees, but need to prove that their need for international protection is well-founded (UNHCR, 2011). They are not (yet) legally recognized as a refugee because the country they submitted it has not yet (finally)

decided on their claim. Ultimately, not every asylum-seeker will be recognized as a refugee. Irregular migrants move outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements of the sending, transit or receiving country (IOM, 2011). Migrants can either irregularly entry or stay in a country when they do not have the required papers (De Haas, 2008). Although the term 'illegal migrants' is still used to refer to irregular migrants, the term is aimed to be avoided by actors such as the UNHCR, the European Commission, scholars and the media. The term 'illegal migration' ignores international legal obligations, is dehumanizing and denies migrants' innate dignity and human rights (UNHRC, 2018). Moreover, the term is legally incorrect, as entering or staying in a country without official documents is not considered as a crime in most countries, and everyone that arrives at borders has innate human rights and specific protection needs.

The complexity of these categories of forced migrants lies in the fact that reasons to migrate often overlap and that a migrant's status can rapidly change. Forced migrants often enter European countries without the required papers, and thus being irregular migrants. However, when a migrant applies for asylum in a country of destination he/she becomes an asylum-seeker. That migrant can later acquire regularization and become a refugee. Conversely, that migrant can also become an irregular migrant again in case the asylum claim is turned down, or due to administrative overstay (De Haas, 2008). Thus, forced migrants' legal status can change rapidly and multiple times during their lives. Yet, different legal statuses carry entitlements to differing types of protection and support, and thus influence human security.

2.2.2 Agency in migration decisions: debating the forced versus voluntary dichotomy

In practice, the clear distinction between forced and voluntary migration is problematic, as most migration motivations have elements of both coercion and volition (Betts, 2009). Migrants' motivations usually involve a combination of persecution and violence, lack of means of livelihood and opportunities, and personal circumstances etc. – in other words, migrants have 'mixed motivations' (e.g. Castles, 2006; Van Hear, Brubaker & Bessa, 2009). Therefore, scholars have been advocating for a continuum between forced and voluntary migration to understand migration decisions (e.g. Betts, 2009; Erdal & Oeppen, 2018; Kothari, 2002).

The forced versus voluntary debate is inherently linked to the concepts of agency and structure (Randell, 2016). The primacy of structure or agency in shaping human behaviour has been a central debate in sociology. According to Gibbens (1984),"agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently" (p.9). Agency concerns the power of individuals to freely make choices and perform actions that affect the course of their lives. However, "structure is a system of rules and resources that shape the extent to which those choices and actions are possible" (Randell, 2016, p.267). Laws, social norms and policies may constrain migrants' actions, and moving requires resources and skills.

Betts (2009) highlights that voluntary migrants are often not completely free from structural constraints. Migratory movements that are caused by factors other than conflict or persecution, are often automatically classified as 'voluntary' and driven by people's individual agency. However, structural constraints, such as lack of livelihood opportunities, can 'force' individuals to move to another place. These movements may be definitionally 'voluntary' while "in reality the decision to move is within a context where the individual or group is faced with no alternatives since staying in situ is not a realistic option" (Kothari, 2002, p.20).

Besides, scholars debate the term of 'forced' migration as even in the most constrained circumstances migrants retain a degree of agency (e.g. Betts, 2009; Turton, 2003; Williams, 2015). Turton emphasizes the dehumanizing effect of the language of forced migration. He describes that refugees are presented as "simply passive victims of circumstances, carried along in flows, streams and waves, like identical modules in a liquid" (p.10). He debates the passivity of refugees and states that most refugees have some degree of agency, or independent rational decision-making, as "to migrate is something we do, not something that is done to us" (p.11). De Haas (2021) complements that, as all migrants "face some level of constraint, 'forced' migrants also have some level of agency as, otherwise, they would not have been able to move in the first place" (p. 16). It is only under extreme conditions such as slavery and deportation that people's agency is largely or completely dismissed. Refugees constitute a category of migrants who experience the highest degree of constraints on their agency because of external factors that limit choice, such as conflict and persecution (Turton, 2003). However, they exercise their agency as far as possible even in times of constraining circumstances (De Haas, 2021).

Williams (2015) argues that even during times of conflict, migrants' movements are often driven by both conflict-related and non-conflict related factors, and thus by agency and structure at the same time. His suggestion is based on qualitative and quantitative studies on migration from conflict-affected areas including Lebanon, Guatemala, Nepal, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Somalia, Ethiopia, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Albania and areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, which provide evidence for the existence of mixed migration motivations. A recent study on Crimean internal displaced persons supports the phenomenon of mixed migration and shows that Crimeans' internal displacement in Ukraine is often a result of both structural changes resulting from the Russian annexation, leading to fear and safety concerns, and individuals' personal agency to seek better political and socio-economic conditions in mainland Ukraine (Charron, 2020). Moreover, in a study with Afghan refugees, respondents reported that, although war and violent conflict were the primary reasons for leaving Afghanistan and moving to Europe, these alone were not sufficient reasons to migrate (Mixed Migration Platform, 2017). The combination with lack of employment opportunities made it impossible to maintain their livelihoods, resulting in different insecurities, and the decision to flee.

In order to better incorporate both structure and agency in migration theory, scholars have conceptualized migration as a combined result of two factors: the aspiration to migrate and the capability to migrate (e.g. Carling, 2002; Van Hear, 2014). According to Prívara and Prívarová (2019), even if people experience severe threats and situations, the 'decision' to migrate has to be considered within the context of possible options and capabilities. De Haas (2010) therefore argues that migration theory should:

> "(1) include structural constraints which might impede people from moving and tend to severely restrict the options migrants have (e.g. through physical and political barriers, limited knowledge, limited resources), while at the same time acknowledging that, within a given set of structural constraints, (2) people can make independent choices according to their own knowledge, tastes and preferences" (p.16).

Structural constrains, such as borders and visa requirements, discourage migration movements, and to be able to move requires economic, social and/or cultural capital (Van Hear, 2014). De Haas (2021) adds bodily resources (e.g. good health, physical condition) as 'capital' that influences migratory agency and the ability to move. Thus, as Randell (2016) suggests "migration theory should integrate the independent preferences, decision, and actions of migrants (agency) with the resources they have access to and constraints they face (structure)" (p.269). In conflict settings, people from better-endowed households may be able to access asylum routes to other countries, while less endowed households may have insufficient resources to move and are stuck in 'involuntary immobility' (Carling, 2002). However, Van Hear (2014) asserts that the resources that people have access to do not only shape the capability to move or not, it also frames "the routes and channel migrants can follow, the destinations they can reach, and their life chances after migration" (p.100). For example, as migration policies of prosperous and desirable destinations have been tightened, access to these destinations is limited to individuals with more, especially social and financial, resources. Stock (2016) argues that people are sometimes forced to stop moving *during* the journey, because they do not have sufficient resources to reach further destinations. However, if they manage to mobilize the necessary resources, they can later continue their flight.

2.3 The context of (forced) migration

Christie (2018) states that forced migrants are "some of the most vulnerable individuals and groups on the planet" (p.11). To gain a comprehensive understanding of Afghan forced migrants' vulnerabilities and human (in)security, requires knowledge of the broader context in which migration movements happen. As abovementioned, migration movements are not only steered by individuals' agency. Instead, structures simultaneously constrain and enable migration of particular groups along particular geographical pathways, and shape migration realities and (in)securities.

2.3.1 Securitization of migration

Migration is not something new. For as long as there have been borders, people have fled from problems and insecurities on their side of the border to seek better circumstances on the other side of the border. However, societies have started to respond to migration during the last century, which led to the gradual development of a global system for addressing migrants' movements and refugee crises (Cantor, 2020).

From the 1990s, after the ending of the Cold War, as a result of the growth of intra-state conflicts and increasing international migration flows, migration came to be seen as a cause for concern for national governments. From then on "political elites, media and governments discursively [started to] construct immigration as a threat to national security, economic stability and national identity" (Jaskulowski, 2019, p.711). Based on individuals' place or origin, cultural background, education and skills, migrants have been divided into two categories: desirable (e.g. high-skilled) and undesirable migrants (e.g. refugees, low-skilled, Muslims) (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). Since the attacks of 9/11 and other Islamist terrorist attacks against the US and EU countries, security concerns have topped western political agendas and a widespread stereotype has emerged that sees migrants as the bearers of risk into the territory of the European Union and elsewhere. Refugees and asylum-seekers have been perceived as criminals and terrorists, and as threats to international peace and security. Resulting from this 'securitization of migration', the EU and governments have introduced restrictive border controls and tightened national refugee admission policies in order to control the flow of people across borders.

The border is one of the most important sites in the process of securitization of migration (Karamanidou, 2015). Emphasis on controlling the borders in the EU led to increased border checks and patrols to protect the EU and its citizens from the adverse risks and threats coming from (undesirable) migration. Increasing militarization of migration control in the Mediterranean area culminated in the establishment of FRONTEX in 2004, an European agency charged with enhancing the border control regime of the EU. FRONTEX's border control activities at the maritime borders of the EU's southern borders have especially become known, aiming "both at preventing migrants from reaching the territory of the European Union and gathering intelligence on border movements" (p. 48). Irregular migration is portrayed as a security problem that threatens the EU territory, and restrictions to international migration are seen as essential to guarantee the internal security of EU citizens.

However, the securitization of migration has led to prioritizing state sovereignty and national security over the protection and rights of forcibly moved migrants (e.g. Jones, 2016; Lazaridis & Wadia, 2015). States aim to protect themselves and their citizens from undesirable migrants, instead of providing migrants with the protection they need. Salter (2008) emphasizes that through hindering migration, borders create a 'permanent state of exception', excluding individuals and groups from basic rights and legal protections. Léonard and Kaunert (2019) point to a paradox in the EU policy towards forced migrants. They argue that refugees' and asylum-seekers' protection standards have increased,

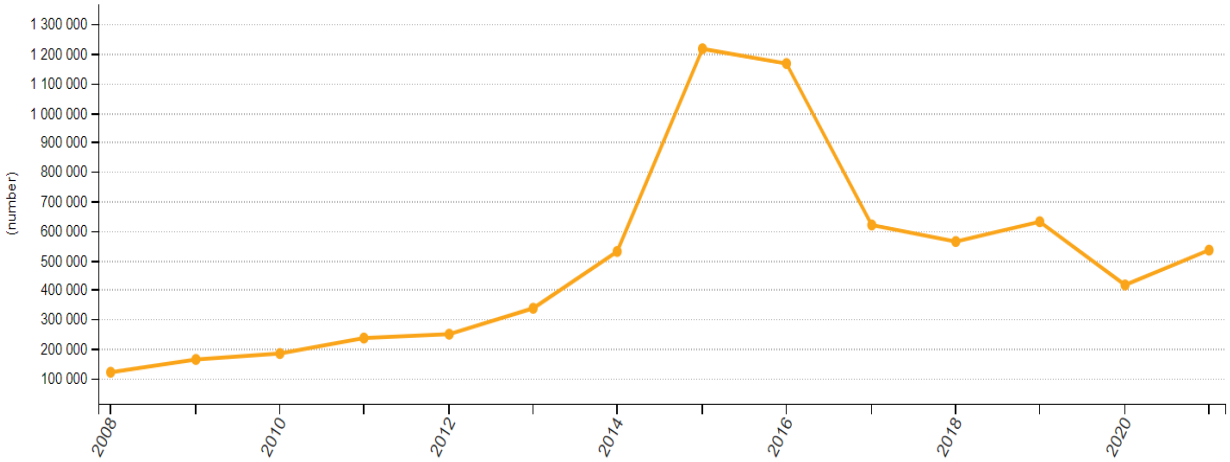
and their rights have been strengthened. However, at the same time, the securitization of migration has led to the strengthening of border controls at the EU external borders, especially on the high seas. This has made it more difficult to access these protection standards granted by asylum systems in the EU. As stated by Gibney (2005), while Western states now acknowledge the rights of refugees, they "simultaneously criminalize the search for asylum" (p.4). States have taken 'non-arrival measures' that impede access of undocumented migrants to the EU territory, and thus asylum. States have increased external border surveillance to make it more difficult to cross external borders without the required visas. For example, they sanction carriers (e.g. flight and boat companies) that transport migrants without valid visas and passports, as well as persons that, for the purpose of financial gain, assist or try to assist undocumented migrant to enter the EU territory. In this way, even when people are genuine refugees, their legal entry in the EU is blocked because they do not have the opportunities the obtain required documents in their country of origin (Albahari, 2015).

Nonetheless, the hardening of borders does not stop migrants from attempting to cross the border (Jones, 2016). Instead, it prompts migrants to risk their lives and embark on long and dangerous journeys to reach Europe. Jones therefore points to the violent role of borders and argues that the securitization and militarization of borders have deadly consequences as "the existence of the border itself produces the violence that surrounds it" (p.16). EU border control policies are thus characterized by a contradiction between to EU´s commitment give protection to the vulnerable group of forced migrants, and the commitment to controlling migration into the EU (Karamanidou & Schuster, 2012). Likewise, the ´fight against smuggling´ demonstrates another paradox in the EU securitization politics (Albahari, 2015). While human smuggling is often represented as an inherently exploitative activity in which migrants should be protected from "ruthless smugglers who exploit vulnerable people and expose them to great danger" (Carling, 2011, p. 39), reducing opportunities for legal entry in the EU actually makes the majority of undocumented migrants dependent on the services of human smugglers.

The power of the state regarding migration is not limited to controlling the EU's external borders. It also embraces the state´s capacity to decide who is admitted to reside in its territory and is granted citizenship rights (Jaskulowski, 2017). As shown in figure 1, the EU member states have experienced an increase in the number of first-time asylum applications from people arriving in the EU to seek asylum, especially in 2015 and 2016. However, migration flows are mixed, including refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants and other types of migrants (Karamanidou & Schuster, 2012).

Figure 1

First-time asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU member states 2008-2021



Source: Eurostat (n.d.)

Migrants are allowed to reside in EU countries if they can prove to meet the criteria set forth in the 1951 Convention. Through refugee status determination procedures, states "differentiate between those people who are in need of international protection and those who are not" (UNHCR, 2006, p.4). In addition to preventing or deterring people from arriving on the EU territory and claiming refugee status through restrictive border controls, EU countries have strengthened determination procedures to cope with mixed migration flows (Scalettaris, 2007). The UNHCR believes that "fair and effective asylum procedures, supported by accurate and timely country of origin information" (UNHCR, 2006) makes it possible to accurately make this differentiation. States have set up institutional and procedural arrangements to handle the increased asylum claims in accordance with international law. However, governments can deal with asylum applications in their own ways, "applying criteria more or less stringently" (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016, p.7). Consequently, outcomes for asylum-seekers can differ depending on which country considers their claim, and it is possible that some people in need of protection are rejected without their claim being fully heard (Karamanidou & Schuster, 2012).

2.3.2 Contemporary International Refugee Regime

The contemporary international refugee regime is the legal framework through which the protection of refugees is (aimed to be) guaranteed. The 1951 Convention is the core of the international protection system, operating in conjunction with international human rights law, starting with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and international humanitarian law (Nicholson & Kumin, 2017). Legal protection starts from the moment an individual arrives at the territory of the potential country of asylum. The UDHR specifies that "everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" (Article 14), irrespective whether they enter territory regularly or irregularly. However, being able to enter asylum systems requires migrants to physically enter the destination

territory, which they are often prevented from in the first place (Karamanidou & Schuster, 2012). The contemporary international refugee regime is established to guarantee refugees' safety and their opportunities to rebuild lives and to reconstitute communities. It consists of "a set of legal instruments, a number of institutions designed to protect and assist refugees, and a set of international norms concerning the treatment of refugees" (Castles, 2006, p.21). At the core is the UNHCR, which advocates for the international refugee protection as well as finding durable solutions to refugee problems (Takizawa, 2011). The 1951 Convention's articles have been composed to provide signatory states with harmonized rules and a clear description of their obligations regarding asylum-seekers and refugees (Balogh, 2015).

The Convention consists of three cornerstones. The first cornerstone is the refugee definition, as outlined in paragraph 2.2. As signatories of the 1951 Convention, states are obligated to review the cases of asylum-seekers and determine whether migrants are in need of protection due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Applicants have to present and justify that their fear of persecution is well-founded. However, strengthened determination procedures have led to restrictive interpretations of the refugee definition. When migrants cannot prove that they have a well-founded fear of persecution in their country, their claim is rejected. Nonetheless, it is not rare that genuine refugees are refused because they lack documentary evidence or their oral testimonial evidence is assessed to be incredible (e.g. Geertsema et al., 2021; Mosley, 2018).

The second cornerstone, the principle of non-refoulement, requires that no potential asylum seeker is returned to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened (Article 33). This guarantees that people are not submitted again to the persecution which has caused their departure. Nonetheless, people are protected "from refoulement once they come under the jurisdiction of a state, but they are often prevented from accessing a state in the first place" (Hirsch & Bell, 2017, p. 418). Consequently, 'push-back' actions on the Mediterranean sea by FRONTEX and EU member states have been met by critique from human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, lawyers and refugees themselves who have claimed that these actions should be perceived as violations of the principle of non-refoulement on sea (Radjenovic, 2021). Marchetti (2010) describes this as 'preventive refoulement', as states wish to avoid their obligations imposed by international law by preventing arrival in the EU territory and, by extension, access to protection systems. Furthermore, concerns have been voiced for 'chain refoulement' or indirect refoulement, pointing at instances where a country transfers asylum seekers to another country, which in turn returns them to the places of persecution or other danger (Diez, 2019). For instance, hundreds of asylum-seekers have been readmitted from Greece to Turkey as a result of the EU-Turkey Statement of April 2016 (Alpes et al., 2017). However, Turkey is often condemned for disrespecting procedural safeguards and breaching the principle of non-refoulement, sending back asylum-seekers to unsafe countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, without due access to legal aid and asylum (Amnesty International, 2015).

Third, the 1951 Convention defines the rights and international protection to which refugees are entitled, and the treatment of accepted refugees by states. However, international protection is not limited to recognized refugees. Asylum-seekers are staying legally on the territory from the moment they are registered until a final decision on their request has been made. As stated by the UNHCR, "respecting the right to seek and enjoy asylum involves establishing reception arrangements that are open, safe, and compatible with basic human rights" (Nicholson & Kumin, 2017, p.96). As set out in the UDHR (Article 25.1), everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, including basic needs such as housing, food, clothing, medical care and necessary social services. Often asylum-seekers and refugees are not able to provide for themselves. As countries have individual asylum systems, countries can adopt different approaches to the reception and assistance of asylum-seekers, such as assistance in kind or financial assistance. Furthermore, the Convention recognizes the realities of refugee flights, and does not perceive crossing a border without authorization to seek asylum as a crime. Consequently, asylum-seekers and refugees shall not be punished because of their irregular entry or presence, "as long as they are coming directly from that country, present themselves without delay to the authorities, and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence" (Nicholson & Kumin, 2017, p. 94) (Article 31). Additionally, detention of asylum-seekers and refugees should be avoided, which is supported by rights to liberty and security of person and to freedom of movement.

Officially recognized refugees are often better off than other forced migrants, as they have a clear legal status and enjoy the full protection of the UNHCR. Asylum-seekers and refugees differ in the support, aid and rights they have access to. For instance, as stated in the 1951 Convention, refugees have the right to public education, wage-earning employment and family unification, as well as 'expatiation and facilitation of naturalization and assimilation' proceedings. Asylum-seekers do not (always) enjoy these rights. However, the support, aid and rights that asylum-seekers and refugees have access to are different within different countries. Chapter 3 sets the context of forced migration in the Netherlands.

2.4 Displaced Lives

2.4.1 Displacement and home-making

This research studies migrants' displaced lives. Belloni and Massa (2021) argue that displacement is not only a flight from conditions of severe insecurity and violence, or the loss of one's own place. Instead, it entails a search "for a new place to emplace and (re)make home" (p.14). Forced migrants often find themselves in "a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo" (UNHCR, 2004). After being displaced they remain in precarious situations for prolonged times, staying for years in asylum camps and temporary lodgings (Horst & Grabska, 2015; Kraler, Etzold & Ferreira, 2021). This 'protracted displacement' prevents them from accessing long-term solutions and rebuilding their lives. They

experience protracted uncertainty and live with a sense of "dispossessed future" (Ramsay, 2020). As Ramsay explains, displacement is:

> "an existential experience of contested temporal being, in which a person cannot reconcile the contemporary circumstances of their life with their aspirations for, and sense of, the future. That is, displacement is a fundamental disruption to the teleology of life: an experience, whether acute or chronic, that pulls a person out of the illusory comfort of a life with stability and into a reality of a future that is not only uncertain, but which is determined by forces that are outside of their direct control." (p.388)

Belloni and Massa (2021) argue that displacement does not end until displaced people regain a sense of home. Securing legal status and stable housing are crucial in the process of home-making. However, it also concerns being able to realize one's aspirations in the new place of residence. Moreover, scholars underline the importance of a sense of belonging in order to feel home (e.g. Belloni & Massa, 2021; Brun & Fábos, 2015). Feelings of isolation, exclusion and perceived discrimination decrease sense of belonging, and in this way can hamper the process of home-making. Also, people aspire to have meaningful lives and livelihoods (Brun & Fábos, 2015). Hence, Jacobsen (2002) illustrates how displacement often results in a loss of livelihoods. In the destination country, forced migrants begin from a position of loss. They lost assets, family, community, and often they 'lost' emotional and physical health. Furthermore, socio-political, legal and policy factors often constrain them from re-establishing their livelihoods.

2.4 Challenges and insecurities in the destination country

Lack of empowerment and strength to control or influence the direction of their own lives puts migrants in a vulnerable and disturbed state of human insecurity. Migrants displaced lives often involve several insecurities, from the moment a migrants leaves the home country until years after arrival in the destination country. On the move, migrants are exposed to various threats to their human security. Besides harsh and dangerous travel conditions (Lutterbeck, 2014), several studies report the vulnerabilities that result from human trafficking (e.g. Vietti & Scribner, 2013; Wylie, 2006; Yousaf, 2018). Although these threats should be recognized, it is not within the scope of this research provide an extensive overview of migrants' insecurities during flight.

Research on human security of forced migrants in destination countries often focus on unsatisfactory conditions in refugee camp. Legesse (2017) demonstrates that for Eritrean refugees in the Mai-Ayni camp in Ethiopia, the main concern is the lack of social services such as shelter, food, water, health care, electricity and employment opportunities. Economic, health and food insecurity were the biggest concerns in the camp. However, Legesse did not find severe threats to refugees' personal physical safety. Contrary to these findings, Berti (2015) highlights the importance of legal, physical and psychological protection in refugee camps to protect individuals' personal security. Especially women

and girls, are prone to sexual and verbal harassment outside the home, and increasing risk of domestic violence or abuse. Besides, children are exposed to various forms of exploitation, including child labour, sexual violence, and employment by armed and criminal groups. Also in Germany, occurrences of different forms of violence, especially sexual and gender-based violence, have been reported (Hartmann, 2017). However, Hartmann's study did not specifically adopt a human security approach. Moreover, Kirk and Taylor (2007) argue that especially young women and girls who reside in refugee camps "may be subject to sexual exploitation by the very people there to care for them, including peacekeepers, humanitarian workers and even teachers" (Kirk & Taylor, 2007).

Even after migrants have received refugees status and move outside refugee camps, human security remains a concern. Berti (2015) focuses on the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey and discusses inadequate shelter and housing shortage, the state's inability to deliver health and educational services, and lack of employment opportunities, as factors that "directly undermine all dimensions of [refugees'] human security (from the personal, to economic, and environmental, to health and food security)" (p.48). Duman and Celik (2019) approach the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey from a human security perspective and argue that refugees in host countries may face different threats to their security, such as poverty, xenophobia, social exclusions, and problems with housing, health and education. Moreover, Akgul, Gurer and Aydin (2021) examine the personal security of Syrian refugees living in Turkey and identified five main themes regarding their personal security: violence, homelessness, prostitution and early marriage, child labour, and deadly journeys.

Furthermore, substantial research has been conducted that addresses various challenges that forced migrants may face in different destination countries, although not specifically using a human security lens. Integration in the workforce is one of the biggest challenges experienced by refugees (e.g. Lee et al., 2020; Rezaei, Adibi & Banham, 2021). Often foreign qualification and education are not recognized in the host country, posing impediments for refugee employment. Rezaei, Adibi and Banham's (2021) study revealed that Afghan refugees in Australia still experienced employment barriers after years, even when they already had received citizenship. Lamba (2003) argues that this "systematic discrimination" (p.47) restricts refugees' entry to desired employment. Furthermore, Kolkbacher (2020) argues that economic disadvantages and discrimination pose new challenges for Afghan refugees in the housing market. In addition, Cheng et al. (2015) highlight problems in accessing and utilizing primary health care services of Afghan refugees in Australia, being a result of differences in primary health care strategies between Afghanistan and Australia. In Afghanistan, primary health is generally provided by community health workers residing in the local community, where in Australia clients need to go to formal health service facilities. Furthermore, barriers to healthcare can also be a result of cultural, language and socio-economic factors (Mishori, Aleinikoff and Dafis, 2017).

Moreover, post-migration experiences can deteriorate refugees' mental health and well-being, which can pose impediments for people to be empowered and live a life in dignity. Research indicates that various post-migration factors affect mental health in refugees (Hill & Thompson, 2012; Li, Liddell & Nickerson; 2016). Hill and Thompson note that socio-economic concerns, acculturation challenges and language barriers, and discrimination, can worsen refugees' mental well-being. Li, Liddell and Nickerson categorize post-migration difficulties that affect refugees' mental health in three groups. First, socioeconomic factors, such as financial insecurity, finding suitable employment and difficulties with accessing secure housing represent barriers to positive psychological adjustment. Second, interpersonal factors, including ongoing family separation, social isolation, discrimination, and the loss of social identity tied with the former community and cultural groups are associated with poorer mental health outcomes. Third, the authors emphasize various stressors associated with the asylum process on migrants' mental health, including detention, extended processing time, negative application outcomes, and insecure temporary visa status. Also, migrants often experience pre-migration traumas (Mishori, Aleinikoff & Davis; 2017; Li, Liddell & Nickerson; 2016).

3. Setting the Context: Forced Migration in the Netherlands

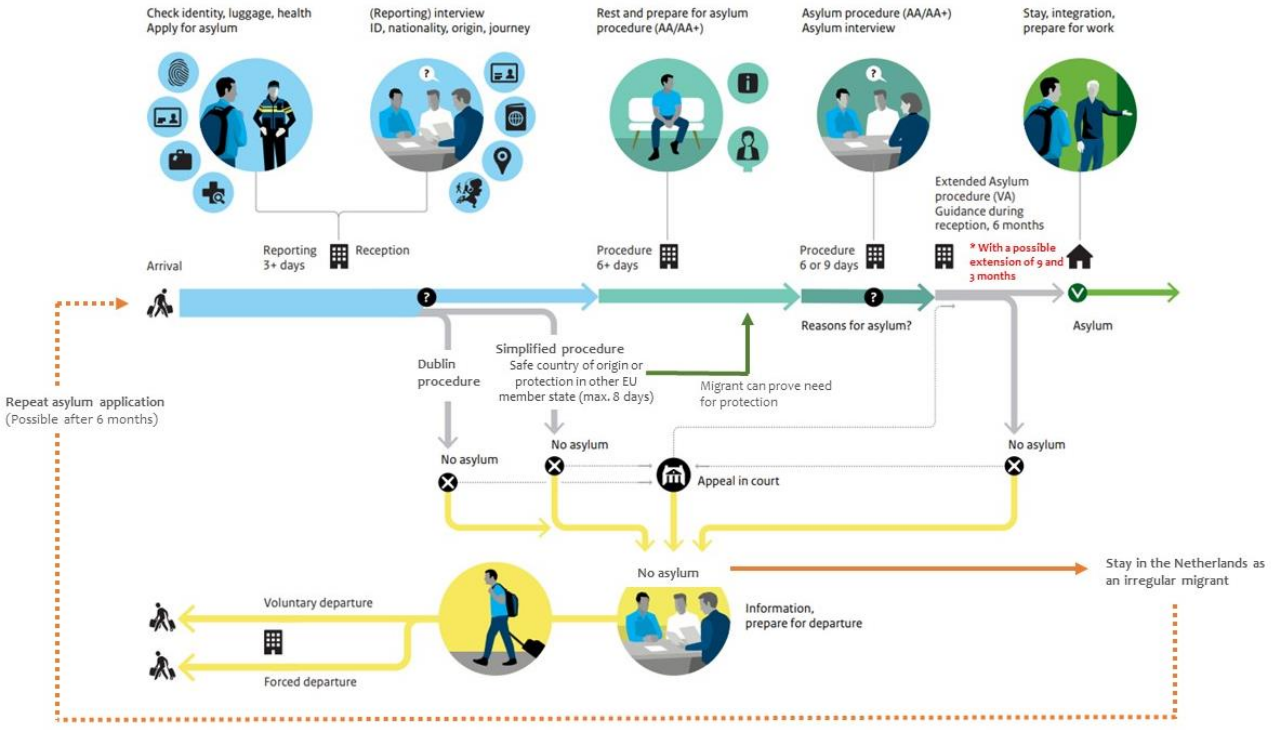
This chapter sets the context of forced migration in the Netherlands. First I describe the Dutch asylum system which influences migrants' daily lived experiences as asylum-seekers. Hereafter, I provide a short overview of the literature on forced migration realities in the Netherlands.

3.1 The Dutch asylum system

Figure 1 presents the asylum procedure in the Netherlands. The asylum procedure in the Netherlands can take months or even years. Sometimes migrant go through the process multiple times, when they 'repeat' their asylum application.

Figure 1

The asylum procedure in the Netherlands



Source: IND (n.d.) with authors own additions

Individuals arriving in the Netherlands and wishing to apply for asylum have to report to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) at the central reception centre in Ter Apel, a village in the North of the Netherlands (Asylum in Europe, 2022). Migrants fill in an application form and provide their fingerprints. A registration interview takes place regarding their identity, family members, travel route and profession. Furthermore, the IND concludes whether another member state is responsible for examining the asylum application, following the Dublin Regulation (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). The Dublin Regulation entails that the country where an asylum-seeker first registers is responsible for processing the asylum-seekers' application. Furthermore, if the asylum-seeker already enjoys

protection in another EU member state, or is from a country on the list of safe countries of origin, a simplified procedure of maximum eight days follows. This is a short and fast asylum procedure in which the asylum-seeker has one interview to explain why the Netherlands should handle the asylum application. The IND can reject the asylum claim or decide to continue the procedure in the general asylum procedure.

After application and registration, asylum-seekers are designated to a centre for asylum seekers (*asielzoekerscentrum,* AZC), usually nearby the IND office where their general asylum procedure starts (Asylum in Europe, 2022; Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). The Central Agency for the Reception Of Asylum Seekers (COA) is responsible for the designation and reception of asylum-seekers. Asylum-seekers are given at least six days for rest and preparation. Before their general procedure begins, they are provided with additional information about the interview process, free legal support from a lawyer, and a medical declaration which they can use to support their asylum story. In reality, asylum-seekers often wait for weeks or months until their general procedure starts.

The general asylum procedure starts with a procedure of six or nine days (IND, 2022). Asylum-seekers are allowed to be accompanied by their lawyer and have the right to speak with help of an interpreter in their first language. They explain their identity, the reason for fleeing their country, and the journey to the Netherlands. The IND uses international refugee law instruments to decide whether or not the asylum-seeker experiences a "well-founded fear of persecution" and should be granted refugee status. The IND can decide to refer the case to an extended general procedure when more time is needed to decide on the claim. This is often the case for migrants who irregularly entered the Dutch territory, because they often lack official documents and/or more proof is required to confirm their stories. The IND conducts additional interviews, and asylum-seekers are told within six months whether they will be granted residence permit or not. However, the decision can be further delayed with nine and three months when the case is complex or when there is an increased number of asylum applications.

From the moment an individual applies for asylum and during the whole procedure, asylum-seekers have certain rights to protect their security (W2EU, 2020). To ensure physical protection, individuals must be safe and accommodated in a secured place. As described above, asylum-seekers receive housing in one of the reception centres for the duration of their procedure. Furthermore, in order to fulfil physical protection minimum standards, refugees are provided with adequate food, sanitation, hygienic products. During their asylum procedure, asylum-seekers receive a financial allowance of around 50 euros per week, and are entitled to medical healthcare. Besides, asylum-seekers have right to free legal support from a lawyer during their procedure. An asylum-seeker is only allowed to work in the Netherlands when his or her application is pending for at least 6 months, and only for 24 weeks over a period of 52 weeks. Among asylum-seekers, only children are entitled to education.

In case of a negative decision, the asylum-seeker must leave the Netherlands within 28 days. During these 28 days, the asylum-seeker still enjoys his rights to shelter, financial allowance etc. (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). Within this period, the asylum-seeker can appeal the decision to the court with the assistance of a lawyer for judicial review of the IND's decision. The court assesses whether due consideration has been given to the asylum application, and the decision complies with national and international legislation. The court can decide that the IND had to reassess the asylum claim. If the asylum-seeker does not appeal the decision to the court, or if the court agrees with the decision of the IND, the asylum-seekers return the their home-country, either forced or voluntary. However, most rejected asylum-seekers do not leave the country within 28 days, and often also not in the months or years thereafter (Kalir, 2017). They live in the Netherlands as irregular migrants, without right to shelter, financial allowances, legal support, etc. Often, they register a repeat asylum application, which is possible after six months. However, they need to provide new facts or changed circumstances in the country of origin to substantiate their claim.

In case of a positive decision, the asylum-seeker will be given a temporary asylum residence permit for five years (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). However, the decision can be overturned if circumstances in the country of origin change. The refugee stays in a reception center until housing becomes available. The refugee is first designated to a municipality, after which housing is provided within three months. Temporary residence permit gives recognized refugees certain additional rights, such as the right to education, access to work and integration courses. However, the process of integration requires both from the host country a willingness to facilitate integration, as well as from the immigrants a willingness to adapt to the host community (Castles et al., 2002).

3.2 Forced migration realities in the Netherlands

Despite the Netherlands' strong global reputation as promotor of human rights and tolerance (Kuschminder & Dubow, 2022), the asylum system is often criticized for several reasons. Bakker, Cheung and Phillimore (2016) describe the Dutch asylum system as 'secure but segregated'. Asylum-seekers' basic needs are provided for by the state. However, asylum-seekers are sent to an AZC without choice, usually situated in rural areas or isolated. Movement outside is permitted, but also restricted due to the necessity to report at the AZC regularly. According to Dempsey (2018; 2022), Dutch asylum camps are a tool for social exclusion. Asylum-seekers are physically segregated from the general public, which prevents them from social network formation. Furthermore, studies report that migrants are often moved through many different camps before receiving a decision (Dempsey, 2022; Van Heelsum, 2017). As (Ryan, 2019) states, "[t]he sustained spatial exclusion of ACZ residents is purposely used to keep individuals in limbo, and under control. Residents never fully integrate into a new environment and are prevented from making connections within the centre" (p.15). Moreover, migrants often reside in temporary and improvised constructions such as tents, shipping

containers and former prisons (Dempsey, 2022). This reflects the sudden increase in asylum seekers in the Netherlands in 2014-2015, and also more recently since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the Russia-Ukraine war. However, it can also be seen as a conscious effort of the Dutch state to appear less attractive as a destination of asylum (e.g. Tesfamariam, 2017).

Furthermore, migrants often experience long periods waiting in AZCs for the asylum decision (Dupont et al., 2005; Reneman & Stronks (2021). Reneman and Stronks (2021) describe how the Dutch government uses the duration of asylum procedures as a 'temporal governance' tool in order to "control and discipline migrants by means of time" (p.302). The authors argue that in the period 2014-2019, the IND prioritized and accelerated cases of asylum-seekers with poor chances of receiving refugee status, while asylum-seekers with good chances of success often had to wait months before their first interview with the IND took place. According to Horst and Grabska (2015) time is a prominent tool for asylum governance, in which waiting and uncertainty is used to "discourage mobility and/or settlement in places of exile" (p.6). Several studies have focused on the effects of long waiting periods on asylum-seekers and have shown how uncertainty affects psychological health (Dupont et al., 2005) and feelings of being stuck (Griffiths, 2014).

Moreover, Versteegt and Maussen (2012) describe the Dutch immigration and asylum policy as one of the strictest of Europe. Scholars of Radboud University in Nijmegen in the Netherlands explain that the strict interpretation of immigration rules by the IND often causes unfair treatment of asylum-seekers (Geertsema et al., 2021). Their findings show that the IND often labels migrants as fraudsters when they give incorrect or incomplete paperwork. Resulting, the authors argue that migrants receive a negative decision on their asylum claim too easily. Not only does this have adverse effects on the rejected asylum-seekers, also their children who cannot go to school and are being put in danger of poverty due to having a parent without resident status (Lovatt, 2021).

In addition, the Netherlands is often criticized due to how it deals with rejected asylum-seekers. According to Kuschminder and Dubow (2022), denying humanitarian assistance to regularized migrants, including the denial of the basic provision of shelter, food, and clothing, strongly influences individuals' lived experiences in the Netherlands. The authors argue that these ´dehumanizing practices´ have clear degrading effects, such as material deprivation, social isolation, and mental and physical illness, and traps migrants in a "mental state oriented to day-to-day survival in a perpetual present without definite end or imaginable future" (p.17).

When becoming refugees, migrants are faced with new difficulties and challenges. Several studies report the economically disadvantages position of refugees in the Netherlands (e.g. De Vroome & Tubergen, 2010; Engbersen et al., 2015). However, Afghan refugees seem to secure a middle position in terms of their participation in the labour market (Nasrat 2020). After receiving refugee status, Afghans have the highest employment share and were the least likely to be recipients of social

benefits among refugee groups in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2018). However, Afghans often have a low level of education (Nasrat, 2020). De Vroome and Tubergen (2010) study Somalian, Iranian, Afghan and Iraq refugees' experiences with accessing the labour market in the Netherlands. They argue that education acquired in the home country contribute to refugees' economic integration. However, refugees often face barriers with the recognition of their educational attainments. Furthermore, the authors highlight education in the Netherlands, Dutch language proficiency and contact with natives as factors improving chances of employment. Hence, longer asylum wait times in AZCs decrease the probability of subsequent employment for refugees. Additional analyses displayed that this is mostly because staying in AZCs and being an asylum-seeker prevents individuals from acquiring education, work experience, and language skills, and to a lesser extent from acquiring (bridging) social contacts. Furthermore, general health problems and depression (which may follow from post-migration experiences) may further negatively influence economic integration.

Instead of using some kind of integration theory, Van Heelsum (2017) writes about aspirations and frustrations among Syrian and Eritrean asylum-seekers and refugees in the Netherlands who arrived during the 2015-2016 'crisis'. Confirming integration theories, Van Heelsum shows that language proficiency, having a job and becoming part of the local community are essential. However, through a aspiration perspective she also sheds light on migrants' strong desires and efforts to rebuild their lives in the Netherlands. Furthermore, she displays the frustrations that come up as a result of not being able to work during the asylum phase, or having to work to hard when received refugee status.

4. Methodology

This chapter clarifies the research approach by discussing the research method, the data collection and data analysis. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the positionality of the researcher, the ethical considerations that were accounted for throughout the research, and two possible risks of the research method.

4.1 Research approach

Method: semi-structured interviews

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to study migrants' experiences and insecurities, and their personal stories (Merriam, 2009). As stated by Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz, "qualitative research has a particular importance for migration studies, considering its potential for producing rich, in-depth, and nuanced analysis; allowing for conceptual refinements with higher validity … [and] being better tuned for understanding the voices of .. immigrant groups" (2018, p.2). Through a qualitative research approach, this research aims to identify issues from the perspective of the study participants and understand the meanings and interpretations they give to their own (in)security (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). This study is based on fourteen in-depth interviews conducted with Afghan forced migrants who are currently living in the Netherlands. Each refugee´s experience is unique, and hence in-depth interviews are best suitable for understanding the participants' personal stories, experiences and feelings (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). Furthermore, interviews are suitable to achieve in-depth information on sensitive issues, such as violence and severe insecurities. These require confidentiality and an intimate setting "to provide a comfortable atmosphere for participant disclosure" (p.36).

For the purpose of this research, I chose a semi-structured interview format. This format allowed me to guide the interview with relevant questions related to the topic, while at the same time I could "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009. p.111). It allowed me to change the order of questions, and add new questions during the interview based on the answers of the participants (Aung, Razak & Nazry, 2021). This was essential in the study on experiences of human insecurities of forced migrants, as I could define focus within the wide range of experiences and stories, to obtain the information that is relevant to the study. At the same time I could delve deeper in relevant stories or ask new questions on topics that came up during the interview. Furthermore, when participants became emotional or were not ready (yet) to tell sensitive stories, I could decide to change the order of the questions, or add less sensitive questions.

The interview guide consisted of some closed questions to collect specific data, including age, city of residence, the year of arriving in the Netherlands, and whether and when participants have received temporary residence permit. However, the interview guide mainly consisted of open-ended

questions, which provided participants the space to freely describe all experiences and feelings that they thought were relevant to the questions. Probes were linked to the interview questions to help participants answer the questions and request more detail (Merriam, 2009, p.19). The interview questions operationalize the research questions in the study and fit the objectives of this research as described in paragraph 1.3. The theoretical framework and identified concepts were used to further define the topics to focus on during the interview, and guided the development of the actual questions in the guide (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). This led to the interview guide as attached in Appendix 1 (English) and 2 (Dutch).

The research population

The study population of this research includes Afghan people who currently live in the Netherlands and have been forced to flee Afghanistan. This includes people who are legally recognized as refugees, asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. This study includes forced migrants who arrived years ago, as well as migrants who arrived more recently. Participants who have been living in the Netherlands for multiple years can provide information about their experiences and challenges both at the beginning of their stay in the Netherlands, as well as the experiences and challenges they faced later during their stay. This way, it can be explored whether certain experiences and challenges to sustain people's human security change over time. However, migrants who have arrived in the Netherlands more recently are expected to provide stories about their experiences and challenges during their first months in the Netherlands more vividly. Also, they may have other experiences and challenges than migrants that arrived a longer time ago. I decided not to include migrants who arrived longer than 15 years ago in the Netherlands. It can be difficult for individuals to remember human security experiences of a long time ago, which can provide a distorted picture (see paragraph 4.6). Besides, challenges that migrants may have experienced back then may not be of relevance anymore today, because solutions have already been offered to minimize these challenges.

Sampling techniques

For the selection of interview participants, I used purposive and snowball sampling. This allowed me to select participants who met the criteria described above. Participants were reached through my personal network and *Huis van Vrede,* a community centre in Utrecht. At the end of each interview I asked participants whether they knew potential participants that matched the sampling criteria. As one of the workers at Huis van Vrede explained to me, Huis van Vrede has gradually become a meeting point where Afghan people from the whole city meet throughout the week. One of the workers has been important for the recruitment of the participants, as he introduced me to several Afghan visitors, as well as friends of his outside the community centre. Also, he invited me for breakfast and meetings on Sundays to meet possible participants. Not only did I get to know my study participants, they also got

to know me in an informal way, which I expect has increased their willingness to participate in the study, and express their stories in detail.

Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of the study participants. This study includes twelve recognized refugees, and two asylum-seekers. Although none of the participants were irregular migrants at the moment of the interview, in total six migrants have been irregular migrants in the Netherlands one or multiple times in the past, for different time periods. Although the ambition to conduct more interviews through refugee organizations as well as snowball sampling, the realities in the research period did not permit me to do so. Refugee organizations were unable to connect me to Afghan migrants due to privacy reasons, and because staff was busy with Ukrainian refugees caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, only in two cases snowball sampling did result in new participants when participants asked acquaintances for approval to give me their numbers. It is possible that people hesitated to participate in the study due to the sensitive nature of the interview, and because they were invited indirectly without knowing who the researcher is.

4.2 Research setting and procedures

I invited participants to participate in the study either in person or via WhatsApp, and informed them upfront about the objectives of the interview, the topics discussed, as well as the possible sensitivity of the interview topics. In this way, participants had time to prepare to share their experiences. Also, when they thought the topic was too sensitive, they could decide not to participate. All of the participants I contacted either directly in person or by WhatsApp participated in the study. Interviews were preferably conducted in a quiet space, in order that participants felt comfortable to share their stories, and to guarantee privacy. The interviews took place at various locations at the participants´ convenience, often in a separated room in Huis van Vrede, at participants' homes, or in a separate room in a café. Four interviews were conducted over phone call. Interviews lasted between 20 and 80 minutes and were recorded with permission of the participants to avoid loss of data. Participants could choose to conduct the interviews in Dutch or English. In total, twelve interviews were conducted in Dutch, and two in English. Appendix 7 summarizes the date, channel and duration of the interviews, as well as the recruitment method. The data collection consisted of two rounds of interviews. The first round of interviews occurred from the end of March 2022 until mid-June 2022, after which I started the analysis process. Hereafter, I found another entrance to the study population, namely someone form my personal network who works at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This led to two additional interviews which were conducted in the beginning of July 2022. These interviews were also transcribed and analysed as described in paragraph 3.2.4.

Prior to each interview I followed clear ethical guidelines. I further explained the objectives and interview topics. Participants were reminded of the possible sensitivity of the interview topics, the voluntariness of participating in the interview, as well as the opportunity to decide not to respond to

questions, take a break, or end the interview at any time. I asked permission to record the audio of the interview and transcribe them, names and identifiable information being anonymized. Once the information sheet was discussed and participants had the opportunity to ask all their questions, informed consent was obtained. During the first five interviews, I asked participants to sign a written consent form. However, often participants had difficulties with reading the form, or just signed without reading it. Therefore, hereafter I decided to read out the informed consent form and obtain verbal consent. Information was validated by participants during the interview by asking confirming questions throughout the duration of the interviews and when participants' responses were ambiguous or unclear, I sought clarifications by asking new questions.

Table 3

Participant information

Interview No.	Sex	Age	City of residence	Civil status	Children, yes/ no	Working lives at time of interview	Higher education in Afghanistan or the Netherlands	Year of arrival in the Netherlands	Year of receiving residence permit	Has been irregular, yes/ no
1	Male	29	Utrecht	Married	Yes (2)	Cook	N/A	2010	2013	No
2	Male	32 (?)	Utrecht	Single	No	Tailor	N/A	2009	2021	Yes
3	Male	24	Utrecht	Single	No	Tailor / translator	N/A	2015	2022	Yes
4	Male	21	Utrecht	Single	No	Carpenter	N/A	2014	2015	No
5	Female	32	Schiedam	Married	Yes (2)	N/A	Education	2013	2013	No
6	Male	29	Utrecht	Married	Yes (2)	Tailor	N/A	2010	2017	Yes
7	Male	24	Utrecht	Single	No	N/A	N/A	2016	N/A	Yes
8	Male	27	Utrecht	Girlfriend	No	Carpenter	N/A	2015	2020	No

9	Male	23	Hogeveen	Single	No	Tailor	N/A	2015	N/A	Yes
10	Male	29	Utrecht	Single	No	Mechanic	N/A	2009	2014	Yes
11	Female	40	Vlaardingen	Single	No	Dentist	Dentistry	2015	2017	No
12	Male	53	Vlaardingen	Married	Yes (2)	(Elderly) healthcare	N/A	2007	2009	No
13	Male	33	Hogeveen	Single	No	Translator	Finished high-school	2021	2022	No
14	Male	32	Groningen	Single	No	Business, business administration	Bachelor business administration	2019	2019	No

4.3 Data analysis

In order to enhance reliability, interviews were recorded and transcribed for textual analysis. All participants gave permission to record the interviews. I analysed the interview transcriptions using Braun and Clarke's (2021) contemporary approach to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). RTA is an approach to qualitative data analysis that involves identifying and analysing patterns or themes across data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As stated by Braun and Clarke (2021), the reflexive character of RTA emphasizes "the importance of the researcher's subjectivity as analytic *resource*, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation" (p.330). Reflexivity, subjectivity and creativity are seen as valuable assets in knowledge production, through which the researcher actively generates themes through interpretative engagement with the data.

Braun and Clarke (2021) proposed a six-phase process for data engagement, coding and theme development, consisting of (1) data familiarization and writing familiarization notes; (2) systematic data coding; (3) generating initial themes from coded and collected data; (4) developing and reviewing themes; (5) refining, defining and naming themes; and (6) writing the report. The first phase consisted of re-reading the dataset. During phase two, I worked systematically through the dataset and identified pieces of information that are relevant to the research question. I provided these pieces of information with a code. For the coding and theme developing process, I used the qualitative data software NVivo20. During phase three, data and associated text segments were organized and grouped to construct themes that are relevant to the research question. Phase four entailed reviewing the relationship among the data items and codes that form each theme, and reviewing the relevance and applicability of the identified themes to the research question. During phase five, final names for the themes were generated and I identified which data items were most relevant for the research paper. The sixth phase consisted of producing the report. Although the phases are organized in a sequential order, the analysis process often required me to move back and forth between phases, for example when new interpretations of data items came up. Moreover, after having done one round of analysis, I added two more interviews to the research. I analysed these interviews following the same process. However, this also included re-analysing other interview transcriptions, as often new interpretations, and relationships among data items and codes emerged. Furthermore, phase six was actually interwoven into the entire process of the analysis, writing down interesting pieces of information and first ideas for the write-up during the whole analysis process. The code book is attached to this thesis in Appendix 8.

4.4 Reflection on the positionality as researcher

Positionality refers to the positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The importance of (awareness of) researcher positionality has especially been emphasized in cross-cultural and sensitive research (Manohar et al., 2017). Being a

Dutch, non-religious researcher studying experiences of Afghan forced migrants makes me an 'outsider' to the topic, and brings challenges due to social, cultural and linguistic differences. I and the participants probably held different views, values, beliefs, and knowledge, and we do not share the experience of fleeing one's country. This influences the connection that could be made and how the participants associated with me. Based on the relationship, participants decided what information to share, and what information to keep to themselves. I adopted multiple strategies to enhance the relationship between me and the participants, and establish trust by building rapport (see paragraph 4.5).

Additionally, during the research it has been important to reflect on my cultural, political and social context, which affects the whole research process, including the design of the research, the interview process, and the analysis of data (Bryman, 2016). A reflexive approach helped me to be aware of certain preconceptions and expectations brought into the research, For example, reflecting on the first interviews I came to the conclusion that the Dutch word '*veiligheid'* as a translation of 'security' can be confusing for the study population when talking about insecurities in their livelihoods. Following from their past experiences of violent conflict and war, 'veiligheid' has become synonym to 'not dying', and is not applicable when talking about insecurities such as not having a job, or having to move all the time to find a place to sleep. To gather information on insecurities other than personal insecurities I therefore had to avoid the word 'veiligheid' and use words such as '*zekerheid'* or '*gerustheid'.*

4.5 Ethical considerations

Studying human security experiences of forced migrants came with several ethical considerations that called for attention. Migrants' stories often cover sensitive topics, such as violence, severe insecurities, and traumatic experiences. Talking about these topics can be difficult or unpleasant, and interviews can stimulate individuals to think more about these experiences in their daily life. Therefore, I was required to conduct this research with special care and sensitivity.

Especially while doing research on sensitive topics, it is crucial that informed consent is communicated effectively. Participants must voluntary consent to participate after having been informed about the objectives, topics discussed, as well as the potential risks and benefits, and the voluntary nature of their participation (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). To minimize the risk of psychological harm, I clearly reminded them of their voluntary participation and the opportunity not to respond to questions, take a break, or end the interview at any time. Additionally, I informed participants that recordings of the interview remained confidential and personal and identifying characteristic would be removed from transcriptions and quotes to assure anonymity. This often eased participants, as some had unpleasant experiences with interviews in which they were filmed, or their names were used in the newspaper. Obtaining informed consent required special attention as consent was obtained in another language than the participants' mother tongue (Seagle et al., 2020). Among the research sample there were participants who had low literacy in both Dutch and English. Sometimes participants had little understanding of the

investigation process, because they had not participated in an interview like this before, and/or they never conducted academic research themselves. Some participants signed the consent form without reading it. Therefore, in order to communicate effectively, after five interviews I decided to read out the informed consent form and information sheet, and obtain consent orally.

I conducted the interviews carefully, without 'pushing' any questions, ensuring that the process did not damage participants. Moreover, I have paid special attention to rapport-building. In order for participants to feel comfortable to share their stories in detail, it has been important to connect with the participants and build trust (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). Before the start of the interview, I set ample time aside to have an informal conversation. When recruiting participants via Huis van Vrede, the process of rapport building, and establishing a relationship of mutual trust started before the interview, because someone introduced me to them, and/or I met them informally during breakfast and meetings. It is expected that participants felt more comfortable to share their stories in detail, but also to indicate when they did not want to talk about a topic. Furthermore, through a semi-structured interview format participants were given the space to share their stories in a way that made sense to them, and have some direction in the conversation. Last, having discussed possible sensitive topics, time was set aside to close the interview in a sensitive manner and 'fade out' from the interview through a more informal conversation. I expect that in most cases rapport building was successful to build a sufficient relationship and trust. Multiple participants expressed that they appreciated my interest in their lives and stories, that they were happy to talk about their experiences with someone from 'outside' the research topic, and/or that I could contact them with additional questions anytime.

4.6 Risks of the research methodology

In this methodology chapter I would like to discuss two potential risks of the research methodology, which may have influenced the validity of the research findings. Additional limitations of the research are presented in the concluding chapter of this research paper.

First, study results may have been affected by recall bias. Participants may not remember previous events or experiences accurately, have forgotten details, or have suppressed parts of their memories. Some participants were young when they fled Afghanistan, and stayed for years in countries 'in-between' before they came to the Netherlands. George and Jettner (2016) argue that "data about past experiences is always subject to the limitations of individuals' memory and the influence of disease/exposure on the recall process" (p.11). Research has shown that effective control of memory retrieval is often affected among heavily traumatized refugees, especially if they have post-traumatic stress disorder (Herlihy et al., 2002; Waldhauser et al., 2018). However, research suggests that memory recalling difficulties are often more related to specific memories and peripheral (irrelevant) details of specific events, and less with general memories and the gist or central details of events (Herlihy et al., 2002, Jobson & Turner, 2012; Williams et al., 2007). Considerable evidence suggests that emotion even

facilitates the memory of central details or the gist of events, while it inhibits memory of peripheral, irrelevant details (e.g. Herilihy, Jobson & Turner, 2012). Recall bias cannot be eliminated, and is therefore acknowledged as a limitation of this study. However, it is expected that memory recalling difficulties are more related to specific memories and peripheral details, than general daily experiences of (in)security and the gist of events. In order to reduce the risk of recall bias, participants were informed beforehand about the topics and stories discussed during the interviews, providing them time to prepare their stories. Furthermore, participants were given sufficient time during the interviews to recall their memories.

Another limitation relates to the difference in main language of the researcher and the study participants. Afghanistan is a multilingual country in which Pashto and Dari are the two official and most widely spoken languages. Due to restricted time and availability of resources, it was impossible to conduct the interviews in the native language of the interview participants through using a translator. Although all participants mastered the Dutch or English language sufficiently to conduct the interviews, it is possible that misunderstandings occurred, or valuable information has been missed because participants were not able to express certain stories or feelings in Dutch or English. Besides, distinct cultural backgrounds could have resulted in misunderstandings and may have influenced incorrect interpretations of the interview data. The questions in the interview guide, as well as the information sheet and the informed consent form, were aimed to be in simple, everyday language to improve understandability. During the interview I paid careful attention to language use and speed. Furthermore, participants were reminded that they could ask all questions if something was unclear. Confirming questions were used during the interviews to clarify any ambiguous or unclear responses.

5. Analysis – Afghan Forced Migrants' Migration 'Decision'

This chapter discusses the predominant conditions and insecurities that drove migrants' 'decision' to flee Afghanistan. Furthermore, I demonstrate the role of structure and agency in the decision when, how, and where to move.

5.1 Background: Insecurities in Afghanistan

Due the sensitivity of talking about severe hardships and insecurities in Afghanistan, as well as possible recall bias, most migrants could not provide (rich) information on their situation in Afghanistan before they fled. However, I want to highlight that migrants' lives in Afghanistan were variable. Multiple participants reported economic insecurities in Afghanistan. For example, participant 3 had to stop going to school and work in his father's sewing study. His family was poor. Participant 1 reported health insecurity because people often did not receive the healthcare they needed. He told that people who had enough money often went to Pakistan, Iran or India for their health needs. However, other participants mentioned that their lives were really good, (almost) without any insecurities. Participants 4 explained that his village was separated from the rest of the world. The city was self-sufficient and there were no economic insecurities. It was a very green village, with a lot of water, and a lot of nature. He pointed to his television where he was playing a nature movie *"it looks a little bit like this".* I asked him what his life looked like: *"everything was very nice. In the evening people just went to the square at houses to gather some, [do] some fun activities or play soccer, we were just in a very different world".* However, his life changed when daily shootings occurred in his village: *"And then it started to get restless. No one was in the square, everyone was hiding or the one who could defended. A lot of people have died".*

5.2 The decision *whether* to move

"What I want to say again is that refugee people do not want [to go], but because of bad situation [they have to move] away from [their] own country" (Participant 6). At the end of every interview, I asked participants whether they wanted to share something else which we had not discussed yet. Participant 6 explicitly asked to emphasize the previous quote in this thesis. He further explained:

> *"[in] some situations, not only in Afghanistan, also, for example, now in Ukraine, the people do not want [to flee], because of the bad situation they have to, they have to. Or they must stay, just fight with … politics or with other people, or just dead by bombs or something, or they must go. … Two choices so to speak: I am going to stay, and just die, or I am going to leave and go somewhere safe".*

The fourteen interviews conducted for this research display that participants perceive their flight from Afghanistan as an inevitability and a necessity to stay alive rather than a deliberate choice. Multiple

participants told about thinking about dying, and that the only thing the wanted was to be in a safe place. Table 4 provides four citations of stories that participants told when I asked them why they had fled Afghanistan. The pie chart in figure 2 shows participants' reason for fleeing Afghanistan. In total, six participants mentioned that their main reason for fleeing Afghanistan were problems with the Taliban. This includes participants that themselves had problems with the Taliban, for instance because they did not want to work for them, and participants that were threatened by the Taliban because family members of them had problems with them. Furthermore, two participants fled Afghanistan in 2019 and 2021, due to increased risk of persecution by the Taliban. In the pie chart they are divided into a different category. They were in danger because they worked for the Netherlands in the past, and the Taliban were tracking down people who worked with foreign forces. They were evacuated from Afghanistan by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two participants mentioned that violent conflict, including attacks, bombings and shootings endangered their lives and forced them to flee. One participants reported problems with people who wanted to kill him, but he could not define who these people were. Furthermore, one participant experienced risk of being persecuted because people in his village thought he had different religious beliefs. Four participants did not clearly state their reason for fleeing. They did not want to talk about their reason for fleeing due to sensitivity, or answered vaguely.

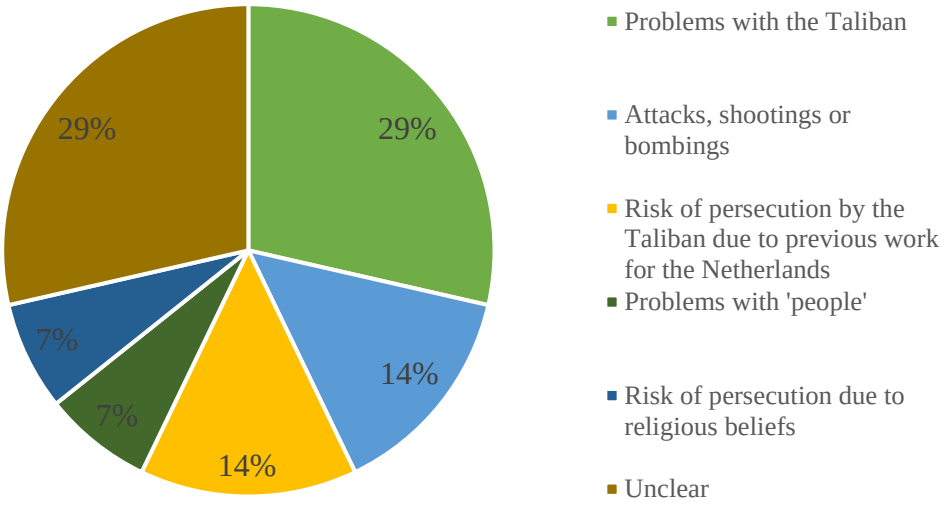
Table 4

Reason for fleeing Afghanistan

Participant	Reason for fleeing
2	"No my reason really is that I had problems with Taliban. They just want me to just work with them you know. … If you do not [work with them they] hit few times and kill you".
3	"the (the Mullah) became mad at me and he said you are not Muslim anymore, who are you and who is your father? That kind of questions and I was scared. [..] I run out of the mosque and did not take my shoes, I run home and I told the situation to my father. He said "you are not safe here anymore, they think you are not Muslim anymore, they want to kill you because then they go to heaven [..] so you have to go."
4	"My village, in 2010, becomes very restless. Every day there was attack from terrorist group. Just came people, police, just shoot everything."
12	"Because we were rich people, my brother was taken by Taliban, Taliban asked for a lot of money from our father, and my father was just ready to give to them, but they did kill my youngest brother. … My father told us to go as soon as possible."

Figure 2

Main reason for fleeing Afghan, categorized



5.3 The decision *when* to move

For some participants, the conditions that created their personal insecurity and unfreedom from fear developed more gradually, while for others the risk(s) to their lives emerged abruptly. Resulting, participants' stories display different degrees of agency in the decision when to move. Participant 3 explained that he asked a question during a prayer sermon to the Mullah, the prayer leader, after which people thought he was not Muslim anymore:

> *"he [the Mullah] became mad at me and he said you are not Muslim anymore, who are you and who is your father? That kind of questions and I was scared. … I ran out of the mosque and did not take my shoes, I ran home and I told the situation to my father. He said "you are not safe here anymore, they think you are not Muslim anymore, they want to kill you because then they go to heaven … so you have to go.""*

He was forced to immediately leave his house, because people who wanted to kill him were looking for him. The same day, his father sent him to a friend's house where it was safer for him. He slept there for one night, and fled to Iran the next day. He never saw his family again. In contrast, other decisions to move developed more gradually. Multiple people told that they first had to earn enough money to be able to flee. Participant 4 first moved from his small village to Kabul, due to shootings and unsafety in his village. He also wanted to flee the capital because he felt unsafe due to daily bombings, the risk of child theft, and a lot of discrimination, which made him feel unsafe mentally. He worked for a while in a hotel and later in a mosque, until he had enough money to flee to Europe via Iran and Turkey.

5.4 The decision *how* to move

Furthermore, participants' stories demonstrate that the resources that people have access to strongly influence the routes and channels that people are able to use. Participants who had access to, mostly financial or social, resources had more agency in the decision how to flee. It took participant 2 one year to move from Afghanistan to the Netherlands. He described:

> *"Then I went to Iran and Turkey, was really difficult path for me, I almost died a few times. … It was very difficult for me because then I did not have enough money to bring me easily [to Europe], a lot of walking and it was really difficult. Turkey, Greece and then Italy and then Belgium till here. That was very difficult".*

Having more resources expands the options that people have for their flight. For instance, participant 1 paid $12.000 US dollars to human smugglers to arrange a passport and flee to the Netherland by airplane. He explained that the amount of money he paid was actually not a lot, because other people paid $20.000 to $30.000 US dollars. He worked hard in Iran and got some money from the heritage of his parents' deaths. Besides, he had family in Europe, Canada and America that helped him pay for his flight. He flew to Germany and then he was brought to the Netherlands by taxi. There he found the police which brought him to Ter Apel. This shows that having access to financial and social resources increases a migrant's chance to move to Europe or the Netherlands more easily.

Furthermore, two participants that worked for the Netherlands in the past fled Afghanistan with the help of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They were evacuated by airplane and did not have to pay anything for the flight themselves. Their social capital (connections due to previous employment) made it possible to leave the country. Furthermore, their situation and having official documents influenced their asylum procedure. They did have to wait in an AZC. However, the did not experience the uncertainty about whether one would asylum or not, as they already were guaranteed asylum.

5.5 The decision *where* to move

Moreover, most participants expressed that their arrival in the Netherlands was more a coincidence than a choice. Participant 4 explained that before fleeing he did not know what or where the Netherlands was, and moving through different countries and ultimately arriving in the Netherlands were not thoughtful choices. He illustrated:

> *"if the top of a mountain explodes, rocks go all over the place, I am one of those rocks … If a rock drops from that mountain then it has no reason where it should be .. It rolls until it lands, then it stops .. that happened to me [and I arrived in Utrecht]"*

Participant 2 tells how he climbed into a truck full of trees in Greece, and eventually ended up in the Netherlands: *"I come in and then the truck started driving, [I] was stuck inside that truck, I thought*

maybe [I will be] dead. … Was a lot of hours. … That truck goes to the boat and that boat goes to Italy. And then that truck just got out and then you can get out when it stops".

Participant 12 reported that he was supposed to go to Canada. During his 'lay-over' on Schiphol airport his human smuggler left him alone, saying that he would come back with the boarding pass to Canada. His human smuggler did not come back, and he applied for asylum in the Netherlands.

In addition, most migrants did not always move directly to the Netherlands after leaving Afghanistan. Some participants reported that they have stayed for longer periods of time, sometimes even years, in countries 'in-between', including Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Greece before they moved to the Netherlands. Some participants even (partly) grew up in these countries, and do not remember much from their lives in Afghanistan. Some migrants first intended to stay in a country, but later felt compelled to 'move on' as a result of their realities in that country. For example, participant 2 first envisioned his future in Greece and stayed there for multiple months. Hence, the conditions in the refugee camp, in which he had to sleep on the ground, did not have a shower for a week, received rotten food, and people were fighting every night, pressured him to move further into Europe. Furthermore, migrants also travel to countries with the intention to travel further, but first need to mobilize the resources necessary for further migration. For example, participant 1, as described above, first stayed in Iran to collect the money needed to pay the human smugglers to bring him to the Netherlands by airplane. Thus, migration movements are not necessarily linear and unidirectional movements, but often consist of multiple journeys in various directions. Migrants' necessity is to leave Afghanistan and find a save place. However, their intended destination often develops and/or changes after they have fled the country.

However, sometimes migrants particularly want to move to the Netherlands. In this research, two participants (participant 1 and 8) intended to come to the Netherlands, due to family members that already lived here. Participant 1 fled from Iran to Afghanistan, after he had collected the necessary research. Participant fled to Turkey with his mother and sister, but lost them on the way. He moved to Greece alone and stayed there for eight years. He did not know where his family was, or whether they maybe died on their way from Turkey to Greece. After eight years, heard from the Red Cross that his family resided in the Netherlands. Hereafter, he moved to the Netherlands himself.

6. Analysis – Human Security Experiences and Challenges in the Netherlands

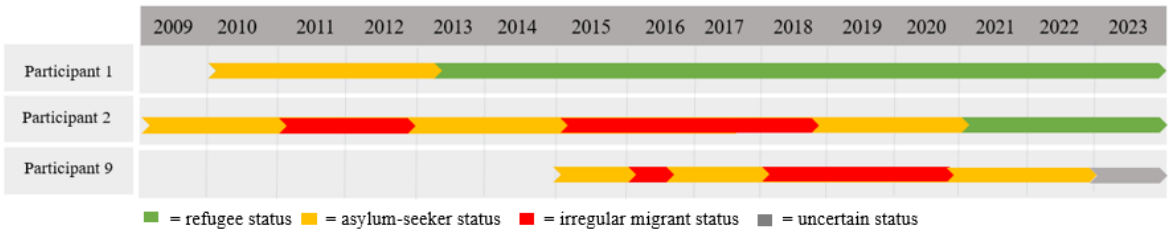
This chapter presents how Afghan forced migrants experience freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity in the Netherlands, and what are/have been challenges to sustain these freedoms. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate how migrants' legal statuses define the boundaries within which these freedoms can be achieved.

6.1 Migrants' legal statuses and changing human security

Forced migrants' legal statuses in the Netherlands define the rights and support they have access to. Migrants' legal status can rapidly change, and migrants often shift between different statuses over time, which can be important turning points for their human security. Figure 1 present three different experiences of the asylum application process. Participant 1 arrived in the Netherlands in 2010, claimed asylum once and was officially recognized as a refugee in 2013. Participant 2 arrived one year before participant 1, in 2009. However, he got officially recognized as a refugee only in 2021. During the twelve years in between he has made three asylum claims, from which two had been rejected. He has shifted back and forth between the status of asylum-seeker and irregular migrant, has lived in ten different AZCs, and eventually received refugee status in November 2021. Participant 9 arrived and claimed asylum in the Netherlands in 2015. He has lived as an irregular migrant for multiple years, after his two claims had been rejected. He applied for asylum for a third time and is currently waiting in AZC Hogeveen until his general procedure starts.

Figure 3

Three forced migrants´ different experiences of the asylum application process



The qualitative interviews conducted in this research support that migrants' legal status strongly influences their human security experiences, and challenges, as well as their daily state of mind. Participant 1´s story clearly demonstrates how someone´s status, human security, and feelings can change from day to day: "*Then after two weeks suddenly my lawyer called me: "you got your residence permit!". I was so happy, not normal. I was crying and I just did not know wat to do. My grandma and*

my uncle, everyone was happy." Besides the relief that he experienced because after three years he finally achieved his residence permit, he was also happy and excited to start working in the Netherlands:

> *"I immediately finished my education and then I just started working here at [COMPANY] and worked a while through my friend then at [COMPANY]. I was very exciting, my first job at a Dutch company, so to speak. … Just suddenly everything went well, everyone happy, everyone gave me so much energy, I thought 'oh look'".*

Work restriction can be perceived as a restriction on individuals' freedom from want. People *want* to work and build a future, but are not *allowed* to. Receiving a residence permit allowed participant 1 to work, and in this way improved his freedom from want. Besides, through working he felt empowered to improve their quality of life and enhance his welfare. After not being able to work for three years, he had so much energy and felt so empowered that he started to work at multiple jobs:

> *" That moment I also worked crazy hard, I started to work right away at [COMPANY]. I started there at 7 in the morning and I had to work there until 4 and then I went straight to [COMPANY]. At 5 I had to work there till half past twelve in the night. I worked like this for 6 months, yeah, I just had energy you know, you did not work for that long, was not allowed, and then suddenly I was allowed, then I just started working really hard."*

In contrast, receiving a negative decision on an asylum-claim often suddenly puts migrants in a challenging situation. As participant 3 explains:

> *"then suddenly I became illegal and then you get no money, … at the AZC you just get 50 or 60 euros per week and then you don't get that anymore when you become illegal and yeah then I was with all my luggage on the street and I just did not know what to do".*

These two stories illustrate that forced migrants' human security has a temporal dimension and can change from day to day. The experiences, challenges and insecurities set out in the following paragraphs are seldomly permanent, but emerge, disappear, evolve and decrease over time.

6.2 Waiting for asylum

Participants perceive waiting for the asylum decision as one of the biggest challenges they encounter(ed) in the Netherlands. The duration migrants had to 'wait' for their official refugee status ranged from a few months (participant 5 and 14) to twelve years (participant 2). Participants 7 and 9 have not (yet) received residence permit, after having been in the Netherlands for six and seven years, and have been irregular migrants multiple times during these years.

Some participants demonstrate that their expectations of living in the Netherlands were not in accordance with the realities they experience(d). Participant 6 explains that *"people think about their situation [in Afghanistan], they think there is bad situation and here [in Europe] is good situation, but*

they did not know here they also come in bad situation". He explains that migrants often have a lack of knowledge about the Dutch (and European) asylum system and procedures. It often comes as a surprise for people that the asylum procedure can take years, and that they can become irregular migrants without access to food and places to sleep. I asked participant 6 what he expected from moving to the Netherlands:

> *"[I expected that] immediately everything is good and perfect, but that is like a dream, it is not true. Mostly they say in Europe is just heaven, going to Europe. … If you go to Europe [you get a] safe place, salary, a beautiful house, a car, just that is heaven. … But it is not heaven, no.".*

This quote stresses that participant 6 (and probably other migrants) envisaged that in Europe all his freedoms would be met. However, although migrants' freedom from fear decreases because they fled from dangers such as violent conflict and risk of persecution in Afghanistan, the asylum system often presents them with new challenges and obstacles for migrants to live their lives free from want and indignity.

Living in an AZC seems not to be a source of major insecurity for most migrants I interviewed. As participant 6 explained, sometimes people in the AZCs go along with each other, and sometimes they do not. People come from many different countries, with cultural differences and different beliefs. When I asked him if people sometimes were fighting or had arguments, he was doubting. He felt safe at the AZC, but sometimes people got mad fast because of their past experiences. Participant 12 has been in three AZCs in Haarlem, Groningen and Hilversum. He felt safe and he tells me that life in the AZCs was interesting. He and his wife occasionally saw local and known people from Afghanistan, which was really interesting and special for him. He also told that because they were married, they always had their own rooms. When I asked him if staying at the AZCs was a good experience, he replied *"Yes, yes, yes, for sure".* Participant 3 describes that meeting other migrants from Afghanistan in the AZCs was a source of relief:

> *"Having contact with people was difficult, because how do you talk? Culture and language, some things were really difficult, so for me and also for other people who were at the AZCs we were looking for Afghan and Iranian people because then we can just talk to each other you know. … It was just our cheerfulness, happiness, we can see each other and we can talk to each other and just do our own things just do our own culture you know."*

This quote displays that (forcibly) leaving one's home country reduces migrants' community security, as they are not surrounded anymore by people from their own country and culture, reducing a sense of belonging and cultural identity. Living in AZCs provides migrants with the chance to meet other people with the same cultural background, as well as people who share experiences of fleeing from Afghanistan, and in such manner can be a source of security, instead of insecurity.

However, one (female) participant expressed insecurity resulting from living in the AZC. Participant 11 reported that there was a lot of noise, and she often could not sleep in the night until three in the morning: *"some people stay till two [at night] and play music, no one can say anything, … or they were having conversation or talking about using weed, like smoking, make something cozy, some [were] drunk. Then I got broken a lot".* Not being able to sleep and rest made her feel exhausted. She thought a lot about her experiences in Afghanistan, and the images she saw on television and Facebook, which emanated in psychological problems. Furthermore, she demonstrated that her physical needs were not met during the first two months she was staying in a big tent in Zaandam. She became sick for two months because her bed was next to the door, where a lot of wind came in.

Although most participants reported that the conditions in the AZC were not a source of insecurity, the fact that their lives were restricted to the AZC often was. People that had to wait for years for their residence permit, as well as people that are still waiting, experienced the restriction on work and education as a huge burden. Participant 2 explained: *"I just wanted to work. I do not come here to sit in a small room in AZC and wait every week, then just get 50 euros 60 euros. I do not come for that [the money]. I am here I just want to work. But they said you just cannot work".* Although after 6 months asylum-seekers are allowed to work for 24 weeks over a period of 52 weeks, none of the participants had paid employment during their time as an asylum-seeker. Some participants tried to find a job, but companies did not want to hire them due to their asylum-seeker status.

Participant 11 expressed that she does not understand why in the Netherlands people just have to wait, do nothing, and cannot work on their future, while she thinks in Germany people have more opportunities. For herself, not being able to do anything contributed to her mental problems. Migrants want to (re)build their livelihoods, build a sustainable future, but are not allowed to do so. Participant 3 points out that not being allowed to do anything is some kind of prison, and makes him feel hopeless. His story demonstrates that not being able to work on his future contributes to feelings of hopelessness, unworthiness, and lack of empowerment:

> *"You can't do anything. Just you see that your friends, people you know, they are building [their] future and you see and you do nothing at all you know, and that is also very annoying for you. For example you are with someone at school and you were together to learn Dutch language and after a few [years] you see that he is now, for example, highly educated and you are still illegally you know. It was very hopeless for me".*

Resulting from the restriction, people cannot work towards their dreams and build the future that they aspire for themselves. Participants 3 told me about his lost dreams: *"you have a lot of dreams in your head but you cannot do anything. Not studying, not working, you just have to see your whole life in your room. You have dreams you know in your head that you are going to, say, build a future and things like this, so that was really hard"*.

Furthermore, the asylum process itself also comes with feelings of stress, uncertainty and loss of control over one's life, which do not allow migrants to live their lives in dignity. A lot of asylum-seekers do not know whether they can stay or have to leave. Participant 9, who is waiting for his third procedure tells: *"I have a lot of stress, I do not know which answer will come for me, positive or negative?".* Receiving a negative decision on an asylum-claim can make individuals feel exhausted. Participant 2 lived over twelve years in the Netherlands before he received his residence permit in November 2021. When I asked him what was the reason it took so long he explained to me:

> *"It was a bit my problem and it was also the problem of the arranging in the Netherlands. The procedure of seeking asylum makes me tired. … Really it made me feel tired then. I had applied for asylum a few times then they just said no, no. I say you just play with me, I am not going anymore. More than 6 years I actually did not go. 6 years I was illegal and without a roof and without money."*

He felt like the people in the Netherlands that conducted the interviews with him and decided on his claim were 'playing' with him. This demonstrates feelings of powerlessness, since his life and future were in other people's hands, and he did not have any influence on the asylum decision. As he said, *"[they] asked me to do an interview four five times, I do the interview four five times. [..] They ask difficult questions and still they say no, I tell them difficult things and still they say no".* He felt like he had done everything during the interviews to influence the decision, but still his asylum claims were denied, creating feelings of powerlessness.

In addition, the duration of waiting influences how people perceive their life *after* they have received residence permit. Participant 2 received his residence permit after twelve years of waiting. He is happy he got his residence permit, but emphasizes that it is *"not the same as when I came here then they just had given it to me, residence permit, then I think I was really happy you know".* He feels like he has thrown away twelve years of his life away:

> *"Now I have to start for example in school from zero. Or a lot of things I have to arrange now to work, I really start from zero. …. After 13 years to look back, yes, those 13 years I have not done anything at all and I get a lot of problems".*

Participant 3 expressed that he felt he could not be successful anymore, after six years of his life just disappeared. In general, with some exceptions, the interviews conducted for this research reveal that people who have had to wait longer for their residence permit, often including times of irregularity, experience more stress, lack and empowerment and indignity after they have received their permit, then people who received their permit within a shorter time. In contrast to participant 2, participant 4 waited for his official refugee status for around one year. He feels very lucky and empowered to finish his studies and take care of his own life, and is confident about his future in which he hopes to start his own construction company.

Of course there are exceptions. For instance, participant 6 waited for seven years before he received his refugee states, which is longer than the average waiting period among the study sample, and became an irregular migrant multiple times. He still feels empowered to fulfill his dream of having his own clothing brand: *"When I received the residence permit I thought ok, I am going to study a bit more, fulfil my dream a little bit".* I asked him if, after not having a residence permit for seven years, how he perceived his future and whether he still felt powerful in his life. He answered: *"it is the process of life, sometimes it is a difficult time, sometime it is an easy time, and difficult [time] can also be a good experience, you can learn from it".* He now is satisfied with his life, has met his Afghan wife in the Netherlands, and now is very happy with his two kids of one and three years old. He illustrated: *"everything goes as a flower, if you care for it, it grows, if you don't care for it, it becomes bad".*

6.3 Living in irregularity

Irregularity required migrants to live their lives more carefully. The fear for apprehension and/or forced deportation to Afghanistan has been salient in participants' everyday lives as an irregular migrant. Participant 3 described living as an irregular migrants as living *"as a ruler"*. As he explained, as an irregular migrant he had to 'walk straight' and make sure he did not do anything wrong. He described his fear for being noticed by the police during the almost three years he had been an irregular migrant: "*[if] they see you, they ask for ID for sure and if you do not have an ID card they will arrest you and, yeah, you go to prison because you are illegal in the Netherlands. We were always careful on the street and what we do you know".* He was scared to go to prison, however, he described that being an illegal migrant is also some kind of prison, since he could not work or study, and rebuild his life (paragraph 5.2).

Moreover, participant 9 described that he had to be careful not only with his own actions, but also with actions of the people surrounding him, and he had to avoid places where he could get in trouble:

> *"If you're illegal it's really hard, you cannot go to the disco, you cannot be at a place [where] people play a little. You cannot be drunk, anyone can, but if I am illegal I am scared, extra. If I go there maybe two people argue or drink a lot of alcohol, police come, I was there, my ID, I do not have ID, then maybe [they] say yes that is a problem too".*

Participants expressed that they had to be 'invisible'. They had to choose the public spaces where they were present carefully. This shows that living in irregularity has a (further) isolating effect. Multiple participants reported that they could not live as 'normal people'. Not being able to live the lives they want, their irregularity contributes to lack of control over their lives (i.e. indignity).

Fear of being noticed by the police and apprehension can also bring about other insecurities, such as health insecurity. Although irregular migrants in the Netherlands have formal legal rights to

medically necessary health care, participant 7 addresses fear for the police as a central issue that prevents him from accessing health care services:

> *"[In 2017] my foot was broken with [playing] soccer. [..] A lot of pain, a lot, I say to my friend do not call an ambulance please, if you call, I am illegal, immediately the police comes, they will take me and bring me back to Afghanistan. After this my feet really really hurt, I cannot live with this pain".*

After the pain remained and his friend told him multiple times that he had to call an ambulance, he let the ambulance come. He said *"I was very sad, but luckily the rule here is not the same as in Iran, the police did not come, the ambulance came".* A similar story was shared by participant 2, who broke his leg, also during playing soccer. He had a lot of pain, not knowing it was broken, but he was too scared to go to the hospital: *"I just cannot go to the hospital, I just cannot, you know".* However, the police caught him and brought him to prison. After one day he said to the police *"my leg hurts, I cannot walk, I cannot sleep, give me paracetamol".* These stories demonstrate that some migrants take their health insecurity for granted, out of fear for the police and apprehension.

Similarly to asylum-seekers, participants reported that the restriction on work and education is a big challenge of being irregular, and can lead to feelings of indignity and lack of empowerment. However, asylum-seekers have a roof above their head, and receive weekly allowances to provide themselves with their basic needs. Participant 9 has been living in the Netherlands for seven years now and has become an irregular migrant twice. He explained about the first time he became illegal:

> *"a year and a half I was illegal, I have no money for food, I have no place to sleep, also I cannot work, [..] really difficult. I say what should I do, where should I sleep, where should I find food, I cannot stay hungry. I did not have 20 cents to buy a small bread at Lidl or Albert Heijn."*

Irregular migrants have to leave the AZC within 28 days after their negative decision. Because they have no access to the formal labour market, they often do not have the opportunity to earn money to sustain their livelihoods. Some participants mentioned that they did/do some small jobs to earn a little bit of money 'illegally'. For instance, participant 9 works as a tailor without official documents. However, this is not enough money to rent a place to sleep (which is also difficult without official documents). Sometimes, participants did not succeed to find a place to sleep. Participant 3 reported: *"after the second time I became illegal I had no place at all, three nights I slept under the bridge here in [neighbourhood]. Three nights in the winter".* All participants that have been irregular reported that they have slept on the streets for one or multiple nights. However, participant 3 expressed that he did not feel unsafe:

> *"first I just felt very sad, also some kind of unsafety that I do not have a roof [..] [but] security for me is that you just not die, that is what I learned from my past. The other situations I have*

accepted in my life. You know you are illegal but the only thing in my head was you are in a safe country".

It seems that difficulties with accessing food and finding a place to sleep are especially present at the beginning of migrants' irregularity. Multiple participants reported that their friends were some kind of safety net, and often provided them with a place to sleep. Participants 9 told how he slept at several friends' places:

"Then I call my friend, …he says ok come to me, it does not matter. I sleep with him for three months or four months and eat with him, but not work … Then another friend …, he says come here in Utrecht with me, I stayed here maybe I think six months, and then I went to another friend"

The findings indicate that irregular migrants adopt different strategies and move between different places to have their basic needs met. Participant 7 described: *"some days, some evenings, I live with friends, sometimes I just sleep outside .. also for ten days I stayed with Dutch people who helped me, from Huis van Vrede"*. Furthermore, they often went to different places for their food and shelter: *"[I went to] a small house close to central station, I just went there for one week, three or four evenings I went there just for food, I slept somewhere else"* (Participant 9

Migrants also mentioned emergency shelters as a way to overcome livelihood insecurities. These were places where they could sleep and receive food. Sometimes, migrants received weekly allowances to meet their basic needs. As participant 7 expresses *"emergency shelter helps me give money, a house for sleeping, after this, (life) is better".* However, circumstances were often not ideal. Participant 2 lived for one year in an emergency shelter, but every day he had to leave the shelter at daytime, even if it was snowing or raining. Instead of living their lives in dignity, and having a sustainable livelihood, irregular migrants' living standards are reduced to a minimum: survival.

Migrants security is often temporal, and their situation can suddenly change. Participant 9 tells about one evening he was suddenly not welcome anymore at the emergency shelter where he ate and slept anymore: *"the fifth time I go there, he gets my letter, he says one more time, [you are] not coming back. Then I am going to [the place] to sleep, everyone goes in, for me [he] says is not [allowed]".* He heard from other people that he was not allowed anymore because he was not a Christian. Now he had to find another place where he could sleep and eat:

"I could not sleep there. It was 8 or 8:30 in the evening, I called for my friend, I say I cannot sleep here what do I do? That other friend said I cannot do anything for you either, if you come to me maybe scream a little or talk a little loud, maybe the neighbors will complain to the police or something. Then [I knew] two Afghan boys in AZC Utrecht here, they live here, but he is waiting for home, he gets a residence permit. Then three months I sleep back with him here. In AZC, I sleep there for three months illegally"

Yet, living illegally in the AZC did not come without risk. He tells that he was always scared for security to come. If they would notice him he would have a big problem. Security came in the room twice, but luckily he could flee out of the room via a window.

6.4 Job insecurity

When migrants receive residence permit, they are allowed the work without any restrictions. Participants report that they work in the Netherlands as a cook (participant 1), tailor (participant 3 and 6), translator (participant 3), carpenter (participant 4 and 8), healthcare worker (participant 12) and translator (participant 13) and as freelancer (participant 14). The majority of the participants did not report difficulties with finding a job. However, they recognize that Dutch language skills were often fundamental to be hired, and they often follow(ed) Dutch language lessons next to their jobs or other education.

The two female participants in this study completed higher education in Afghanistan, but report that lack of Dutch language skills and academic and professional credentials that are not recognized in the Netherlands makes it difficult to resume their careers. Participant 5 studied and worked as a teacher in Afghanistan. Her dream is to become a teacher in the Netherlands as well. After she had worked as a waiter in the Netherlands for a few months, she had to quit her job due to pain in her arm. She is fearful that she will not find a job in her field of work: "*I find the language a bit difficult and also have to study for a long time, 5 years or so I heard. I find the whole situation a bit difficult. Someone as a foreigner cannot find a job in the Netherlands in a short time"*. Participant 11 had completed a medicine and dentistry education of seven years in Afghanistan and had her own dental clinic. However, to resume her career as a dentist in the Netherlands she has to study for six more years to complete education in the Netherlands. Even finding a job as a dentist assistant is difficult due to a gap in her working experience, and her lack of Dutch language skills. She has to pass language examinations, but she has failed multiple times because of the stress: *"during [Dutch] presentation, summary, I was restless. When I have peace, I can talk very well, I can speak Dutch [and] have a good conversation, but when I'm restless, my head does not work well".* Although it is improbable that refugees experience severe economic insecurities, due to the Dutch social security system and unemployment benefits, the participants do not have the ability to do the work they were trained for, and contribute to the new country's economy, which may create feelings of indignity. Furthermore, they may not be able to sustain the same lifestyles as they had in Afghanistan, because they receive a lower income.

6.5 Experiences of indignity

Besides uncertainties and feelings of indignity resulting from waiting for asylum, not being allowed to work or study, and build a future, some narratives present other sources of feelings of indignity. Some participants feel mistreated by the Dutch asylum system, particularly the IND. They mention feelings of disrespect, exclusion, and discrimination. Participant 10 described that he felt humiliated and disrespected by the IND because his interviewer did not believe his story. H

> *"I have been through a lot, as a kid, I never met my parents, so I had a really hard time and I came here and I have told my stories and you just get humiliated. … By IND, he is going to tell you directly that we do not believe you for your story. .. that time I was really annoyed by the IND. … No respect. It is my story in the end and you may not appreciate it but for me it is really big things … Of course I do not come here for nothing, I come here for paper and to live".*

Furthermore, five participants reported that they not feel treated equally with other groups of forced migrants, especially migrants coming from Ukraine following the Ukraine-Russia war. Participant 4 explains:

> "*… the world is never fair. Because I am also a refugee. For example in Ukraine there is also war but they are more respected than us. … What do I have less? My hair is black, is that the reason? My skin color is different, is that the reason? So this is what I think [the] world is not fair. .. Everyone says it is equality everyone is equal, but actually it is not like that".*

Participants expressed unfairness because Ukrainian refugees do not have to do interviews, they are allowed to work and go to school, while Afghan forced migrants have to wait for years. Participant 7 does not understand why refugees from Ukraine are allowed to do these things, while after six years he is still not allowed. He thinks this is because he is from Afghanistan: "*IND is not happy [that] Afghan people come here".*

Most participants expressed that they felt respected and helped by the Dutch people. Some mentioned instances where they were miscalled at the street with "*refugee, cancer refugee"*(Participant 4) or "*go back to your own country"* (Participant 1). However, they do not mention these as huge sources of insecurity or indignity. As participant 4 explained:

> *"You have good and bad people everywhere. A world without good and bad will break down very quickly. … In the Netherlands a lot of people are friendly and respectful and understand everything. But there are also people who just don't give a shit about everyone".*

Nonetheless, participant 11 voices feelings of humiliation because people have prejudices. She tells about two situations in a store, in which she felt that people thought she would steal something:

"I went to a store … I looked around to buy something, and the store had no cameras and they looked behind me. That for me really hurts, it made me really sad. I am not a thief. I understand because some people in AZC are, yes, but we are different, different countries, different cultures. … Not everyone is the same. One is a thief, or a liar, the other is very good person, very honest"

"And also when I was in the supermarket, a year ago, I was in the store and the backpack was with me, and at the cash register the lady said can I check your bag. I said yes you can check my bag, but madam, I do not think that's neat."

She felt judged because here skin, hair and eye colour, which hurt her feelings and affected her dignity. Also, she reported that she worked as an assistant at a dental clinic. She felt disrespected when she discovered she was treated differently by her colleagues, and had to clean all the rooms and to do all the dirty chores:

"I see difference. To me it doesn't matter [to do the dirty chores] … but if there's a little difference or [I] notice something … that they look down on you, then you don't feel well. I was also assistant there, the other girls were also assistant … everyone works with a dentist. Everyone has to clean that room at the end of the day, and prepare for the next day. Sometimes some people, not everyone, made it difficult for me. … I get really tired of it, for example they are finished and having a conversation when I get dressed to go home, and they call me 'grab that garbage bag', then I really think they look down".

When she came home from work, she often had to cry. The conditions at her work made her feel excluded and disrespected, and created feelings of indignity.

7. Discussion

7.1 Afghan forced migrants' migration 'decision'

The findings indicate that participants saw no other option than fleeing Afghanistan. Reasons to flee Afghanistan were varied, ranging from shootings in one's neighborhood, to risk of personal persecution by the Taliban. Although participants reported other insecurities in Afghanistan, such as economic insecurities due to unemployment or low wages, and health insecurity due to lack of access to healthcare, these did not contribute to the decision to flee. As such, the findings in this research do not comply with the idea of mixed migration motivations as supported by Williams (2015), Charron (2020), the Mixed Migration Platform (2017), and Van Hear, Brubaker and Bessa (2009), who all state that forced movements are often driven by a combination of persecution and violence, lack of livelihood opportunities, and other non-conflict related factors. Recall bias could be a possible confounding variable in these findings. I do not expect that participants just 'forgot' insecurities that contributed to their decision to move. However, the fear of life-threatening situations may have overshadowed other insecurities in their daily lives. Furthermore, the asylum procedure in the Netherlands may have altered migrants' memories. During the interviews with the IND, any indication of agency in their migration decision could undermine migrants' right to refugee status and lead to a negative decision. In order to convince the IND of their well-founded fear of persecution, other insecurities in Afghanistan, such as lack of employment opportunities, may have been suppressed.

Yet, the results show that, instead of passive victims, participants were active agents who, although within constrained opportunities (i.e. structure), developed their own plans and employed some agency in the decision when, where, and how to move (Turton, 2003). Only in extreme cases, dangers to migrants' personal security were so severe that they had to flee immediately. Some migrants first had to mobilize the necessary resources for flight. This is in line with Carling's (2002) aspiration-ability model which underlines that migration movements are a combined result of the aspiration to migrate and the ability to migrate. Without (financial) resources, participants would not have been able to flee. However, the findings substantiate that migrants do not just have two options: to flee or not to flee. Based on structural constraint (i.e. physical and political barriers) and their access to resources they decided on routes and channels of migration. Some migrants were from better-endowed households, or received financial resources from social contacts, and were able to flee directly to the Netherlands by airplane. In contrast, participants who had less resources were forced to use dangerous irregular routes over sea, hiding themselves in trucks, and/or walk long distances to reach the destination country. When running out of resources, some were forced to stay in a country along the route for a while, to mobilize the necessary financial resources for further travels, supporting the idea of forced immobility (Carling, 2002), and being forced to stop moving during journeys (Stock, 2016).

7.2 Freedom from fear, want and indignity in the Netherlands

Freedom from fear

Several studies report personal insecurities and threats to migrants' freedom from fear in refugee camps (e.g. Berti, 2015; Kirk & Taylor, 2007). They report instances of violence, abuse, and exploitation, especially among women and children. However, these studies focus on refugee camps in developing countries. Migrants' human security in (refugee camps in) developed destination countries have received less attention. Although not specifically using a human security approach, Hartmann (2017) reported occurrences of different forms of violence, especially sexual and gender-based violence, against women in German reception centres. These findings attest to personal insecurities and threats to freedom from fear. However, participants in this study did not report instances of violence in AZCs. An explanation for this is that asylum-seekers in AZCs in the Netherlands are better protected against physical violence and abuse, due to supervision and control. Though, studies did report that especially women are vulnerable to violence and abuse. This study only included two female participants. It is possible that a larger sample of women would have resulted in different findings.

Also outside AZCs participants did not experience any threats to their freedom from fear. Multiple participants reported that they slept on the street for some night when they became irregular. This increases their potential exposure to violence. However, none of the participants expressed any instances of (fear of) violence. Although sleeping on the streets is uncomfortable and a threat to people's livelihoods, participants in this study did not perceive it as a threat to their freedom from fear, especially when they compared it with their life-threatening experiences in Afghanistan. As participant 3 explained: "*security is that you do not die … yes, I am illegal, but the only thing that is in my head is that I am in a safe country".*

Freedom from want

Refugees' and asylum-seekers' freedom from want seems to be protected. Although asylum-seekers experience restrictions on work and cannot receive an income through legal employment, they receive financial assistance to meet their basic needs and sustain their livelihoods. Existing literature reports economic, health and food insecurities in asylum camps, due to lack of social services such as shelter, food, water, healthcare, and electricity (Legesse, 2017). This points to an endangering of migrants' freedom from want. In this research, the majority of the participants did not report any difficulties or insecurities in the AZC. Two participants even reported that their lives in the AZC were 'interesting' and 'pleasant', as they could meet other Afghan people who shared the experience of fleeing. However, one (female) participant reported that life in the AZC made her feel exhausted and that it endangered her physical health. Based on the small sample of this research no general conclusions can be made on migrants' freedom from want in AZCs.

Participants did faced significant livelihood pressures when they entered irregularity. When asylum-seekers receive a negative decision on their asylum claim, they have 28 days to leave the AZC. Besides, they lose the entitlement to financial assistance. Also, they fall outside the institutional safety nets available in the Netherlands. The findings indicate that, contrary to asylum-seekers, irregular migrants experienced food insecurity and often struggled to find places to sleep. Participants often depended on their networks of friends to sustain their livelihood. Tedeschi and Gadd (2022) describe social relationships as 'social safety nets', as they are crucial for the survival and livelihoods of irregular migrants. However, participants said that they frequently changed the places where they lived. Often, they slept at a friends' place for a few weeks or months, and then moved to another friend's place. Sometimes, they slept on the street for a few nights. The literature addresses multiple reasons for often changing friends' accommodation, including avoidance of being a burden to their friends (Gasana, 2012), fear of being spotted by the neighbors and being denounced to the police (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021), as well as friends' fear of being caught by the police. If participants could not sleep at friends' places, migrants often went to emergency shelters to cope with their homelessness. However, migrants often had to leave the shelter at daytime, which forced them back on the street, sometimes exposing them to harsh weather conditions.

Moreover, participants lives in irregularity were marked with a constant fear of the police. Tedeschi and Gadd (2020) describe that migrants often distrust the police in the destination country as a result of their survival instinct, which has been shaped by the untrustworthy police in their home country. Due to fear for the police, and for apprehension and deportation, participants expressed that they tried to remain invisible in everyday life. They carefully had to choose the public spaces where they could be present. Moreover, they often could not lead their lives how they wanted. One participant reported that he had to avoid events where people had fun and drank alcohol, because of the risk that people would get in an argument and the police would come. This shows that irregularity can further 'isolate' migrants from the general public, giving rise to feelings of exclusion and non-belonging, and thus indignity.

Freedom from indignity

Participants' stories displayed several circumstances or sources that gave rise to feelings of indignity. Waiting for asylum involved uncertainty, powerlessness and meaninglessness (which will have its focus in the next paragraph). According to Sennet (2003), societal respect as well as self-respect are crucial to preserve one's dignity. The findings show that uncertainty and being unable to work or acquire education, which are experiences shared by asylum-seekers and irregular migrants, often lead to a decline in feelings of worthiness. Furthermore, multiple participants reported they felt their their innate worth was not respected by others, especially the IND. They experienced disrespect, exclusion and discrimination, which are sources of indignity (Collste, 2014). Some perceived that Afghan migrants

were treated unequally compared to other migrant groups. They perceived that Ukrainian migrants, for example, immediately received a positive decision and were allowed to work and study, while they themselves had been waiting in the AZC for years. Most participants did not experience (severe) discrimination in their daily lives. Some participants reported having been shouted at sometimes, but recognize that 'there are bad people everywhere'. In general, participants think Dutch people are very kind and caring. However, one (female) participant reported that occurrences of prejudice and discrimination on the work floor hurt her feelings. It is possible that women experience more, or suffer more from, discrimination occurrences. Considering the small sample size of only two women, no conclusions can be made.

Most participants did not report difficulties with finding a job. However, their jobs often required little or no prior education or work history. Only four participants completed higher education in Afghanistan. The two female participants worked in Afghanistan as a teacher and dentist. In the Netherlands, they struggled to find jobs that matched their previous careers. The findings show that this is a source of sadness, stress and unworthiness (i.e. indignity). Although their experiences can be a sign of systematic discrimination in the Netherlands (Lamba, 2003), this conclusion cannot be based on this research. Difficulties with finding a job matched to participants shills can also result from a lack of language skills, or lack of knowledge due to gaps in their working experience. For example, participant 11, who worked as a dentist in Afghanistan, had been unemployed for seven years. Considering changing technologies and practices in her field of work (as well as differences between Afghanistan and the Netherlands), it is not unlikely that she requires additional schooling.

7.3 Waiting for asylum

'Waiting for asylum' has come up as a characteristic theme for forced migrants' experiences in the Netherlands. In this section I expand on the situation of waiting and the ways that the Dutch asylum system gives rise to uncertainties (which can be both temporal and spatial in nature). Furthermore, I argue that waiting and uncertainties can be perceived as deliberate government practices that violate forced migrants' human dignity.

The majority of the participants had to wait multiple years before they received their residence permit. Six participants experienced periods of irregularity, in which they were forced to move out of AZCs. Two participants were still in an asylum procedure at the moment of the interview. The experiences discussed in this section thus refer to experiences of the current asylum-seekers in this study, as well as past experiences of recognized refugees. In order to preserve consistency, I write this section in the past tense when referring to their shared experiences.

The results show that participants experienced feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness and meaninglessness as a result of waiting. According to Horst and Grabska (2015), conflict situations often

pose individuals with 'radical uncertainties', while "in exile uncertainty often takes on a much more protracted and slow form" (p.2). AZCs are (supposed to be) temporary spaces in which forced migrants wait and receive protection until a decision in their claim is made. However, migrants often experience what Horst and Grabska term as "protracted uncertainty"(p.1). They "experience living in a temporary situation for an unexpectedly long period" (p.39). Some participants had to wait for years before their application could even start, and hereafter had to wait a long time for the final decision. Such as, the experience of temporariness became to feel permanent, what Hughes (2022) terms as "permanent temporariness" (p.193). Participants struggled with the lack of temporal limits. They did not know whether they had to wait for one month, six months, or a year, they just had to "*wait, wait, wait, wait, and wait"* (Participant 6). Griffiths (2014) points out that migrants do not only experience uncertainty due to not having a timeframe for the decision-making process, they also have no clue what the final decision will be. This dual temporal uncertainty is especially displayed in the stories of the two asylum-seekers in this study. While they were longing for an end to the waiting, they were also fearful for a negative decision.

Furthermore, participants stories display feelings of powerlessness. They felt powerless because they could to nothing to influence the asylum-decision, which made them feel like they lost control over their lives. They only moment migrants regain some power, is during the interviews with the IND. Some participants expressed they did everything in their power to convince the interviewer of their life-threatening circumstances in Afghanistan. Yet, they received a negative decision. Feelings of losing control of one's life, powerlessness and being "played with" (participant 2) attest to feelings of indignity.

Furthermore, one of the main barriers faced by asylum-seekers, as well as irregular migrants, is the lack of access to education and employment. Multiple participants reported that they desire to study or work, but they could only "*sit in the AZC and do nothing"* (Participant 8). Turnbull (2018) writes how experiences of waiting contribute to feelings of boredom and monotony of life. Feelings of boredom and laziness are displayed in participants' stories. However, what they found most frustrating is that they could not do anything meaningful for their future, such as working or acquiring education. Also when looking back on their time in the AZCs, participants described that 'years of their age have gone away', 'time was wasted', and 'years disappeared'.

As a result, migrants' lives were characterized by a sense of being stuck. Hage (2009) describes the experience of being stuck in the present as 'stuckedness'. Participants experienced stuckedness both in space and time. They demonstrated that they felt stuck at the AZC and stuck in their 'small room'. Furthermore, the Dublin Regulation prevented them from seeking asylum in another European country, which made them feel stuck in the Netherlands. They simultaneously perceived the AZC as a place where they did not want to be, as well as a place that they did not want to leave. This is a result of their spatial uncertainties: where a positive decision allows migrants to access housing, a negative decision

can force migrants to sleep on the streets or at friends' houses, or voluntary return to Afghanistan. Also, a sense of temporal stuckedness was salient in their daily lives. They were stuck between past and possible (but unknown) futures. They had little opportunities to rebuild their lives and pursue meaningful activities. As a result, migrants "cannot move forward to a viable future" (Reneman & Stronks, 2021, p.316). Moreover, migrants perceived a disjuncture between the temporalities of themselves, and of those around them who had received a temporary residence permit and were allowed to work on their futures.

As Griffiths states "uncertainty and instability are key characteristics of the asylum and uncertainty detention systems" (p.2001). However, they should not be perceived as just 'a result of' the Dutch asylum and increased numbers of asylum applications since the 2015 crisis. According to Tazzioli (2018), 'temporal borders' have been significant in regaining control over migration movements, in order to regulate "practices of migration that could not be regulated through spatial containment" (p.2). It seems that waiting and uncertainty function as a deliberate governance strategy that aims to discourage mobility and/or settlement in the Netherlands (Horst & Grabska, 2015). Humans are used as a means by the Dutch authorities to become a less attractive option as a country for asylum. Hence, the disempowering practices of the asylum and detention system pose significant impediments for migrants to build lives of dignity in a secure context. In this way, the Dutch government neglects its task of finding durable solutions to refugees' problems, and, more importantly, purposedly violates forced migrants' human dignity for their own interests.

7.4 Concluding remarks

To conclude this discussion chapter, I would like to state that forced migrants' experiences are extremely varied. The objective of human security is to protect people from critical and pervasive threats that endanger their freedom from fear, want and indignity. Waiting for asylum, irregularity, and perceived discrimination, among others, have been identified as threats that endanger forced migrants' livelihoods and dignity. However, a focus on migrants' hardships and insecurities may have overshadowed more positive, or even successful stories. Some participants managed to stay positive, even during times of extreme uncertainty, sometimes because they took refuge in God. While some felt pessimistic after receiving their residence permit, others were cheerful to rebuild their lives and build towards their (new) dreams. Some were 'lucky' and received their residence permit within one year, without having to spend years waiting.

Furthermore, stories of the two participants that were evacuated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs point to a different forced migration reality. They were helped in their flight to Afghanistan, did not experience the feeling of temporal temporariness or dual temporal uncertainty, and both did not experience any difficulties with finding a job in the Netherlands. When reading through the

findings, it is therefore important to be aware that different migrants may face different experiences and challenges.

8. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the main research findings in relation to the research questions. Moreover, this chapter discusses the social and theoretical implications, and the limitations of the study. Subsequently, I pose recommendations for further research.

This research aims to answer the following research question:

"What implications do forced migration movements have on experiences of, and challenges to sustain human security of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands?"

First, this research analyses the predominant insecurities and conditions that drove Afghan migrants´ 'decision' to flee. Participants fled from situations severely endangering their personal security, such as persecution and shootings. Regarding the forced versus voluntary debate, participants reported that they neither did experience mixed motivations (e.g. Castles, 2006), nor did they experience any voluntariness in their migration decision. Participant 6 clearly illustrated the two options he had: "*I am going to stay, and just die, or I am going to leave and go somewhere safe".* However, a combination of structure and agency determined when participants could flee, which routes and channels they could use, and which destinations were reachable. Financial resources appear to be important 'capital' that structure migratory agency and the abilities to move. For instance, a high amount of financial resources enabled participants to use human smuggling services and flee by airplane, while individuals who had less financial resources were bound to use dangerous irregular routes. Sometimes they were on the move for years.

Second, this research explores migrants' freedom from fear, want, and indignity in the Netherlands, and how migrants' legal statuses affect these freedoms. Migrants' freedom from fear seems to be protected in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, migrants may experience different insecurities which can threaten their freedom from want and indignity. Seeking asylum involves temporal and spatial uncertainties and powerlessness, and participants often perceived their time in AZCs as wasted. Some participants reported discrimination or inequality because they perceived to be treated unequally to other migrant groups, especially compared to Ukrainians. As a result, participants experienced feelings of unworthiness and indignity, which sometimes remained even after they received refugee status. The findings show that irregular participants often struggled to find a place to sleep and to get (money for) food, especially at the beginning of their irregularity. This undermined their freedom from want. Friends seem to function as 'social safety nets' for the survival and livelihoods of irregular migrants. Periods of sleeping at friends' houses were often interchanged with sleeping in emergency shelters and, sometimes, sleeping on the streets. This underlines the insecure nature of irregular migrants' livelihoods.

Receiving refugee status diminishes most of migrants' uncertainties and insecurities. Refugees are allowed to go to school and work. Although most migrants reported to be cheerful to (re)build their lives, and even fulfil their dreams, some felt pessimistic and experienced feelings of indignity due to the long time they have spent waiting. They do not know where to start and struggle to find meaning in life. For most participants, finding employment is/was not experienced as a big challenge. However, two participants reported difficulties with finding jobs that match previous educational attainments and working experiences in Afghanistan. Last, discrimination on the work floor, as well as in everyday life, is found as a possible source of feelings of indignity.

As a concluding remark, I would like to note that human security experiences and challenges migrants are exposed to are variable, and dynamic across time and space. As shown, migrants' legal statuses set the boundaries within which migrants can meet their freedoms. However, also other personal and context-specific factors, such as their socio-economic status and the political environment in the Netherlands impact migrants' experiences of human security. Therefore, this research does not, and this has also not been the aim, portray any generalization about Afghan forced migrants' human security in the Netherlands. Instead, it sheds light on the variability of experiences and challenges that migrants may encounter (and in different levels).

8.1 Social and theoretical implications

This research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of Afghan forced migrants' human security in the Netherlands. It is oversimplistic to state that forced migrants, who fled out of fear of persecution, conflict, violence or human right violations, are completely secure in the Netherlands (and other destination countries). This research shows that migrants may experience severe insecurities that threaten their freedom from want and their freedom from indignity. Although this research focuses on the specific case of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands, it contributes to a more broad narrative concerning human security and displaced lives of the extensive group of forced migrants fleeing from places of conflict. This knowledge can be a first step towards lasting solutions to migrants' security, in order to protect their survival, livelihood, and dignity.

This study discusses the importance of incorporating time and temporalities in the study on forced migrants´ experiences. These concepts have long been overlooked in migration studies (Griffiths, 2014; Hughes, 2022). On the one hand, this study demonstrates the temporal dimension of human (in)securities. (In)securities are seldomly fixed, but rather change over time. On the other hand, time is paramount to understanding migrants' experiences, which are often characterized by waiting and hoping.

8.2 Research limitations

Several limitations of this research must be considered when interpreting the findings. In Chapter 3 I already substantiated two potential risks of the study methodology, which may have influenced the validity of the research findings. First, recall bias among the participants may have led to distorted or uncomplete stories. Second, misunderstandings may have occurred between me and the participants due to differences in main language, as well as misinterpretation of data due to distinct cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the study includes a relatively small sample of fourteen participants. The limited time available for this research, as well as difficulties with reaching participants resulted in a smaller sample than was aimed for. Additionally, I recruited participants using purposive sampling (through my personal network and Huis van Vrede) and snowball sampling, which are both non-probability sampling techniques. Therefore, no generalizations can be made for the whole study population of Afghan forced migrants in the Netherlands. This is especially important since six participants were recruited via Huis van Vrede, who all live in Utrecht and are likely to be in the same social networks. Also, some of them mentioned that they have converted from Islam to Christianity after they came in contact with Huis van Vrede. This may have influenced their daily experiences.

Another limitation of this research relates to the sensitivity of the research topic. Although only one participant became emotional during the interview, multiple participants expressed that they were unable to answer certain questions concerning their lives in Afghanistan due to sensitivity. Some did not want to talk about Afghanistan at all. As a result, from some participants I could not retrieve (rich) information about the conditions and insecurities that drove them to flee. Moreover, being unable to retrieve rich information about individuals' insecurities in Afghanistan required me to change the second sub-question in this research. The initial idea was to make a comparison between individuals' human security in Afghanistan and in the Netherlands, in order to analyze how migrants' human security can change in both positive and negative ways. Because I could not retrieve sufficient information to make a comparison between participants' human security, I had to shift the focus to solely migrants' human security in the Netherlands.

8.3 Recommendations for further research

This research raises a number of opportunities for further research. First, the study can be extended in comparative ways. Although this study includes participants with different demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the small sample makes it impossible to make general comparisons. Additional research on a larger scale may shed light on how migrants with different characteristics may experience different threats to their freedom from fear, want and indignity. I specifically recommend further research to include more female participants, who may have different experiences than men. During this study, it was difficult to reach female participants through my personal network, as well as

via Huis van Vrede. Explanations for this might be that Afghan women stay home more often, and/or have smaller social networks. However, these can also be factors influencing women's human security. Moreover, through additional research it can be analyzed whether other forced migrant groups in the Netherlands, such as Syrians, Eritreans and Ukrainians, have similar and/or distinct human security experiences.

Second, the limitation of recall bias can be overcome by adopting a longitudinal approach to forced migrants human security in the Netherlands. Through collecting annual data from the moment a migrant arrives in the Netherlands until years after, it is possible to better capture temporality and dynamism within forced migrants' experiences. However, this comes with additional ethical considerations, as it involves newly arrived migrants who are often extremely vulnerable. This is due to their fresh traumatic experiences of life-threatening situations in Afghanistan, as well as often dangerous journeys to the Netherlands

Third, this research studies the interplay between agency and structure in the decision whether, when, how and where to move. It focuses on the beginning of migration journeys. However, migration journeys are often not determined beforehand, but develop step-by-step, based on realities during the flight. Further research can shed light on how migration journeys change on the way, as a result of both structural forces and migratory agency.

Last, this research has highlighted the prevalence of unfreedom from indignity among forced migrants. The results indicate that often migrants perceive their time as 'meaningless' or 'wasted'. It is not within the scope of this research to change the Dutch asylum system, and we cannot help migrants with what is most important to them: receiving a residence permit. However, further research can explore how migrants can regain a sense of purpose, agency, and empowerment, even under difficult and constraining conditions. Information could be retrieved through additional interviews with forced migrants. However, it is also interesting to interview people who work with (Afghan) forced migrants in their daily lives, such as community workers. They can provide a different perspective on migrants' daily hardships and insecurities, and offer ideas how migrants' time can be spend more meaningfully.

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