

# Shaping Experienced Immobility

A Study on Undocumented Migrant People and Migration Discourses in Mexico and the Netherlands

Wies de Laat

Master Thesis

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Date: 29-08-2021  
Wordcount: 32204  
Status: final version

**Radboud Universiteit**



## **Abstract**

Due to the rise of globalization, in combination with technological and communication improvements, it is argued that the crossing of international borders is now easier than ever. However, strict visa requirements, immigration policies, and strict border controls have made it more difficult, if not impossible, for migrant people from certain nationalities to enter Europe or the USA by legal means. Therefore, many migrant people look for irregular ways to cross borders. When people cross borders without having the right documents, use false documents, or overstay after their visa has expired or their asylum application has been rejected, they become ‘undocumented’. As a consequence of being undocumented, migrant people are dependent on external factors, such as coyotes, smugglers, border controls, and sheltering organizations. Due to this dependence, the routes, means of transport, transit points, and destination areas are often negotiated along the way and periods of mobility are alternated with periods of immobility. Therefore, this research aims to get a better understanding of the ways in which sheltering organizations shape the immobility experienced by the migrant people who are helped by them. This research will focus on the Dutch and Mexican migration discourses in which sheltering organizations operate and how those discourses are performed by the people working for and volunteering with those organizations. In order to achieve this objective, this research is based on a data set that is collected by the use of qualitative methods from four sheltering organizations in Mexico and the Netherlands: Casa Tochan, Casa Sol, Guest Foundation and SNDVU.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the final product to fulfill the graduation requirements for the Master specialization “Globalization, Migration and Development”, from the Human Geography department teach at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. I could not have written this thesis without the contribution of certain people, to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

First of all, I would like to dedicate this thesis to all undocumented migrant persons who struggle with the consequences of being undocumented. In doing so, I dedicate this thesis especially to Rashid, Florent, and Lina, who were so open to share their stories with me and made a great contribution to this thesis. I wish them a happy and sustainable future in the Netherlands.

Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to all the employees and voluntary workers of SNDVU and Guest Foundation for making time to talk to me and for their openness during these conversations. I would especially like to thank Astrid Kroon for her guidance throughout the process and for putting me in contact with three residents of SNDVU.

Thirdly, I would like to express my gratitude to the supervisors of this thesis. To Joris Schapendonk, who has been of great help in the developing process of this thesis, and to Cesar E. Merlin Escorza, who has not only been my thesis supervisor, but also my internship supervisor. I would like to pay special thanks to him for his expertise, guidance throughout the supervision of this thesis, and fruitful cooperation during the research process.

Lastly, I want to thank Kenji Gushiken Morales for his tireless support during this research process, for reading my work multiple times and always being there to give me some advice.

Wies de Laat

Nijmegen, August 2021

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# 1. Introduction

*“If we [sheltering organisations for migrant people] didn’t exist, there wouldn’t be a place to offer these kinds of services” - Gabriela*

*Hernandez Chalte, director at Casa Tochan*

*(Power, 2020)*

With the words “these kinds of services,” Hernandez Chalte refers to the sheltering services, the meals, hygienic services, and the medical and juridical assistance that the many sheltering organizations in Mexico offer to the thousands of undocumented migrant people in Mexico that are in need of help. Although Hernandez Chalte’s quote refers to the situation of undocumented migrant people in Mexico, this quote is also applicable to the situation for undocumented migrant people in the Netherlands, where people, whose asylum application is rejected, lose all their rights on shelter and other forms of assistance and are put on the streets.

Due to the rise of globalization, combined with technological and communicational improvements, it is argued that the crossing of international borders is now easier than ever. For example, the establishment of the Schengen zone in Europe has created the possibility for European citizens to travel visa-free between member states of this zone. However, the crossing of international borders has not become easier for everyone. To control and decrease immigration and mobility, nation-states have implemented restrictive border controls and immigration policies. While for the population of some countries, the visa conditions have been dropped, for others, they have actually become stricter, and the cost of a visa has increased dramatically. The liberalized migration policies of dropping visa requirements and the free-mobility Schengen zone are thus only for ‘wanted’ migrant people: wealthy tourists and high-skilled and -educated people from wealthy, Western countries. Those people for whom the visa requirements have become stricter mostly come from developing countries and they are seen as a threat to the security and cultural integrity of destination societies and are therefore labelled as ‘unwanted’ (De Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020).

However, the restrictive border controls and visa requirements do not actually contribute to a decrease of international migration. In contrast, since there are less possibilities to reach destinations such as Europe and the United States of America (USA) in a legal way, migrant people might look for other, irregular ways to cross borders. Migrant people become ‘irregular’ or, rather, ‘undocumented’ when they enter a country without having the right

documents, when they use false documents, or when they overstay after their visa has expired or their asylum application has been rejected. As these migrant people do not have the right documents to be in a country, people try to avoid the police and Immigration Officials, and they try to be as invisible as possible. Therefore, they are forced to travel via dangerous routes and by using alternative means of transport, such as jumping on a freight train or making use of the services of coyotes or smugglers, since traveling by plane or bus increases the chances of being caught (Oberoi & Taylor-Nicholson, 2013).

As a consequence of being undocumented, migrant people are dependent on external factors such as coyotes and smugglers, but also on whether they get caught by Immigration Officials and if sheltering organizations have a bed available for them. This dependence makes undocumented migrant people vulnerable to violence, criminality, and exploitation, as many migrant people depend on the services from gang members, security officials, or citizens who offer them work, means of transportation, a bed or food without having the right intentions. Due to this dependence, the routes, means of transport, transit points, and destination areas are often negotiated along the way, and periods of movement are often alternated with periods of waiting (Schapendonk, 2018; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Sheltering organizations are there to protect these migrant people and give them a space to sleep and wait until they find the means to travel further or to work on a sustainable plan for the future. However, there are not enough sheltering organizations and people who work in these organizations to provide assistance to every undocumented migrant person in need. Therefore, more awareness on and knowledge about this situation is much needed, to which this research can contribute.

Within migration studies, the periods of waiting are often referred to as periods of immobility, through which migrant people cannot continue their trajectory. These periods of immobility can be experienced in many ways and can be affected by migrant people's stories and experiences, but also immigration policies, sheltering organizations, governmental, or non-governmental institutions that deal with immigration and border controls. All these elements can be understood as integral parts of migration discourse as a concept (Van Dijk, 2018). Sheltering organizations, which are an important element in the care system for undocumented migrant people, can be understood as performers of the migration discourse, and therefore play an important part in the facilitation and prevention of mobility.

## 1.1 Research objectives and research questions

This research aims to grasp a better understanding of the ways in which sheltering organizations shape the immobility experienced by the migrant people who are helped by them. Therefore, this research will focus on the Dutch and Mexican migration discourses in which sheltering organizations operate and how those discourses are performed by the people working and volunteering for those organizations. The data for this research is collected through qualitative, ethnographic research methods in two sheltering organizations in Mexico – *Casa Tochan* and *Casa Sol*<sup>1</sup> – and two sheltering organizations in the Netherlands – *Foundation for Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Aliens Utrecht*<sup>2</sup> (*SNDVU*) and *Guest Foundation*<sup>3</sup>. In order to accomplish the objectives of this research, the following research question was formulated:

*How do migration discourses, performed by people working in sheltering organizations, shape the immobility experienced by undocumented migrant people<sup>4</sup> that are assisted by them?*

The main question for this research was constructed among three overarching concepts that form the theoretical basis for this research: *migration discourse*, *performativity*, and *immobility*. In order to collect relevant data that specifically regards these concepts, each sub-question was formulated in relation to each of those concepts:

- 1. Which elements of the migration discourse can be analysed in the interactions between migrant people and workers of the organizations?*
- 2. In what way are migration discourses performed by people working in the shelters?*
- 3. In what way do migrant people that are assisted by the sheltering organizations, experience immobility?*

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<sup>1</sup> To protect the privacy of this sheltering organization, its staff and its residents, a pseudonym was used for this organization. Hence, Casa Sol is not the real name of the organization on which the data is based.

<sup>2</sup> Stichting Noodopvang Dakloze Vreemdelingen Utrecht

<sup>3</sup> Stichting Gast

<sup>4</sup> As sheltering organizations SNDVU and Guest Foundation only sheltered people whose asylum application was rejected and are therefore undocumented and the majority of people who stayed at Casa Sol and Casa Tochan were undocumented as well, this research focusses on undocumented migrant people. However, it is important to acknowledge that, in contrast to SNDVU and Guest Foundation not every person who stays at Casa Sol and Casa Tochan is undocumented, as those organizations also host many migrant people who are in the middle of an asylum procedure.

Along with these three core concepts, the concepts of *migration industry*, *migration regime*, and the *aspiration-capability model* appear to interrelate to the three core concepts of this research. Therefore, these concepts will be explored in the theoretical framework and applied to the findings from the fieldwork.

## **1.2 Societal and scientific relevance**

As I mentioned in the introduction, due to restrictive border controls and immigration policies, many migrant people cross borders and live in countries without holding the proper legal papers. Sheltering organizations do their best to help most of those people, but there are too many undocumented migrant people seeking help and too few people who work in those organizations (Employee Guest Foundation, personal communication, 10 February 2021). Besides that, the people that receive help from such sheltering organizations are only a small percentage of all undocumented migrant people. This leaves a big group of people left in the streets. Therefore, it is important to keep seeking knowledge and to spread stories about this situation in attempt to get attention and eventually improve the various elements of the migration discourse, such as immigration policies, and the methods and policies of institutions such as the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (COMAR), National Institute of Migration (INM), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND), and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V). This is needed in order to find a sustainable solution for undocumented migrant people, to be able to provide all of them with appropriate care, and to relieve some of the pressure from the shoulders of employees and volunteers working at the sheltering organizations. In addition to that, this research aims to pay attention to the multiple differences and similarities between the Dutch and Mexican migration discourses in relation to undocumented migrant people. By doing that, this research contributes to the attempt to raise awareness on the topic of undocumented migrant people and the similarities and differences between those two different contexts.

Within various scientific disciplines, the topics of ‘irregular and undocumented migration’ and ‘immobility’ have already been extensively researched by different scholars. Many of those studies have understood migration as a linear process that implies movement between two places, in which countries are often nominated as ‘host’ and ‘home’ countries, ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ countries or countries of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ (De Haas et al., 2020; Schapendonk, 2012; Van der Velde & Van Naerssen, 2011). These terms are

problematic, as they often give a one-sided view of migration and mobility. For example, the 'home-host' terminology gives the idea that the migrant people are 'guests' to a country and are expected to leave. However, for most migrant people this is not the case. The terms 'sending country' and 'receiving country' are problematic because they assume a certain passivity of the migrant people. These terms imply that the migrant person was 'sent' by their government. Thereby, such terminology reinforces a dichotomous world view that implies that the world is divided into receiving and sending countries. The terms 'origin' and 'destination' countries seem less problematic. However, it might differ per person for what is understood as country of origin. A person can understand the country where they are born as country of origin, but also, the country where they grew up or the country from where their ancestors originate. Besides that, the term 'destination' country is often not applicable, as the perceived destination might change along the way (De Haas et al., 2020). Therefore, this research goes beyond this terminology, as it understands countries as not only a receiving, sending, or transit country, but as a country that might receive and send people, or potentially be a transit country for some migrant people. In order to break through this terminology, I will refer to so-called sending, receiving, and transit countries as 'the country people came from', the 'country people arrive to,' and 'the country people travel through.'

Besides the discussion on the use of such terms, the field of migration study has been dominated lately by the discussion that pleads for an understanding of migration as a non-linear process. Within this line of thinking, the movement of migrant people is understood as a trajectory which is characterized by spatial dynamics, periods of mobility, and periods of immobility such as detours, transit points, spatial frictions at borders, border controls, waiting, and detention (Schapendonk, Van Liempt, Schwarz & Steel, 2018). This research follows this argumentation by relating sheltering organizations and migration discourses in Mexico and the Netherlands to each other. However, although the immobilities approach to migration gives a lot of insight in migration trajectories and how mobility and immobility both can be part of migration, most research on migration trajectories is focussed on the journey to settlement. Attempts to settle in a society, such as application for asylum and the process for starting new asylum procedures after being rejected, are not discussed often in detail. This research zooms in on such processes in Mexico and the Netherlands by understanding these stages of a process as part of the trajectory.

### 1.3 Structure

This thesis consists of nine chapters, of which the first chapter is this introductory chapter. After this chapter, I will start by discussing the methodological choices that were made during the research process. In Chapter 3, I will elaborate on the theoretical concepts that form the basis of this research, namely migration discourse, experienced immobility, and performativity. After that, in the fourth chapter, the research locations will be introduced. First, I will dive into the migration discourse of the Netherlands, paying special attention to sheltering organizations SNDVU and Guest Foundation that were important sources for this research. Then, I will elaborate on the migration discourse of Mexico, again paying special attention to sheltering organizations Casa Sol and Casa Tochan, who have been important sources of information for this research. In the fifth chapter, a profile is written on Rashid, Lina and Florent<sup>5</sup>, who are three residents of SNDVU, and have been a great source of information by giving me an insight in their lives as an undocumented migrant person in the Netherlands. After introducing the research locations and three of the participants, the findings of this research will be laid out and divided into three chapters. Based on the collected data, Chapter 6 gives an insight in the life of an undocumented migrant person in both the Netherlands and Mexico. As it discusses the daily life of undocumented migrant people at one of the four sheltering organizations that were subject to this research, this chapter gives an insight in the daily struggles that undocumented migrant and sheltering organizations run into. In addition to that, as the fieldwork period took place in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chapter 7 will discuss the effect of this pandemic and the related measures on the life of undocumented migrant people and the work of sheltering organizations. In Chapter 8, I pay attention to the performativity of migration discourses by sheltering organizations, and therefore describing the different kinds of relations and interactions between sheltering organizations, paid staff, voluntary workers, and undocumented migrant people who receive help from sheltering organizations. This thesis will end with a concluding chapter, giving concluding remarks on the research questions and recommendations for future research.

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<sup>5</sup> For privacy reasons, a pseudonym was assigned to the migrant people who participated in this study. Rashid, Florent and Lina are not the real names of the migrant people who participated.

## 2. Methods

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the methodological choices that were made for the data collection and the data analysis. I will start with a short overview of the used methods and the collected data. Then, I will discuss in depth the ethical considerations of this research and the challenges and difficulties that arose regarding to get access to respondents and informants and the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the data collection of this research.

### 2.1 Data collection

This research is based on qualitative methods used in ethnographic fieldwork. As it was stated in the proposal of this research, ideally, this ethnographic fieldwork would take place both in Mexico and the Netherlands. Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Radboud University Nijmegen did not allow students to travel outside of Europe for educational purposes during the fieldwork period. Therefore, all data was collected while I was stationed in the Netherlands.

For the data collection from Dutch sheltering organizations, I used a set of classic ethnographic tools. I have conducted ten semi-structured interviews, eight (participant) observations, and six content analyses. In Appendix 1, an overview of the moments of data collection from sheltering organizations in the Netherlands can be reviewed. For the data collection from Mexican sheltering organizations and their staff and volunteers, a *netnography* was planned (Kozinets, 2015).

*Netnography [...] uses social science methods to present a new approach to conducting ethical and thorough ethnographic research that combines archival and online communications work, participation and observation, with new forms of digital and network data collection, analysis and research representation.*

*(Kozinets, 2015, p. 1)*

However, during the fieldwork period, it was very difficult to access Mexican sheltering organizations. Despite the many attempts to get in contact with various sheltering organizations, only one of them replied and demanded some conditions that I could not meet,

such as being physically present within the organization. This required creative solutions in order to collect data on the Mexican context. I will further elaborate on these challenges in the reflective paragraph of this chapter. As a solution, I decided to base my data collection on a content analysis. This content analysis is conducted on nine sources. Besides that, I conducted two interviews with a voluntary worker from Casa Sol. I will elaborate further on this interview in the reflective section of this chapter. In Appendix 2, an overview of the moments of data collection from sheltering organizations in Mexico can be reviewed.

## **2.2 Data Analysis**

To analyse the collected data, I combined an Ethnographic Analysis with a Critical Discourse Analysis and a Relational Ethnography. In this section, I will shortly elaborate on these methods for data analysis.

### ***2.2.1 Ethnographic Analysis***

In the first place, the data will be analyzed using Ethnographic Analysis. This analysis is a research method to analyse qualitative data sets, consisting of observations, interviews, and documents. By doing ethnographic research, the researcher takes a cultural lens to the study of people's lives within their communities. The researcher seeks to gain an emic perspective of a specific culture, which means that the researcher studies a culture "from the inside" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p.159).

Within ethnographic research, there are multiple ways to analyze the collected data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). A commonly used method is coding. For this research, I chose to code the data by hand. In order to increase the validity of the coding, three phases of coding have been used: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. First, the data was scanned roughly to get a broad idea of the collected data. Then, the data was read more thoroughly to search for elements that can be related to the research questions. In order to find relevant elements for this research, an open coding was used and multiple domains were established. After the open coding, an axial coding was done in order to find relations between different categories. These categories were processed in a domain analysis. Lastly, a selective coding was done (Gobo, 2008). Based on this selective coding, core categories have

been selected: migration discourse, performativity, and immobility. These three core categories form the overarching concepts of this thesis.

### ***2.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis***

In addition to the Ethnographic Analysis, the data was analyzed by using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This method “provides theories and methods for the empirical study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains” (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p.60). Van Dijk (2001) argues that CDA is rather an approach than a method, which can be used to apply theory to practice in multiple ways. CDA is “a broad, multidisciplinary field of study of the humanities and social sciences” (Van Dijk, 2018). In his chapter “Discourse and Migration,” in the book *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*, Van Dijk (2018) proposes the concept of ‘migration discourse’. As this concept turns out to be one of the core concepts of this research, I will further discuss this concept in the theoretical chapter of this research. However, it is an important concept to mention since the analysis of the migration discourse is an important element of this research.

In order to study discourse, the first methodological step is to establish what genre of discourse will be analyzed. For this analysis, and since this research is based on two different contexts and two different units of observations, multiple genres of the migration discourse are established. For the Dutch context, three genres were established. The first genre consists of the stories of undocumented migrant people who receive assistance from sheltering organizations. The second is based on stories of people working at sheltering organizations. The last genre is the political discourse, existing of policy documents. For the Mexican discourse, two genres were established. Since most of the data on the Mexican context was collected through content analysis of public documents, the first genre of the Mexican migration discourse is the media discourse, existing of news articles, interviews, reports, and blog posts. The second genre consists of the stories of people working at sheltering organizations.

The next step is to differentiate contextual and textual subcategories of the discourse (Van Dijk, 2018). For this research, the unit of analysis has been the relation between people working in sheltering organizations and the migrant people residing in those shelters. To analyze this relation, the discourses were differentiated in social roles, social relations, and place. In this relation, the sheltering organizations are understood as the place. Within this

place, the voluntary and paid staff fulfil certain social roles in their social relations to undocumented migrant people, but also to other places, such as organizations and institutions.

### ***2.2.3 Relational Ethnography***

Besides the Ethnographic Analysis and CDA, the Relational Ethnography has been included in the analysis. The initial idea of this research was to make a comparative study between the Mexican and Dutch migration discourse. However, since the data collection on both research sites has been imbalanced due to a lack of access to respondents in Mexico, and because the genres of the Discourse Analysis are slightly different, it is unseemly and impossible to make a proper comparison between the two discourses. Therefore, I decided to make use of Relational Ethnography as an analytical tool, instead of the Comparative Analysis. Relational Ethnography follows the idea that researchers “cannot hope to understand the dynamics of the social world by comprehending delimited groups as individual cases with semi-autonomous histories and lifestyles” (Desmond, 2014, p.547). Therefore, by using the Relational Ethnography, I aim to analyze how “social actors exist in a state of mutual dependence and struggle” (Desmond, 2014, p.574). In order to do that, the data sets have been put next to each other, and although it is not possible to draw clear conclusions based on differences and similarities between the discourses, there are some tentative arguments that can be made, based on the data collection.

## **2.3 Ethics**

Along with doing ethnographic research, ethical implications come along. This research is built on a data collection from a very vulnerable group of people. Therefore, it is even more important to reflect on the ethical implications that the research has for its participants.

### ***2.3.1 Vulnerability***

*“[Vulnerability can be understood as] a person’s decreased capacity for autonomy or heightened susceptibility to physical or emotional harm (...) [and] can be associated with marginalised or stigmatised populations*

*whose social position, health status or dependence on other for their welfare impedes their capacity to act independently.”*

*(Wolf, 2020, p.7)*

Many forced migrant people experience one or multiple forms of such vulnerability in the country they left, on their trajectory or during their stay in the place they arrived to in the form of racism, discrimination, and exploitation (Wolf, 2020). This vulnerability became clear during the fieldwork conducted on both the Mexican and Dutch contexts. For example, because undocumented migrant people in the Netherlands are not allowed to work, they are very dependent on people in their network who can offer them unauthorized jobs. Due to this dependency, undocumented migrant people are very vulnerable to exploitation. They often have to work under bad circumstances and are often not paid in time or not paid at all. Another example of this vulnerability is the fear to end up in dangerous situations and get in touch with the police. Since undocumented migrant people cannot identify themselves with legal documents, every minor offense such as riding a bike without a light, bike through a red light or being a witness to an accident or crime, can result in arrest and, subsequently, detention.

The content analysis on undocumented migrant people in Mexico also gave some examples of the vulnerability of migrant people. Most migrant people get in contact with gang members, security officials or citizens who provide migrant people transport, or act as landlords and food vendors without having the right intentions (Wolf, 2020). Migrant people lose money as a result of corruption and exploitation and are often victims to violence and sexual abuse.

In both Mexico and the Netherlands, these experiences cause a large emotional baggage and psychological complaints that undocumented migrant people carry with them. Besides the examples given above, these psychological problems in itself make undocumented migrant people very vulnerable.

The various forms of vulnerability of the participants have had a significant influence on the ethical choices that were made during this research. However, these implications are not the same for all participants, as my participants – varying from employees and voluntary workers in sheltering organizations, and undocumented migrant people – experience different degrees of vulnerability. For example, as the undocumented migrant people that I interviewed are undocumented, and therefore take a certain risk by talking to me, I decided to use a pseudonym to refer to them. Besides that, it is important to keep in mind that sheltering

organizations and their staff form a significant element in the care system for undocumented migrant people, and are thus also vulnerable to external influences. For example, any documented information about those organizations can affect the organizations, but most of all the assistance that migrant people need from these organizations. Therefore, in coordination with the voluntary worker of one of the Mexican sheltering organizations, I choose to anonymize one of the concerned sheltering organizations.

### ***2.3.2 De-migrantization***

In relation to this vulnerability, it is of great importance to be aware of the effect that the use of certain terms can have on the wellbeing of undocumented migrant people. Over the past decades, the state migration apparatus has created a wide range of categorical differentiations, which have been taken over and explored by researchers (Dahinden, 2016). As a response to this categorical way of thinking, Dahinden (2016) introduced the concept of ‘de-migrantization’. By introducing this term, she suggests to look at broader structural and social processes around migration, such as the neoliberal economic dynamics that play a crucial role in the shaping of migration fluxes. Dahinden (2016) does not only pay attention to the way in which state apparatuses on migration affects individual migrant people, but also how by the de-migrantization of migration studies, we can go beyond such classifications and comprehend better structural conditions that legitimize these.

With her work, Dahinden (2016) inspired me to go beyond the categorical ways of thinking that are created by state migration apparatus and which have been adopted and explored by researchers within migration studies and other scientific disciplines that are engaged with migration. The use of terms such as ‘migrants’, ‘economic refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’ creates gendered, racialized and classed distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and by adopting this apparatus in a research design, the research might fall onto methodological nationalism(s) which understand ‘migrants’ as a threat to the national identity and, therefore, as unwanted. In the context of this specific research, the adaptation of this apparatus creates a distinction between me as a Dutch, white, female researcher and the undocumented migrant people who were analyzed for this research (Amelina, 2021). In addition to that, the use of such terms contributed to the exclusion of people with a migration background from the national imagined community (Dahinden, 2016)

Along with this topic of de-migrantization, Dahinden and Amelina (2021) stimulated me to pay attention to the question until what point a person that follows a migration trajectory is a migrant person and at what point the person in question stops being a migrant person. The term ‘migrant’ implies mobility. This raises the question whether a migrant person that experiences a period of immobility can be understood as a migrant person. The people that receive assistance from Guest Foundation, SNDVU, Casa Tochan and Casa Sol experience forms of immobility as part of their migration trajectory. However, their trajectory did not end yet. To specify that the people that I write about are still in the middle of a migration trajectory, I decided to refer to them as migrants. Since the use of the term ‘migrant’ contributes to exclusion of the person that is wearing the ‘coat’ of a migrant, I find it important to underline the fact that the migrant is a person with its own agency. Therefore, I will use the term ‘migrant person’. Yet, I am aware of the fact that I still use the term ‘migrant’ and, by using this term, contribute to the further distribution of the migration state apparatus.

Lastly, it is not only important to pay attention to the use of certain terms in the field of migration studies and other scientific disciplines. It is also essential to pay attention to the use of such terms in the practices of sheltering organizations and other organizations that care about migrant people. Therefore, during the fieldwork period and the analysis of the collected data, I paid attention to the performativity of categories within all elements of the migration discourse (Dahinden, Fischer & Menet, 2021).

## **2.4 Reflections**

During the research process, multiple challenges and difficulties have come up. The first difficulty I faced at the start of the research, was the challenge to find participants. As it was mentioned in the previous section on ethics, undocumented migrant people are a group of people who live under very vulnerable circumstances. Undocumented migrant people often try to hide from assailants and migration agents (Wolf, 2020), and try to avoid being in public spaces (Interview 9, 21-04-2021). Thereby, many organizations attempt to protect their residents or visitors and work as gatekeepers who decide who can be let in and who cannot (Wolf, 2020). For example, sheltering organizations in the Netherlands expressed how they preferred not to expose their residents or visitors to online programs such as ZOOM and how they preferred to keep personal contact with the people they assist. Therefore, it was difficult to get access to sheltering organizations and to find undocumented migrant people who wanted to talk to me.

However, this vulnerability is not the only reason why it was difficult to get access to sheltering organizations. Many sheltering organizations never replied to my e-mails and some who replied, apologized for not being able to participate since they were very busy with their own work and responsibilities. The organizations that I visited in the Netherlands expressed as well that there are too many requests for help from undocumented migrant peoples, while there is a limited capacity in the sheltering organizations and a limited number of staff members who mostly work voluntarily. As an example of this issue, between the moments of the contact with Guest Foundation, there was often a long period of time. This demonstrates that for many sheltering organizations which are run by volunteers, handling research requests is not their priority. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was no option to work as a volunteer in one of the sheltering organizations. However, this is something that I consider a prerequisite for research in the future. Since the participants gave me much of their time and information, and were open and vulnerable to my research, I strongly felt the need to give something back, which I think could have been done well in the form of voluntary work. Besides that, I believe that doing voluntary work within an organization can provide interesting insights that can be of added value to the research.

Because I was not able to get in touch with a sheltering organization in Mexico, it was not possible to apply the same research tools for data collection that I used in the Netherlands, to collect data in Mexico. The initial plan was to do a 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2015) on the Mexican context. This means that I would use classic research tools such as conducting interviews and doing participant observations via online platforms such as ZOOM or Skype, in combination with content analyses of media articles, blog posts, and social media pages (Kozinets, 2015). Due to the lack of access to participants, I could not conduct many interviews or do any participant observations as I planned and I had to focus the data collection on a content analysis. Although I managed to collect very useful data through this analysis, I was missing the feeling with the research field and some important questions that I had were still unanswered. Eventually, I got in contact with someone who worked voluntarily in Casa Sol, and was willing to talk with me. In the end, we did two interviews by the means of video calls.

In the proposal for this research, I suggested a fourth method for data collection: the Participatory Appraisal technique 'mapping'. Initially, I wanted the participants to make two maps. For the first map, I would ask them to draw the places and institutions that they would go to on a regular basis. This map would show me which places are important in the person's life and could possibly show where the limit to their mobility could be found. For the second

map, I would ask the participants to draw the social connections and interactions he or she has on a regular basis. Using this technique, I hoped to get a better understanding of the persons social network which might contribute to the experienced immobility of the person. Both maps would show the influence of different elements of the migration discourse on the daily life of the migrant people, since the social network of migrant people can be understood as a form of migration industry and certain institutions can be part of the migration regime.

Although it seemed an interesting research method at first, practice showed that the method was more complicated to implement than I expected, and the exercise did not work out the way I planned it. The reason for this, is two-fold. First, an important reason is the fact that the participants were not included in the designing of the research method, as is required for the method to succeed (Beazly & Ennew, 2006). Therefore, the participants did not understand the objective of this method and the outcome did not appear to be significant for them. It was not clear for the participants what I expected from them and therefore, they felt uncomfortable in executing the exercise. The first participant told me he would prefer to tell me which organizations and people he had contact with and to write it down. Second, since I did not speak the mother tongue of the participants (well) and I had no access to a translator, the interviews and mapping exercises were conducted in Dutch. As Dutch is not their native language, I experienced a certain language barrier during our interviews as they sometimes had problems to understand me or could not find the word they wanted to use.

Despite the mapping exercise did not work out as I expected, it gave me some interesting insights. The pieces of paper that I handed out for the mapping exercise, appeared to be useful for them to sometimes write something down in order to explain me what they wanted to say. Also, in the second interview, it was useful for the participant to sometimes write a French word – as French was his mother tongue – in Google Translate and translate it to Dutch, or the other way around. In addition to that, I realized that as a Dutch researcher, I tend to switch to English when someone is struggling to understand me or when someone cannot find a word in Dutch immediately. However, many undocumented migrant people do not speak English and therefore it can be frustrating for them if I start to speak in English.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

In this chapter, the interconnected concepts that frame the theoretical basis of this research are introduced: experienced immobility, migration discourse, and performativity. The migration discourses and the way in which the people that work and volunteer for those organizations perform them, have a big influence on migrant people's daily life and the steps they can make in their trajectory. Therefore, they play a big role in the extent to which migrant people experience different forms of immobility.

Along with these three core concepts, three other concepts, such as migration industry, migration regime, and the aspiration-capability model, are also explored in this chapter. Later on, these concepts will be connected to the findings from the fieldwork, but first these theoretical concepts must be explained.

This chapter starts with an elaboration on the theory within migration studies that understands migration processes as non-linear trajectories. Such theory is important since it contributes to the explanation of how experienced immobility, migration discourse, and performativity are interrelated to each other. In the second section, the concept of immobility in relation to mobility is discussed. After that, I go deeper into the concept of discourse and the genre of discourse theory, *migration discourse*. Along with this concept, the concepts of migration industry and migration regime are explained. Finally, this chapter pays attention to the concept of performativity.

#### **3.1 Migrant people's journeys as non-linear trajectories**

As it was mentioned in the introductory chapter, migration is often understood as a linear mobility process from location A to location B. However, migration is more complex than that. It is a long-term process that is shaped by a variety of external factors (De Haas, Castles and Miller, 2020). On the road, migrant people often face various obstacles and setbacks, or get opportunities that change the direction of their trajectory. For example, being stopped by Immigration Officials while crossing a border, being arrested and put into detention, waiting for asylum, or not having enough social or financial capital, can affect the migrant person's trajectory and result in a detour or period of immobility (Schapendonk et al., 2018; Van der Velde & Van Naerssen, 2011). Schapendonk and Steel (2014, p.268) state that "by carefully following migrants' trajectories, we observe that migration processes do not

follow the conventional order of uprooting-movement-regrounding.” Hence, migration trajectories are rarely fixed and, instead, are often negotiated along the way (Schapendonk, 2020).

Research on migration trajectories and immobility is often focused on the route to the perceived destination. The process of settlement is often not considered as part of such trajectories. This research considers, besides the process of leaving a place and the transit through other places, the process of settlement as an integral element of a migration trajectory. This understanding stems from the fact that settling is not always a conscious choice for people and sometimes occurs from periods of immobility or opportunities that migrant people can get. Thereby, settlement is not necessarily permanent, and the fact that people choose to settle does not mean that they will never leave again. For example, Van der Velde and Van Naerssen (2011) argue that the redefinition of plans not only occurs in transit areas, but new decision-making processes can occur in perceived destination areas as well. There have been various studies that followed migrant people that left a country after they received a residence permit (e.g., Bang Nielsen, 2004). Thereby, new decision-making processes can also occur while waiting in the perceived destination country for the decision on the asylum request or after the asylum requests are rejected. In fact, one can argue that a migration trajectory – or rather mobility trajectory – never ends.

### **3.2 Experienced immobility**

Migrant trajectories are thus characterized by periods of mobility, alternated with periods of immobility (Schapendonk, 2018; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). The concepts of mobility and immobility are often seen as each other’s opposites. However, both concepts are evolving and changing, and exist in different forms. Therefore, we cannot see mobility and immobility as a fixed dichotomy (Schewel, 2020). Schewel (2020, p.329) conceptualized immobility as a “spatial continuity in an individual’s center of gravity over a period of time.”

Within the concept of immobility, a distinction can be made between *experienced immobility* and *physical immobility* (Schapendonk, 2012). Physical immobility implies absolute immobility in terms of non-movement, while experienced immobility – which is the focus of this research – refers to feelings of stagnation (Schapendonk, 2020). People that live with experienced immobility still might be able to go to the supermarket, but are limited in their social connections or cannot travel further on their trajectory (Schapendonk, 2012).

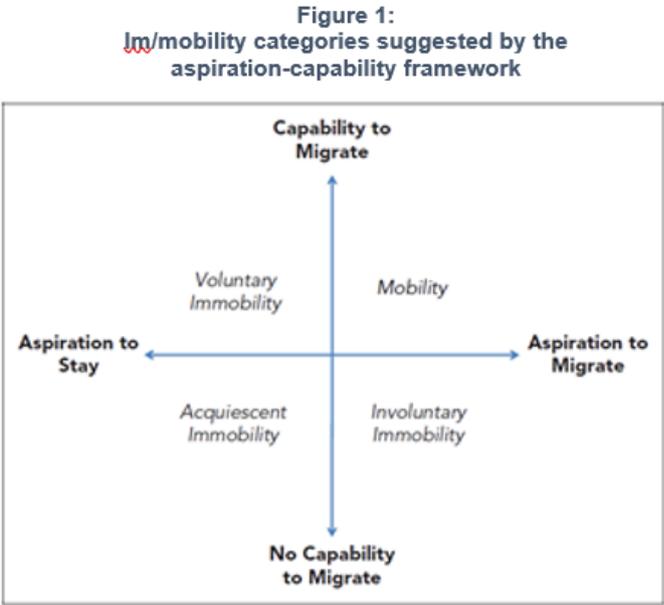
Hence, experienced immobility is never absolute, and is relative to space and time (Schewel, 2020). For example, Mexican migrant people that applied for asylum have to “sign” every two weeks at the immigration office (Hawkins, 2019). Thereby, for undocumented migrant people in general, it is a risk to leave the country because there is no guarantee that they can come back.

Schapendonk (2012) argues that by examining migrant people’s experienced immobility, roughly three groups can be separated: migrant people who are stranded, stuck or settled. The first group, stranded migrant people, are people who experience immobility due to factors that block their onwards movements. This form of immobility is common for migrant people that try to enter the USA via Mexico, but are blocked by the USA’s strict border controls (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013). The group of migrant people who are stuck, experience immobility in every migratory direction, including the direction to their country of origin. This form of immobility has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in countries closing their borders at the beginnings of 2020. Due to this happening, many migrant people who were travelling through Mexico to the USA could not enter the USA due to closed borders, but also could not return since Guatemala closed their borders as well. Migrant people were unable to move north or south and were stuck in Mexico (Arriola Vega & Coraza de los Santos, 2020). The third form of experienced immobility appears when people decide to settle (Schapendonk, 2012). Where the experiences of immobility due to being stranded or stuck are quite similar, the experienced immobility due to settlement is quite different. The main cause for this difference is the aspect of choice. For example, it is not the migrant person’s choice to be stranded or stuck, but people make the choice to settle. However, it is important to acknowledge that the role of force by external factors should not be ruled out in this situation of immobility. In multiple cases, settlement is a result of being stranded or stuck (Schapendonk, 2012).

Although, these three subcategories give a good insight in the different forms of experienced immobility, it does not pay much attention to forms of stagnation in terms of mental and physical health. When people arrive to a new society, they often do not speak the local language and do not know the cultural norms, values, and habits. Therefore, it is difficult to connect with other people and fit into the society (National Research Council, 1997). The lack of a social network in the society in which a person is residing, is thus an important cause for experienced immobility. However, the social consequences of immigrating into a new society are not only the result of a person’s own agency, but also reflects the responses of the local residents’ population (National Research Council, 1997). In many societies, immigrant

people are often considered a threat to the national security and cultural integrity of a nation-state. This results in multiple fears towards migrant people in the Global North. For example, many civilians accuse immigrant people from stealing their jobs. This is an economic fear, but there are also many political and cultural fears for migrant people. For example, governments, but also civilians are afraid that migrant people bring diversity which causes a fear for fundamental change of the social, cultural, and political ‘fabric’ of societies. Thereby, migration is often linked to security concerns such as terrorism. These fears often result in unwelcoming behavior from civilians in the receiving society, but are also part of social discourses that are designed to maintain power over immigrant people. For example, nationalism has been a common political response to processes of immigration, as nationalism can be a very strong, socially bonding force. However, nationalism also fuels divisive nativism and forms of superiority thinking, such as white supremacy, racism, and discrimination. These societal responses make it more difficult for migrant people to fit in, and properly function within and contribute to a society. This can lead to feelings of stagnation (De Haas et al., 2020).

**3.2.1 The aspiration-capability model**



*Source: Schewel, 2020*

As explained in the previous section, the element of choice thus plays an important role in experienced immobility. This element contributes to the understanding whether immobility is voluntary, acquiescent or involuntary (Schewel, 2020). The aspiration-capability model, which is an improved version of the aspiration-ability model by Carling (2002), explains the role of choice in experienced immobility. In Figure 1, the aspiration-capability model is

explained, and a division in different categories of mobility and immobility is made, based on the degree of aspiration and capability. Capability refers to “people’s capabilities to do and be what they have reason to value” (Sen, 1999 in Schewel, 2020, p.334). In terms of migration,

aspiration refers to the function of people's general life aspirations and perceived geographical opportunity structures (De Haas et al., 2020).

The combination of the capability to migrate and the aspiration to migrate leads to mobility. However, the fact that there is capability to move, does not mean that movement is happening. When there is no aspiration to move, but to stay, voluntary immobility is the result. On the contrary, when there is aspiration to migrate, but no capability to do so, involuntary immobility is the result. When there is aspiration to stay and no capability to migrate, acquiescent immobility is the consequence (Schewel, 2020). This model is often used to understand why people migrate or not. However, Schewel (2020) points out that it is important to not just apply this model on countries which are, from a Western point of view, less developed or developing. This reason for this argument is two-fold. The first reason is that most countries should not only be labelled as sending countries, nor as transit or receiving countries. Every country has people who are leaving and who are entering, whether permanently or temporarily, and every country can fulfill the role of a transit country for people travelling to another place (De Haas et al., 2020). The second reason is that, although the country may be a receiving country for a person when the person arrives, this country can always transform in a transit country or sending country when a person decides to leave again (Schapendonk, 2012).

### **3.3 Migration discourse**

The experiences of immobility are shaped by the migration discourse. According to Van Dijk (2018, p.230), migration discourse “not only may be *about* migration or its many aspects, but also be a *constituent* part of migration as a phenomenon.” On the one hand, it includes social aspects of migration, such as migrant people's stories, networks, and experiences. On the other hand, it also includes more institutional and political aspects of migration, such as migration policies, governmental immigration institutions, and NGOs (Van Dijk, 2018).

The migration discourse is part of a larger field of discourse theory and analysis (Van Dijk, 2018). In sociology, discourse is defined as “any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning” (Ruiz, 2009, p.2). A discourse is a network, existing of several signs and nodal points, connected by discursive chains that form a web (Jacobs, 2018). All signs in a discourse can be seen as moments, whose meaning is fixed through their differences from other moments. These meanings are fixed around certain nodal points, which are privileged signs around which the other signs are ordered (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Together, these

nodal points, also referred to as signifiers, and discursive chains define how this discourse is organized and which meanings it articulates. These signifiers can also be ‘floating’. Floating signifiers are signifiers that do not participate in the process of signification within a discourse (Jacobs, 2018). In other words, these signifiers could be open to different ascriptions of meaning (Merlín-Escorza, Davids & Schapendonk, 2020).

According to Van Dijk (2018), the migration discourse can be seen as a genre of discourse that focusses on practices related to migration. Practices that form the migration discourse can be roughly divided in two subcategories: the migration regime and the migration industry. The concept of migration regime is often used to capture the relation between mobility, regulation, and discourse (Rass & Wolff, 2018), and can be understood as any practice related to the regulation or control of mobility. Migration regimes are composed by laws, policies, governments, and institutions that decide who is welcome and who has to leave (De Haas et al., 2020). Such migration regime can be understood as ‘politics of im/mobility’ (Schapendonk, 2020) since the regime aims to “normalise the movement of some travellers, while criminalising and entrapping the ventures of others” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p.189). These regimes can be executed by producing spatial frictions, such as border controls, waiting, and detention (Schapendonk et al., 2018).

The concept of migration industry is broader than the concept of migration regime and can be defined as “the array of non-state actors who provide services that facilitate, constrain or assist international migration” (Nyberg Sørensen and Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2013, p.6-7). Within migration studies, these three domains of facilitation, constraint, and assisting are often seen as different subcategories of the migration industry. However, Schapendonk (2018) argues that these should be understood as interrelated aspects of the migration industry. Only focussing on one of these dimensions, would create a very fragmented image of the migration industry and a migrant’s trajectory. The migration industry is formed by meso-level structures that go beyond migrant networks. For example, sheltering organizations, humanitarian organizations as UNHCR are elements of the migration industry, as well as the coyotes, recruiters, smugglers and immigration lawyers are elements of the migration industry (De Haas et al., 2020).

Although a distinction between the migration regime and migration industry can be made, it is important not to see these concepts as opposite or non-related. Both concepts are interconnected since they shape the mobility patterns of migrant people. Thereby, migration regimes and industries feed and reinforce each other. Due to stricter migration control,

migration industries such as smugglers become more important since the main routes become more difficult, if not impossible, to pass (De Haas et al., 2020).

### **3.4 Performativity**

Just as a general discourse, the migration discourse is also performed by actors. For this research, attention was paid to sheltering organizations and the people working for and volunteering with those organizations as actors who perform the discourse. As the migration discourse plays a significant role in the experienced immobility of migrant people, so do the performativity's of this discourse by sheltering organizations.

The concept of performativity originates from gender studies and was introduced by Judith Butler (1988). She argues that gender is not a stable identity from which various acts proceed, but an identity that is constituted in time through “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1988, p.519). Gender is a “performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (Butler, 1988, p.520)

Over the years, the concept has been integrated in a wide range of academic disciplines. In relation to the migration discourse, performativity can be seen as a form of articulation of a discourse, because it reflects the constant struggle between different discourses and the fixation of their meanings (Merlín-Escorza et al., 2020). Performativity of the migration discourse within sheltering organizations can be analyzed by two floating signifiers of the migration discourse: humanitarian aid and mobility control. These signifiers can be understood as floating, because humanitarian aid can be performed both as care and control. Through people's performativity, specific meanings of care and control are constantly negotiated and articulated (Merlín-Escorza et al., 2020).

Besides humanitarian aid and mobility control, another form of performing migration discourse is in terms of language and categorizations of migrant people (Dahinden, Fischer & Menet, 2021). As was mentioned in the chapter on the chosen methods, the adoption of the state migration apparatus by scholars and sheltering organizations, is problematic, because such terms create gendered, racialized, and classed distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. These distinctions can have hierarchizing effects on an individual's life opportunities (Dahinden, 2016).

## **4. Introducing the research locations**

In this chapter, the research locations for this thesis will be introduced. The first research location is the Netherlands. I will start by elaborating on the general migration discourse in the Netherlands. Then, I will introduce the sheltering organizations SNDVU and Guest Foundation, where I conducted my research. The second research location is Mexico. First, I will pay attention the general migration discourse in Mexico. Subsequently, I will introduce the two sheltering organizations that were subject to the content analysis, Casa Tochan and Casa Sol. Lastly, I will get deeper into the networks of organizations, institutions, and agencies that the sheltering organizations are part of and on which they rely in order to provide the migrant people with the assistance that they need.

### **4.1 The Netherlands**

Within migration studies, the Netherlands – and Western Europe in general – is often understood as a net immigration country. This means that more people enter the country than that people leave the country (De Haas et al., 2020). In 2019, almost twice as many people entered the Netherlands than that people left the country (CBS Statline, 2019). The understanding of the Netherlands as a net immigration country is partly due to the Netherlands' history of recruiting cheap labour from Morocco and Turkey and to the family reunification of the families of these so-called 'guestworkers'. Thereby, the Netherlands receives a large number of people seeking refuge every year. For example, in 2020, 13.673 people applied for asylum in the Netherlands for the first time (VluchtelingenWerk, 2021). However, there are also many people who leave the Netherlands to start a life elsewhere (CBS Statline, 2019). Additionally, the fact that many migrant people enter the Netherlands does not imply that this is their final destination. For many, as was explained in the theoretical framework (Chapter 3) of this thesis, the Netherlands is also a transit point to travel to other European countries (Schapendonk, 2020).

As a member state of the European Union (EU), the Dutch migration regime is closely related to the EU migration regime (De Haas et al., 2020). This regime regulates mobility and migration, and controls who can or cannot enter into the EU. Two characteristic elements of the EU migration regime are the visa policies and the free-mobility Schengen zone for nationals of EU member states (De Haas et al., 2020). In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht

determined a list of the so-called ‘third world countries’ whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders of the EU member states. After this Treaty, a standard model visa was established (Jileva, 2002). Five years later, with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, issues concerning visas, asylum, immigration, and other policies related to free movement of persons were brought under the first pillar of the EU (De Haas et al., 2020; Jileva, 2002).

As this research focusses on undocumented migrant people, the asylum procedure is a third and important element of the Dutch migration regime. One can apply for asylum in the Netherlands when the person in question had to flee because they are at risk of violence based on race, religion, nationality, political preference, because they are part of a specific social group, because they risk the death penalty, execution, or torture, or when there is an armed conflict in the country they came from (IND, 2021). To apply for asylum, they must first get registered in Ter Apel, a small village in the North of the Netherlands. In Ter Apel, the person’s identity is determined, personal details are noted, and Immigration Officers scan the persons luggage and clothes. The Immigration Officers take the persons fingerprints and they might ask questions about the persons trajectory and previous applications for asylum. Besides that, an identification document type ‘W’, for foreigners who seek asylum, will be requested and each person will have a medical intake. After the registration, the person has the right on shelter, a meal, and medical care in a central shelter from the government. The person needs a medical examination for tuberculosis and must visit the IND for a so-called ‘registration hearing’. This is an interview in which the IND asks the person questions about their identity, country of origin, family members, previous education or work, et cetera. After that, one will be registered and receives a citizen’s service number. Following the registration hearing, the person will be sheltered in another government shelter, close to the IND office where they receive time to rest and prepare for the asylum procedure. For this preparation, the person receives assistance from the Refugee Council<sup>6</sup> (VWN). Then, the eight days of the asylum procedure start, consisting of many hearings, conversations with lawyers, and interviews with the IND. On the fifth day of the asylum procedure, the IND makes a decision. If the decision is negative, a lawyer can appeal to which the IND reviews the case and comes with a second decision. When the second decision is negative as well, one can decide to start a new asylum procedure (HASA), to return to the country of origin in cooperation with Return and Departure Service (DT&V) (IND, 2021). However, once the asylum procedure has come

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<sup>6</sup> VluchtelingenWerk Nederland

to an end, one loses the right to stay in a government shelter. As a result, many undocumented migrant people who are not able to return to their country of origin, but whose asylum application has been rejected, wander in the streets. In order to give those people a place to sleep, a meal, hygienic services, and in some cases also medical and juridical assistance, sheltering organizations such as SNDVU and Guest Foundation are established.

#### ***4.1.1 Foundation for Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Aliens Utrecht (SNDVU)***

The first sheltering organization that I visited during the fieldwork period, was SDNVU. This sheltering organization is located in Utrecht, a city in the centre of the Netherlands, and is a so-called *bed-bad-brood* sheltering organization for migrant people whose asylum application has been rejected and therefore are undocumented (SNDVU, 2021). A bed-bad-brood sheltering organization can be literally translated from Dutch to English as a bed-bath-bread sheltering organization and offers basic services such as a place to sleep, hygienic facilities, and food (VNG, 2015). On their website, SNDVU (2021) states the following:

*“Returning to the country of origin is complex and not always possible for various reasons, which is why many rejected asylum seekers end up on the street. They are literally empty-handed and cannot and are not allowed to do anything. We find it unacceptable to let this vulnerable group of people roam the streets. That is why we shelter these people and work on a sustainable solution for this problem.”*

With this goal in the back of their head, the board, staff members, and voluntary workers of SNDVU provide assistance to approximately 100 residents, whose age range oscillates between 18 and 75 years old. These residents are spread over 21 houses in different neighbourhoods in Utrecht. This means that in every house, four to five people live together. Some of them have an individual bedroom, while others share their room with another resident. Besides their bedroom, residents share a toilet, bathroom, living room, and kitchen.

On average, residents spend between one and a half and two years in the sheltering organization. Some people leave very fast, while others stay a very long time. For example, one of the residents of SNDVU whom I spoke with, told me that she has been living for almost 10 years within the organization. Although migrant people can stay in the sheltering

organization for a long period of time, the sheltering practices are temporal and sheltering is not the objective of the organization. Their objective is to help undocumented migrant people to become “self-reliant” (Interview 1, 24-03-2021) and “work on a sustainable future” (Interview 2, 24-03-2021)

In order to achieve this objective, SNDVU offers various forms of assistance. Besides the basic forms of assistance which are characteristic for bed-bad-brood organizations, they offer forms of assistance which can be grouped into three main areas. The first area is living guidance. Although the residents live independently with roommates and the living guidance is minimal, the sheltering organization offers guidance to ensure that residents are living well together and under good circumstances. This means that if residents disagree on something or if there has been an argument, the staff steps in to talk about the problem and to find a solution. Besides that, the staff furnishes the houses and ensures that if something in the house is broken, someone comes over to repair or replace it.

The second area of assistance is activation. The employees that work within this area, help the residents to find a daily rhythm. When I asked one of the staff members who works in this area what activation means, she answered with the following:

*“It means that you look with people who live here with us whether there is a way, despite the limited opportunities because they are undocumented, and now also corona, that people still have some kind of daytime activity or a reason to get out of bed. So, actually I look at what people want to do during the day.”*

*(Interview 2, 24-03-2021)*

Creating a daily routine for undocumented migrant people and actively searching for daytime activities for them is thus an important part of the activation of residents. This consists of looking for other organizations or people who organize activities for undocumented migrant people, figuring out what residents would like to do and how often, making appointments for them, and sometimes the staff even goes with a person to an appointment or activity (Interview 2, 24-03-2021).

*“Some people you really have to invite a couple of times because you think, oh, he sits at home all day, I think he should go out. But there are*

*also people who do all sorts of things themselves and who also go to [...] Villa Peace and, um, have a network and talk to people who might be able to work somewhere black. So that varies a lot.”*

*(Interview 2, 24-03-2021)*

The third area in which SNDVU assists their residents is social-juridical assistance. This area consists of four social-juridical employees and one voluntary worker. Each of them has their own case load of 20 to 25 cases at the same time. When an undocumented migrant person arrives at SNDVU, they get assigned to a social-juridical contact person which can assist the person in a wide variety of issues. They can offer juridical assistance in terms of looking into the person's perspective on a new asylum application, return migration, or another solution, and helping them to make a plan and prepare for that. Thereby, they provide social assistance by mediating towards churches or general practitioners, hospitals, dentists, and pharmacists. They help migrant people to subscribe to a general practitioner, help them to arrange medical appointments, and speak with churches about the religious process of converts. One of the staff members of this department described her function as a “kind of spider in a web for the facilities around undocumented migrant people” (Interview 7, 19-04-2021).

Besides the people working in those three main areas of assistance, SNDVU also has a board that consists of six members, one general coordinator who also still works some hours as a social juridical employee and one administrative worker. Since the board is not actively present at the office of the organization, this research does not take the function of the board into account. However, the general coordinator and administrative worker are present at the office and form important pillars of the organization.

Besides her work as a social-juridical staff member, the general coordinator is responsible for human resources, the intake with new residents, and the contact with other organizations and governmental institutions. For example, the general coordinator is on a regular basis in contact with the municipality of Utrecht, as well as with governmental institutions such as the IND and DT&V to speak about how to work on a sustainable solution for undocumented migrant people. Parts of this contact is in terms of the LVV.

**Box 1: National Aliens Facilities (LVV)<sup>7</sup>**

The LVV is a pilot from the national government, in cooperation with sheltering organizations in five municipalities – Utrecht, Groningen, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Eindhoven – the International Network of Local Initiatives with Asylum Seekers (INLIA Foundation), the VWN, the DT&V, the IND, and the Department of Alien Identification and Human Trafficking (AVIM).

The LVV pilot is established for undocumented migrant people who lost their right on government shelter after their asylum procedure has been rejected. Because these foreign nationals do not return to the country they came from (yet) for various reasons and are no longer eligible for state reception, this specific group often ends up in non-statutory facilities. Therefore, the LVVs (sheltering organizations for this specific group of undocumented migrant people) were created to ensure that these people do not have to roam the streets.

However, receiving shelter from a LVV is not without some conditions. The undocumented migrant people must cooperate in their search for a sustainable solution to their situation, also if that means that they have to return to their country of origin.

*Source: Rijksoverheid, 2018*

The administrative worker is responsible for the accounting of SNDVU and therefore is responsible for arranging the salaries, making budgets for specific juridical or medical cases, and distributing the living allowance of the residents. Every resident receives an allowance of 55 euro a week to live from on a so-called ‘money card’. Additionally, every resident can apply twice a year for a loan of a maximum of 50 euro at a time. These loans are also the responsibility of the administrative worker.

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<sup>7</sup> Landelijke Vreemdelingenvoorzieningen (LVV)

#### **4.1.2 Guest Foundation**

Guest Foundation is the second sheltering organization in the Netherlands where I collected data during the fieldwork period. The sheltering organization is located in the city centre of Nijmegen, a city located 13 kilometres from the border with Germany. Like SNDVU, Guest Foundation is a bed-bad-brood sheltering organization that offers assistance to migrant people whose asylum procedure has been rejected, but are unable to return for various reasons. On their website, Guest Foundation (2021) expresses that those migrant people often still have a chance on a residence permit. However, until that happens, the Dutch governments does not assist those people and therefore, they are left to roam in the streets.

*“Our aim is to guide these refugees, as far as they have a connection with Nijmegen, in dealing with problems and making a plan for the future. Guest Foundation offers them shelter, living expenses and the opportunity to further develop themselves so that there is a prospect of an economically independent future.”*

*(Stichting Gast, 2021)*

In contrast to SNDVU, where most staff members are paid, Guest Foundation relies mainly on voluntary workers. The staff consists of four board members, one general coordinator, three voluntary workers who work at the office, eight mentors, two people who work at the kitchen garden, two people who work at the bike repair centre, one person who focusses on housing, one trustee, and one person who focuses on ICT problems. From all these staff members, only the general coordinator is paid.

The people who receive assistance from Guest Foundation can be divided into two groups. The first group are the ‘guests’ of Guest Foundation. These guests are similar to what SNDVU refers to as residents and must meet one of two conditions. The first condition is that guests need to have a perspective on the future, whether that is a new asylum procedure, returning to the country they came from or resuming their trajectory by migrating to another country. If a person does not have a perspective on the future, they can still qualify for a room within the organization when they are vulnerable due to being a minor, being of age, having serious physical or mental health issues, or by having a gender identity or sexuality that differs from the norm. This can be understood as the second condition. Besides that, a guests must have a connection to the region of Nijmegen.

If someone becomes a guest at Guest Foundation, they are given a room in one of the four houses that the organization rents in Nijmegen and they are financially assisted with a living allowance of 45 euro a week, full compensation of necessary public transport costs, and assistance in paying study costs. Additionally to that, the sheltering organization helps undocumented migrant people to generate an income by helping people to create a network and to find places to do irregular jobs. This can be by allowing them to do small jobs in the organization's bike repair centre or in their garden for ten euros at a time, or by letting people cook in the so-called "Guest café" for ten euros per evening. On top of that, the staff helps undocumented migrant people to make a plan for the future in a yearlong program with three evaluation moments. Along with this program, they are assigned to a mentor who helps them with small, practical issues, such as arranging medical appointments, appointments with a lawyer, and the furnishing of the house.

The second group of undocumented migrant people that receive assistance from Guest Foundation are the so-called 'visitors'. These undocumented migrant people do not live in one of the houses of Guest Foundation but do receive basic forms of assistance. For example, they can use the office address as a postal address, they get minimal compensation for necessary trips with public transport and the staff helps them to arrange appointments with general practitioners and hospitals. In addition to that, they can help visitors to make an appointment for a COVID-19 test, they can help them to get the medication they need, and they can mediate with schools, dentist, and other institutions. Thereby, the visitors are welcome to come to the Guest café and have dinner with other guests, visitors, and staff members. Like the guests of Guest Foundation, the visitors can also work in the bike repair shop, kitchen garden or in the Guest café in order to generate some money (Interview 9, 21-04-2021).

## **4.2 Mexico**

Based on its migration history, Mexico used to be often understood as a net emigration country. This means that more people leave the country than that people enter the country (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013). One of the reasons for this, was the recruitment of Mexican, cheap labour by the USA through the Bracero Program, fulfilling the role of 'labour frontier' for the USA (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013). However, following recent trends of migration, Mexico is often seen as a transit country for migrant people from the Northern Triangle Countries

(NTC) - Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala - who aim to apply for asylum in the USA (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013). Even though many of them never succeed to cross the Mexican-USA border and most remain (semi-)permanently in Mexico, they are often labelled as transit migrant people (Basok, 2019). However, besides that, Mexico also receives immigrant people. Most of these people are Mexicans returning from the USA due to deportation or an increased sense of hostility and securitization of the border, and skilled workers employed by technology firms (Acosta-García and Martínez-Ortiz, 2015).

As a neighbouring country of the USA, Mexico plays an important role in the securitization of the USA border and the prevention of the entrance of migrant people from the NTC into the USA (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013). Mexico functions as a so-called 'buffer zone' for the USA and is, therefore, pressured to increase its border controls (Basok, 2019; De Haas & Vezzoli, 2013). Although the intensified border controls are meant to curb migration, many scholars argue that it does not contribute to the achievement of this goal. In contrast, it only increases forms of irregular migration. Since there are less possibilities to reach the USA in a legal way, migrant people might look for other, irregular ways to cross the border (Oberoi & Taylor-Nicholson, 2013). As a result, migration became a lucrative business for those criminal organizations that kidnap migrant people throughout Mexico, particularly near sheltering organizations or the cargo train, known as *La Bestia*, on which migrant people often hop on to travel further up north (Basok, 2019).

Besides that, many migrant people are not able to reach, if not cross, the USA border. As a result, more migrant people from the NTC apply for asylum in Mexico (Hawkins, 2019). When applying for asylum in Mexico, one must submit an application at the COMAR or the INM. This application consists of completing a form that explains why the concerned person left the country they fled. When the application is accepted, COMAR issues a certificate that proves that the person has started the regularization process and the person receives a temporary Unique Population Registry Code (CURP). After this, there will follow multiple interviews to identify the person's needs in order to facilitate the access to procedures and services, and to understand why the person concerned left their country. COMAR will study the person's case and is supposed to deliver a decision after 55 business days. If the outcome of this decision is negative, one can appeal within 15 business days. The case will be reviewed and a new decision should be made within 90 days. During the process, the applicant must remain in the state where the application was submitted and they can only leave the state with COMAR's authorization. Thereby, one must visit the offices of COMAR or INM every week to sign the register, indicating you are in the state (UNHCR, 2021a).

In Mexico, the conditions that decide who is a refugee and who is not, are based on the updated definition from the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. In addition to the definition that was established in 1951, this definition includes “persons who have fled their country because their lives, security or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, a massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed the public order” (UNHCR, 2021b). This definition is different than the definition used in the USA, with the result that many migrant people hope on a better chance within the Mexican asylum system after they were turned away by the USA asylum system (Hawkins, 2019).

However, besides migrant people applying for asylum, Mexico hosts many migrant people who stay in the country without documents, whether they are on their way to the US, got deported from the USA or their Mexican asylum application is rejected. For those people, but also for many other migrant people who wait for a decision on their regularization process, sheltering organizations are very important. Spread over the Mexican territory, there are roughly 80 sheltering organizations. These sheltering organizations are all civil society organizations, which are established by everyday people who feel responsible as first responders to migrant people (Power, 2020). Most sheltering organizations are connected by being part of a network of organizations working for migrant persons. An example of such a network is the Migrant Defenders Organizations Documentation Network<sup>8</sup> (REDODEM). This is the network of which Casa Tochan, together with other organizations, is part. Until recently, there have been no state-run shelters among the 80 sheltering organizations. In August 2019, the first state-run sheltering organization was opened in the city of Juarez, in the north of Mexico. It was opened to house Central American migrant people who seek asylum in the USA and have been sent back to Mexico to wait the process as part of the ‘Remain in Mexico program’. Since then, similar shelters have opened in Tijuana, Mexicali, and Nuevo Laredo. The sheltering organizations offer meals, medical attention, and access to the local labour market (The Associated Press, 2019). In April 2021, it was announced that Mexico planned to open 17 sheltering organization for unaccompanied minors at the southern border. These sheltering organizations would be run by Mexico’s child welfare agency, using some of its own existing day care centers and other facilities (The Associated Press, 2021). However, until now, the state-led sheltering organizations have been quite absent within the Mexican migration discourse.

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<sup>8</sup> Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes

## **Box 2: REDODEM**

REDODEM is a network of sheltering organizations, homes, residences, canteens, and other organizations. All organizations that are part of the network provide “diverse types of accompaniments to people in situations of mobility in Mexico.” Besides that, the network registers and documents the situation of these migrant people, by realizing annual publications based on the registers of organizations which are affiliated to the network. On their website they state the following:

*“REDODEM records and documents the situation of people in a situation of mobility in order to obtain information on their displacement in Mexico, in addition to strengthening and supporting with statistical data the work of human rights defenders who work on this issue.”*

The network was established in 2013, by eight organizations. Since then, the network has grown to a network of 23 organizations which are spread over 20 cities and towns, and 13 states. With this growth, the network has contracted four external, financial, and strategic allies, which are the EU, Interculturas<sup>9</sup>, Cáritas France, and UNHCR. Besides these alliances, REDODEM does not contemplate the inclusion of governmental entities or international organizations, and claims to be a non-profit, non-partisan, and non-economic organization.

*Source: REDODEM, 2021*

### **4.2.1 Casa Sol**

The first sheltering organization from the Mexican context that I analyzed, is Casa Sol. This sheltering organization is a large-scale organization which is located in the region near the

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<sup>9</sup> Entreculturas

Guatemala-Mexico border<sup>10</sup>. This location is of great importance to this organization, as it is decisive for the way in which the organization is structured. For example, the shelter assists many migrant people who just crossed the border with Guatemala. This means that most residents are undocumented.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Casa Sol had the capacity for lodging approximately 250 migrant people. The time that they spend in the shelter varies. Some of them arrive at night and leave the next morning again, while others stay for a month and try to make a living while waiting for their regularization processes to finish, or save money to travel further up north. Yet, others create a network in the city and find a small room to rent from other migrant people who live in the city.

Casa Sol is a non-profit organization, which started as a project of the Catholic church. The organization is a civil-society organization which sprung from the local community. This community was aiding migrant people in distress since the 1990s, long before they established a formal sheltering organization. The friars provided food and shelter to migrant people at the local church. Since 2011, Casa Sol exists in the form as it is known today as a response to fulfil the need for a formal organization outside of the church<sup>11</sup>. As a home and refuge for migrant people, Casa Sol aims to be:

*“a welcoming space where migrants do not only find bread and a bed to sleep in, but also a place of solidarity, a supportive embrace, a mother’s blessing, a place where pregnant women give birth and dreams of a better life begin to come true”<sup>12</sup>*

Although the support from Casa Sol used to be only for migrant people who left the country they came from for economic reasons, the sheltering organization now assists and takes care of any migrant person who is in need of help. In order to do that, the sheltering organization offers basic medical assistance, basic psychological assistance, food, comfort in the forms of a place to rest and sleep, and a place for spirituality and legal advice. Thereby, Casa Sol offers separate spaces and programmes for unaccompanied minors, women, and LGBTIQ+ people.

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<sup>10</sup> This information was retrieved from an article on the sheltering organization, mentioning the organization’s real name in the title. To protect this organization’s privacy, this reference cannot be included in the references.

<sup>11</sup> This information was retrieved from an article on the sheltering organization, mentioning the organization’s real name in the title. To protect this organization’s privacy, this reference cannot be included in the references.

<sup>12</sup> This quote was retrieved from the sheltering organization’s website. To protect this organization’s privacy, this website cannot be included in the references.

Casa Sol is run by a so-called ‘Base Team’, which consists of five people who get paid for their work. Besides that, Casa Sol has many voluntary workers which can be divided in two categories. The first category consists of the short-stay voluntary workers, who stay at least one month in the shelter and who work at the reception, in the infirmary, the wardrobe, the communication room, the laundry room, and channelling to the needs of each person. During this period, they live at the shelter and assist the migrant people day and night in their needs. The second category consists of the long-stay voluntary workers who stay at least three months. These voluntary workers integrate in the five different work areas and collaborate full time in the project. These work areas are the area of humanitarian assistance, the area of human rights and migration management, the area of structural change, and the area of vulnerable groups such as children, adolescents, women, and LGBTIQ+ people. Although the long-stay voluntary workers spend much time at the shelter, they do not live there. After their workday, they go back to the house in the town where they all live together.

#### ***4.2.2 Casa Tochan***

The second Mexican sheltering organization which I analyzed, is Casa Tochan. This is a smaller sized sheltering organization, located in Mexico City. It is a non-profit sheltering organization, which is run by a group of multidisciplinary voluntary workers and is part of the REDODEM network.

Casa Tochan’s mission is to be a safe and warm space for their guests by offering them comprehensive care and help in sociocultural placement. They offer regular meals, places to sleep and they provide their guest with psychological, juridical, and medical attention. In addition to that, the sheltering organization helps migrant people to find a job and provides them with cultural and recreational activities. For example, migrant people can use weights to work out, play chess, take guitar lessons, do arts and crafts, and practice boxing at the rooftop (Hawkins, 2019). The sheltering organization claims that their vision is “to be an international benchmark institution in the care, support, and defence of the human rights of our population of interest, with a solid model of care” (Casa Tochan, 2021). In addition to this vision, the organization portrays its values as:

*“Unrestricted respect for human rights; solidarity for the unequal conditions of the population we serve; equity in the struggle to achieve*

*the objectives we set ourselves to achieve a just society; [and]  
transparency in each of our practices and with the available resources.”*

*(Casa Tochan, 2021)*

The sheltering organization welcomes any person living in vulnerable conditions, which can be all types of migrant people or victims of crime with a human rights approach. In contrast to Casa Sol, migrant people can only obtain a bed in Casa Tochan if they are referred to the sheltering organization by another agency. When one arrives to the sheltering organization, one will find a tall, narrow building, sandwiched between two other buildings. The walls are painted with brightly coloured murals of the maps of Mexico and Central America. Next to those maps, the walls are decorated with texts such as “Bienvenidos a Tochan” and other migrant images, migrant slogans, and religious symbols. When one enters the building, there is a staircase to the office where a log of all the residents is kept by hand, a kitchen with a chore list on the kitchen door, small rooms which are crammed with bunkbeds, a courtyard, a library with air mattresses on the library floor for those who could not obtain one of the bunk beds, and a rooftop (Hawkins, 2019).

### **4.3 The network of sheltering organizations**

The data collection within the sheltering organization in Mexico and the Netherlands showed how sheltering organizations are part of a broad network of different organizations, institutions, and agencies. As was mentioned in Chapter 4.2, sheltering organizations are a spider in the web of undocumented migrant people and are therefore in contact with many organizations, institutions, and agencies that play role in the lives of undocumented migrant people. In this section, I will further elaborate on the networks that sheltering organizations in Mexico and the Netherlands are part of.

#### ***4.3.1 The network of sheltering organizations in the Netherlands***

SNDVU and Guest Foundation provide undocumented migrant people with basic needs such as shelter, hygienic services, and food. For these services, sheltering organizations mostly rely on their own capacity and capabilities. However, to some extent, these sheltering

organizations rely on other organizations, institutions, and agencies. For example, Guest Foundation provides their guests with some additional food products. Therefore, the organization has an agreement with the Foodbank<sup>13</sup>. This organization helps people who are temporarily unable to support themselves by handing out food packages (Voedselbanken Nederland, 2021). In order to distribute the limited number of food packages that they receive from the Foodbank fairly among the guests and visitors, Guest Foundation also cooperates with Street People's Foundation<sup>14</sup>. This is an organization that provides food packages that they receive from the Foodbank among homeless people in Nijmegen (Stichting Straatmensen, 2021). They give the food packages that they have left to Guest Foundation. For the housing and the maintenance of the houses, the sheltering organizations also rely on third parties. SNDVU rents the houses of the municipality and Guest Foundation rents their houses from a housing association. To maintain the houses, the sheltering organizations rely on mechanics, electricians, and plumbers. Additionally to these basic services, SNDVU and Guest Foundation rely on many more organizations, institutions, and agencies in order to finance the organizations and provide undocumented migrant people with additional services, such as living allowance, medical assistance, juridical assistance, and social assistance.

Both sheltering organizations receive subsidies from the municipality. Therefore, the municipalities of Utrecht and Nijmegen form an important role within the network of both sheltering organizations. However, these subsidies differ between these organizations. The subsidies of the municipality of Utrecht form the basis for the existence of SNDVU, while Guest Foundation is financially dependent on donations. The municipality of Utrecht is therefore a bigger factor in the network of SNDVU than the municipality of Nijmegen is for Guest Foundation.

In order to provide undocumented migrant people with the medical and juridical attention they need, SNDVU and Guest Foundation reimburse the necessary medical and juridical expenses that their residents or guests incur. In order to provide this form of assistance, sheltering organizations can apply for funds, such as the Orange Fund<sup>15</sup>, the Opportunity Fund<sup>16</sup>, the KF Hein Fund, the Burken Foundation<sup>17</sup>, and the Collective Insurance for Undocumented Migrants (CAK). Since undocumented migrant people do not have a Citizen Service Number (BSN), they cannot apply for a regular insurance policy.

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<sup>13</sup> Voedselbank

<sup>14</sup> Stichting Straatmensen

<sup>15</sup> Oranjefonds

<sup>16</sup> Kansfonds

<sup>17</sup> Burkenstichting

Therefore, those funds are an important element in the network of sheltering organizations. However, the extent to which these funds are used by sheltering organization varies per organization. Where SNDVU makes full use of these funds to reimburse necessary medical and juridical costs, Guest Foundation argues that it takes a lot of time from them to apply for these funds. Thereby, it often happens that at the time they receive the money, the person in question already disappeared.

*“They come here and then they disappear again. Then they go elsewhere. And um, to another country all of a sudden. Because this is, um, they're also afraid everywhere that they'll be arrested, and um, sent back. Deported. So yes, then they disappear.”*

*(Interview 9, 21-04-2021)*

Despite the reimbursement of costs, undocumented migrant people need to be affiliated with an organization such as SNDVU or Guest Foundation to qualify for medical aid. Although it is not forbidden, undocumented migrant people are often unable to make an appointment with a doctor or dentist by themselves, since many health institutions are afraid that by helping undocumented migrant people, they will be accomplices to an illegal practice. Therefore, sheltering organizations play an important role in the contact between undocumented migrant people and institutions that provide medical aid, and hospitals, general practitioners, dentists, physio therapists, and psychologists play an important role in the network of sheltering organizations. Besides that, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Municipal Health Service<sup>18</sup> (GGD) is an important institution in the network of sheltering organizations, since the sheltering organizations are the ones that can make appointments for COVID-19 tests and vaccinations for undocumented migrant people.

Many migrant people who stay in a sheltering organization for undocumented migrant people are occupied with the preparations for a new asylum procedure and therefore are eligible for juridical assistance. When an undocumented migrant person is applying for asylum, they are often in contact with the IND and the AVIM. However, before the new asylum procedure can be started, there is a whole process of preparation prior to this application. In this process of preparation, several organizations are involved. Which organizations are involved, depends on the nature of the application. For example, if the

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<sup>18</sup> Gemeentelijke Gezondheidsdienst

nature of the application is medical, medical institutions such as hospitals, pharmacies, and general practitioners can be consulted for the issuing of a statement about a person's health. If the nature of the application is religious because the person in question is converted to another religion than is accepted in the country they come from, churches are often consulted to evaluate the process of conversion. Another motive to start a new asylum application can be based on sexuality or discrimination. In this case, the sheltering organizations often turn to organizations such as the Culture and Relaxation Centre (COC) and Article 1. These organizations are committed to the interests of minority groups, such as people from the LGBTQIA+ community or people who experience discrimination in any form. They can assist and train undocumented migrant people to articulate their story to the IND, and they can issue statements which can be used as proof of their sexuality or the experienced discrimination.

*"There was an Afghan gentleman who had had two asylum applications, based on his sexual orientation. Two failed and then, he applied as a convert. I went to talk to the gentleman and he said I'm going to Bible class. I thought: yes, that's great fun, but it's not an English course. In the end, we decided together to go back to that sexual orientation, and we got much more out of it. And with the third application that also succeeded, so he received an asylum permit. Because he learned to talk. It had to do with becoming aware. [Being able to answer questions like] when did you have your first sexual experiences and all that sort of things, and, [finally,] he was actually able to articulate that quite well. He had a boyfriend [...] [and] we had found him a good buddy who could guide him. So that third application just worked out."*

*(Interview 7, 19-04-2021)*

In some cases, it may happen that an asylum application is rejected because a migrant person does not have the right documents to proof their identity. In this situation, the sheltering organization might consult embassies of the country of which the person in question is a national, or might seek contact with the social network of the person in question in that country, in order to obtain the needed documents.

Another, important form of assistance that SNDVU offers to their residents, is providing them with activities to do during the day. Voluntary workers of SNDVU organize some activities themselves, but the sheltering organization is also in close contact with other organizations that organize activities, workshops, language classes, bible study, music

lessons, cycling lessons or sport tournaments. Examples of those organizations are Villa Peace<sup>19</sup>, Social Welfare Army<sup>20</sup>, House of Peace<sup>21</sup>, and Lifegoals. Thereby, the organization maintains contact with the neighbors of the residents.

**Box 3: Villa Peace**

*“[Villa Peace is] a place where undocumented migrant people can be and where they are not ‘invisible’ but where they are seen as unique people.”*

*(Villa Vrede, 2021)*

The organization is located in Utrecht. The organization is a daycare center where undocumented migrant people can come to hang out, spend the day, and meet new people. In the villa, undocumented migrant people can get bread, coffee, and tea during the whole day and at noon a warm meal is served. Thereby, the voluntary workers of Villa Peace organize various activities for undocumented migrant people. For example, people can join an anti-stress group, follow computer lessons, join English or Dutch classes, participate in arts and crafts workshops, or work in the bike repair space or in the kitchen garden. They can also participate in one of the programs that Villa Peace is part of. One of those programs is ‘Sportify’. Under this program, undocumented migrant people can take volleyball, football, and swimming lessons, participate in sport tournaments, and they can get free entrance passes for the gym. In addition to that, they can go on the yearly excursions organized by the organization, such as mountain biking, swimming or sailing. Another project to which the organization is affiliated, is called “Getting Started”<sup>22</sup> (PAS). This is an initiative by COA and Pharos that offers voluntary work positions to people who seek asylum and undocumented migrant people (VreemdelingenVisie, 2018).

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<sup>19</sup> Villa Vrede

<sup>20</sup> Leger des Heils

<sup>21</sup> Huis van Vrede

<sup>22</sup> Project “Aan de Slag”

Next to the regular activities and projects, various festivities are celebrated throughout the year. For example, Villa Peace organizes celebrations for Christmas, Iftar, World Refugee Day, and the birthday of the organization itself.

Besides these activities, workshops, and celebrations, the staff of Villa Peace also assists the visitors of the villa in more practical issues. For example, the visitors can get free lights for their bikes or ponchos to protect themselves from the rain. Thereby, they can use the computers with internet access in the organization's living room, use clippers to shave, or do their laundry.

Everyone is welcome at the villa. However, it is important for the organization to know everyone who comes into the shelter, since their target group lives in vulnerable conditions as they risk getting caught by the police and, subsequently, getting put in detention and getting deported. Therefore, every migrant person that arrives must do an intake with one of the two coordinators of the organization. Besides that, it is at all times required for a person with a Dutch passport to be present at the organization. This is needed in case an accident happens and the police comes to the villa.

In the intake conversation, the coordinator explains what the organization does, what the person can expect from the organization and what the organization expects from the migrant people. They will show the villa, which exists of a living room, classroom, kitchen, office, and a big garden. Lastly, the rules of the organization will be explained. When I asked the coordinator about these rules, he gave me a piece of paper. On this paper, a guide for the intake was written down, including the so-called 'house rules'. These house rules, that forbid violence, alcohol, and drugs within the shelter and demands the visitors to be respectful to each other and not to flirt with female staff, are the only rules in the house. According to the coordinator of Villa Peace, the latter rule is necessary, because there are so many men who come to Villa Peace, who all have different cultures and different perceptions on how to treat women. As a result, he noticed that there exist different perceptions on how to treat women respectfully. To avoid unpleasant situations, he decided to integrate this rule in the house rules of the organizations.

Although Villa Peace is only open during daytime, the organization is willing to refer undocumented migrant people to other organizations for a place to sleep or to apply for other forms of assistance that they need. Thereby, when migrant people come to Villa Peace regularly, they eventually can become a voluntary worker within the organization.

*Sources: Interview and observations on 31-03-2021; Villa Vrede, 2021*

Guest Foundation maintains contact with similar organizations as well, such as an organization that is called ‘Gezellig’<sup>23</sup>, and House of Compassion<sup>24</sup>. These organizations are places where, among others, undocumented migrant people may come to hang out, participate in activities, and connect with other people. In addition to these organizations that provide daytime activities for undocumented migrant people, Guest Foundation is also in contact with schools and day cares for the children of undocumented migrant people. They help them to find and subscribe their children to a school or daycare, and if complications of any kind arise, they mediate on their behalf with these institutions.

SNDVU employees report that the contact with these organizations and institutions is in most cases very approachable. Most of the contact with day care organizations and the municipalities happens via WhatsApp and is quite informal. Besides those ‘easy going’ forms of contact, SNDVU has different meetings with the other organizations that assist undocumented migrant people, the municipality, and governmental institutions, such as the IND and DT&V. In those meetings the situation amongst undocumented migrant people is evaluated and together the different parties discuss what can be improved. The employees are in general very positive about the contact they have with different organizations and institutions.

When I spoke to the staff of Guest Foundation, I noticed a completely different vibe. According to them, many institutions or agencies are unwilling to help when they find out that it concerns undocumented migrant people.

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<sup>23</sup> There is no English word that provides a good translation of the word “gezellig”. The term refers to a cozy or pleasant ambiance. The term can refer to the decoration of a place, but also to a group of people (Van Dale Uitgevers, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Huis van Compassie

*"All a bit, a lot of bureaucracy and, yes then it just ends up somewhere on a person who then says oh these people are here illegally, we don't want anything to do with that, I don't want to make myself a criminal, I can't do anything for you. Like, wait a minute! You make, you can just, um, listen, right? No, illegals we don't do that."*

*(Interview 9, 21-04-2021)*

Thereby, the staff of Guest Foundation tells that the municipality of Nijmegen is less willing to help and is less easy going than the municipality of Utrecht. A couple years ago they started to receive a subsidy of 15.000 euro from the municipality, in return that the sheltering organization would shelter three vulnerable people who do not have a perspective on regularization, re-migration or return migration. After a few years, the undocumented migrant people who are helped by sheltering organization doubled. However, the subsidy stayed the same. Thereby, the communication with the municipality is less approachable and it is harder for the sheltering organization to make concrete agreements with the municipality of Nijmegen.

*"The problem with government agencies is, you make agreements. Especially about our target group. Because there are no rules, you make agreements. So, you make appointments with one, [...] policy official. And [that person] goes elsewhere. [...] And then you don't have that appointment anymore. It no longer applies."*

*(Interview 9, 21-04-2021)*

Analyzing both networks of the organizations in the Netherlands, I can conclude that the networks of both sheltering organizations is quite similar. However, the ways in which this network is created and maintained is different.

#### ***4.3.2 The network of sheltering organizations in Mexico***

The network of sheltering organizations in Mexico is organized in a similar way to the network of sheltering organizations in the Netherlands. Casa Sol and Casa Tochan provide undocumented migrant people with food, hygienic services, shelter, medical assistance,

juridical assistance, and social assistance, and therefore, are in contact with many other organizations, institutions, and agencies.

In Casa Sol, medical aid is distributed by Doctors Without Borders<sup>25</sup> (MSF). The medical staff of MSF is present in the shelter from Monday to Friday and because the medical team only consist of a few people, they are only capable of providing basic forms of medical aid. The medical staff can cure superficial wounds or jump in when someone has a panic attack. However, for more complex cases, Casa Sol can take migrant people to the communitarian hospital. This hospital receives any kind of patients, whether they have a status or not. It is a small hospital that does not employ any specialists, but people can still get the medical assistance for which the sheltering organizations do not have the capacity and resources, such as x-rays. This hospital represents an important element in the network of Casa Sol, as the staff has to take migrant people there, multiple times a week.

In terms of psychological aid, sheltering organizations can refer undocumented migrant people to the National System for Integral Family Development (NSDIF or DIF). This center is exclusively for minors and families, and their psychologists and social workers provide them with the psychological assistance they need. For additional medical assistance, Casa Sol can also rely on the Red Cross. Unlike Casa Sol, Casa Tochan has no medical staff working within the organization. For medical assistance, whether physical or psychological, Casa Tochan can make an appointment for a person at a doctor or hospital or can assign the person in question to a psychologist.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the medical assistance within Mexican sheltering organizations has been given a second focal point. Besides the regular medical issues, such as sores, dehydration, and fevers, the identifying and prevention of COVID-19 contaminations now also became part of the work of the medical staff. Although this requires a lot of extra knowledge and work, there are not many other external organizations, institutions and agencies added to the network of the sheltering organizations since the outbreak of the pandemic. The COVID-19 related medical assistance is distributed by the organizations and institutions that already were part of this network. Within Casa Sol, MSF provides the regular staff with plans for isolation and circulation through the buildings. The COVID-19 tests and additional COVID-19 related medical aid in more crucial cases are executed by the local health institutions, such as the hospital. However, since the pandemic, there is contact with an epidemiologist.

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<sup>25</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières

As was mentioned before, both Casa Sol and Casa Tochan provide their population with juridical assistance. Therefore, there is contact with multiple, external organizations and institutions. This contact can happen in terms of the migrant people's regularization processes, or in terms of defending migrant people's rights. For example, there is contact with the INM and COMAR, which are the governmental institutions in Mexico that process the asylum applications, and the police. Besides these government institutions, organizations that defend the human rights play a significant role in the network of sheltering organizations for undocumented migrant people. Examples of these organizations are Asylum Access and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)<sup>26</sup>. Where Casa Sol has their own juridical staff and lawyers working within the sheltering organization, Casa Tochan provides migrant people who arrive to the shelter with juridical assistance in terms of assigning them to an attorney (Casa Tochan, 2021). Therefore, the organization is in contact with different attorneys that are specialized on immigration. Like SNDVU and Guest Foundation, sheltering organization in Mexico can claim funds in order to reimburse high and necessary medical costs, such as the costs for a needed surgery, an x-ray, or crutches. The UNHCR is an example of agency that can provide undocumented migrant people and sheltering organization with such funds.

In terms of social assistance, there is not much contact with other organizations and institutions. Many people go out to the city to find work by themselves, and the organization provides the population with activities themselves. However, Casa Sol is in contact with the local football team against whom the migrant people play football on a weekly basis<sup>27</sup>. As part of the social assistance, Casa Tochan provides the undocumented migrant people that stay at the house with job placement. Although this is not mentioned specifically on the website or in the article by Hawkins (2019), I assume that for this form of assistance, contact is made with places, companies, organizations, and citizens who can offer jobs to undocumented migrant people.

To keep improving the assistance that organizations can give to undocumented migrant people, the sheltering organizations aim to exchange their knowledge and experiences with other sheltering organizations and communities. As was mentioned in the introduction of the research locations, both Casa Sol and Casa Tochan are part of networks, of which REDODEM is an example. Within these networks, there is regular contact with other

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<sup>26</sup> This information was retrieved from an article on the sheltering organization, mentioning the organization's real name in the title. To protect this organization's privacy, this reference cannot be included in the references.

<sup>27</sup> This information was retrieved from an article on the sheltering organization, mentioning the organization's real name in the title. To protect this organization's privacy, this reference cannot be included in the references.

organizations. The article by Hawkins (2019) shows a great example of a situation in which contact is made with other sheltering organizations, the police, and governmental or municipal institutions:

*“I went today to renew my visa, but they told me I should go back to Acayucan. That’s where my file is. The lady today said she couldn’t help me, that I had to go back there.’ Acayucan, in the state of Veracruz, is about a seven-hour drive from Mexico City. As Betty asked more questions, the young man explained that he had been staying in Coatzacoalcos, about an hour from Acayucan, but had come to Mexico City on the train because the migrant shelter in Coatzacoalcos is under construction, and because there seem to be more opportunities in Mexico City. He did not want to return to Coatzacoalcos because a federal police officer had looked at his visa there, told him the paper was worthless and taken all his money. Betty wrote down his name, saying she would see what she could find out.”*

*(Hawkins, 2019)*

#### **4.4 Migration regime and migration industry in the Dutch and Mexican context**

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the migration discourse can be understood as a constituent part of migration, including migrant people’s stories, networks, and experiences, but also immigration policies, governmental immigration institutions, and NGO’s. Analyzing the migration discourse in which sheltering organizations such as SNDVU, Guest Foundation, Casa Sol and Casa Tochan operate, two integral elements to the migration discourse can be seen: the migration industry on the one hand, and the migration regime on the other hand.

As the migration industry can be understood as an important factor in the facilitation and prevention of mobility, sheltering organizations itself can be understood as a part of the migration industry. However, besides that, many organizations from the network of the sheltering organizations that is described in the previous section, can be understood as part of the migration industry as well. All these organizations and institutions aim to help

undocumented migrant people by providing them care, financial assistance or social activities in order to work on a sustainable future, and to make their life easier and better. Therefore, these organizations can be understood as organizations that negotiate with the migration regime. The laws, policies, and governmental institutions that form the migration regime, decided that the migrant people in question are not allowed to be in the country that they are in, as they are undocumented. However, the sheltering organizations go against this regime as they offer possibilities for undocumented migrant people to stay.

## 5. Introducing the migrant people

For this research, I spoke with three undocumented migrant people, who were, at the time of our conversations, all residents of SNDVU. All three of them are very different people, who are in different phases of their life, and have very different stories. In order to give a clear image of these people and to tell their stories well, I will introduce these people in this chapter.

### 5.1 Rashid

Rashid is a 21-year-old guy. He was born in Afghanistan and spend multiple years of his childhood in Iran. When he was 15 years old, he fled Iran to move to Europe. He travelled via Turkey, where he met a friend with whom he travelled further to Greece. When they left Turkey, their perceived destination was Sweden. However, when they arrived to the Netherlands, they liked the place and decided to stay. Rashid arrived to Groningen, where he stayed two nights because he did not have money for the train to Ter Apel. After two nights, he got a chance to go to Ter Apel and there he applied for asylum. During his asylum process, he stayed in multiple Asylum Centres (AZCs). When he stayed in the AZC in Ter Apel at the beginning of his asylum procedure, he stayed a short period of time with many other people in a sports hall. Rashid described the period that he stayed in the AZC in Ter Apel as very difficult. The people in the AZC were very loud. He constantly felt like they were fighting, which he found difficult to be around. Besides that, he felt very limited in his access to food. Although they received three meals a day, for which he was very grateful, he got tired of always having the same “broodje kaas”<sup>28</sup>. After a while, he was transferred to Drachten and Steenwijk. There, he could stay in a sort of student house from Nidos. This is an organization that offers protection to minor migrant people who seek asylum. In the houses of this organization, Rashid had his own bedroom and a shared living room. In the mornings they got breakfast and they received 50 euros a week as living allowance, which gave him a little bit more freedom. In addition to that, he could clean in the AZC for an additional 20 euros a week.

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<sup>28</sup> A ‘broodje kaas’ means ‘cheese sandwich’, which is typically Dutch to eat for breakfast or lunch.

As a minor in the Netherlands, Rashid could attend school and he worked voluntary at an animal shelter. Unfortunately, when he turned 18, the rights that he had as a minor stopped immediately.

*“My birthday is August 15. And August fourteenth [...] I got a paper from DT&V. [...] They say, tomorrow I become a problem, you become 18, you have to do something or go away, or we come and get you. And I was scared, because I need more time. To go to jail, kind of things, I don't want to. And I ran away, from AZC.”*

*(Interview 5, 14-04-2021)*

Since he was not a minor anymore and did not have status, Rashid ended up in the streets. One day he was so tired and hungry, that he decided to go to the office of VWN and ask for help. After a while on a wait list, he got a space in ‘De Toevlucht’<sup>29</sup> in Utrecht. This is a sheltering organization where undocumented migrant people can spend the night. After three months in De Toevlucht, a spot came open in SNDVU and since then, he stays in a house of SNDVU.

As a former unaccompanied migrant person that seeks asylum, Rashid is still legally represented by VWN. However, SNDVU helps him to create a daily structure. For example, at least once a week he goes to Villa Peace where he repairs bikes for other undocumented migrant people. He goes to the gym, plays football and the guitar, and he often goes to the church. Recently, Rashid has been partially converted. Partially, because he says himself that he is now a follower of both Islam and Christianity.

*“I was almost one and a half year converted. And um, almost two months, no, more than two months. Four, five months that I'm a bit back on Islam. I'm now, I must say, I'm two sides. For all two I can have respect. Maybe in 30 years I have to make decision, which one should I choose, or both two. Islam, I understood four five months ago that it is not the Islam that I didn't like, it was the people. It was not faith. He was always with me, but it was the people who was next to me.”*

*(Interview 5, 14-04-2021)*

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<sup>29</sup> The English translation of ‘De Toevlucht’ is ‘The Resort’. Because this term brings to mind vacation resorts, which is not what the organization does, I decided to use the Dutch name of this organization.

Right now, Rashid is preparing for a HASA. Over the years, he developed an addiction to marijuana, which makes him restless and this causes him to be unable to articulate himself well in the interviews with IND. Therefore, in order to make a good case with the IND, he first has to quit smoking this substance.

## **5.2 Florent**

Florent, a Christian man who is 49 years old, came to the Netherlands in 2010 after he fled Congo for political reasons. He arrived in Eindhoven and after arrival, went immediately to Ter Apel to apply for asylum. After he started his application, Florent went to the AZC in Zevenaar for a couple of days where his first interview with the IND was conducted. Afterwards, he went to live in the AZC in Enschede. Many interviews followed.

Florent stayed in the AZC in Enschede for three years, until the shelter there stopped and he was transferred to the AZC in Utrecht in 2013. During this time, he had a lot of conversations with DT&V, which wanted him to return to Congo. However, returning to Congo has never been an option for him: “the Netherlands is safe for me. Security. DT&V says no, no, no, we will talk, good collaboration. You go back to your country. I say, in my country I will die” (Interview 6, 14-04-2021).

After his asylum application was rejected and he had to leave the AZC, Florent went to STIL, an organization in Utrecht that offers shelter, but also juridical and medical assistance for undocumented migrant people. At STIL he could sleep during the nights, but he had to leave during the day. His lawyer, that he got via STIL sent his dossier to the municipality, in order to find a better place for him. A room opened up in one of the houses of SNDVU, where he is now living for already three years.

At the moment of our conversation at the office of SNDVU, Florent just became father of a son, who he had with his girlfriend. His girlfriend is also from an African nationality and came to the Netherlands as a refugee. Right now, she has a residence permit and lives in Amersfoort. Besides going to the church, going to Dutch lessons and visiting Villa Peace, Florent tries to visit his girlfriend and son every weekend. However, because the living allowance that he receives is often just enough to buy necessary goods and because train tickets are expensive, this is not always possible. When he speaks of his new-born son, a big smile appears on his face:

*“I am, happy, really happy, with my baby. Yes. So, I know, looking at, my baby, like that. All things, gone. With me, my head, so calm. [...] I feel, my body so good. I have a lot of stress. I have a lot of thinking, then I see my baby again, things are gone.”*

*(Interview 6, 14-04-2021)*

Besides the positive, psychological effect that his son has on him, the birth of his baby might as well have a positive effect on his planned HASA. In two years, Florent’s girlfriend will be able to apply for Dutch citizenship, after which the child will also become a Dutch citizen. Having a Dutch child will make it easier for Florent to get a residence permit. Until then, they will proceed his case with the European Commission Against Torture (CAT), focussing on how he has been tortured in Congo and on what medical issues are the result of these tortures. However, it seems that he still has a long way to go.

### **5.3 Lina**

Lina is a 51-year-old, Yezidi woman who fled Armenia almost 20 years ago. Before she came to the Netherlands, she used to work as a seamstress. She had her own atelier where she made clothes for people who needed them.

*“I came here when I was young. I became old, and I didn’t see anything. I ran from my own country. They said, go run, maybe there is a solution, go rebuild your life. Here is nothing either. [...] Problem upon problem. Yes. People need a little bit of luck in life. For me that does not exist. I have to wait, to see what will happen. That’s life.”*

*(Interview 10, 21-04-2021)*

When Lina became undocumented, she stayed for a while with a friend who had a residence permit. After a while this friend needed money, and she reported Lina to the AVIM in exchange for some jewellery and money. Lina was put in detention for ten months. The AVIM and DT&V wanted to deport her, but this was not possible for a reason that Lina did not mention. Instead, they put her back in the streets. She ended up in Utrecht, where she went

to STIL. This organization, which also has a special shelter for women, took her in for 11 months. After those months, she had to leave. However, she still received juridical assistance by STIL. She needed a place to stay, so she was sent to Den Haag, where she lived for a year. After that year, she went to live in with a friend in Culemborg, who also lived in a sheltering organization. She could only stay there for a couple of months, after which she came back to Utrecht. From that moment on, for four years, she all the time lived with different people for a few months. Until STIL gave her dossier to the municipality and found a spot for her within SNDVU in 2012.

*“Until this moment, I’ve been a few, I think a year or one and a half year in the Prinses Margrietstreet, in Zuilen. The other years I lived here. Maybe 20, 30 times roommates have been changed. And I still live here.”*

*(Interview 10, 21-04-2021)*

With most of her roommates she had a good connection. Despite that, she told me that it is exhausting to not have a home for herself. Therefore, she does not like to be at home during the day. Every morning she leaves the house and goes to the shopping centre in the neighbourhood. There she drinks a coffee from the machine in the supermarket and goes sit somewhere outside, to watch people passing by. In the afternoon she goes back home.

She used to have dinner with some roommates sometimes. However, these girls already left the house and moved to the AZC to start a new procedure. With some roommates, she has experienced some problems. Everyone comes from different countries and lives according to different cultural norms and values. Therefore, she noticed that there are often small conflicts about cleaning and the space in the fridge.

Most of the people in Lina’s social network, she knows from church. Before the COVID-19 pandemic arose and there were still physical masses, she used to go there weekly. Unfortunately, due to the fact that masses were cancelled because of the pandemic, she sees her friends less often. However, they are still always there for her. When she is sick, they bring her medication, and they even collected money to buy her a scooter. She got this scooter because, due to her carpal tunnel syndrome, Lina had a knee and hand surgery. Therefore, walking long distances is hard and it is difficult for her to carry heavy bags.

At the moment of our conversation, Lina was waiting for a statement by the IND. The court upheld her appeal against the rejection of her asylum application. Hopefully, Lina soon gets an answer and will have a clearer view on what the future will bring her.

## 6. Living an undocumented life in Mexico and the Netherlands

All residents, guests, and visitors of SNDVU and Guest Foundation, and many guests of Casa Sol and Casa Tochan are undocumented. A migrant person can be undocumented for various reasons. For example, a person can enter a country without having the right documents or a person can stay in a country after their asylum is rejected (De Haas et al., 2020). Once a person is undocumented, they are often requested to return to the country they came from or they get deported. However, many migrant people who live in a country without the right documents, do not have the possibility to return to the country that they came from. Yet, what happens if a person cannot return, but is neither welcome in the country they are currently in? For some people, applying for asylum elsewhere is an option. Nevertheless, for most migrant people, re-migration is difficult due to the high costs of travelling and the lack of a social network. This means that many people stay in the country without having the right documents to do so.

Living in a country while not having the right documents, imposes many difficulties on the life of a person. During the interviews with the residents of SNDVU and the staff of SNDVU and Guest Foundation, it became clear that in the Netherlands it is very difficult to survive without legal documents and in particular, without having a BSN. For example, without a BSN number, it is impossible to rent a house in the Netherlands. One of the voluntary workers of Guest Foundation mentioned the following:

*“I think the Netherlands is really one of the hardest countries to survive as an undocumented person. [...] Look, elsewhere, you just have money, you want to rent a house, you go somewhere. I give you 300 euros every month, can I live in this room? Fine. [...] Just happens. Never going to happen in the Netherlands.”*

*(Interview 9, 21-04-2021)*

Besides that, undocumented migrant people only have the right to go to school until they turn 18 years old. After that, this right expires. Although it is permitted to pursue a course of study, few undocumented migrant people are admitted to a study program. According to the coordinator of SNDVU, this has to do with the fact that schools in the Netherlands receive a subsidy for every student they receive. However, when a student does not have a legal

document, the school in question does not receive this subsidy for this person and, as it were, misses out on money (Interview 8, 20-04-2021). Additionally to that, for many study programs it is required to do an internship. However, it is impossible to do an internship when a person does not have a BSN number, since it is required to have a liability insurance which is impossible to get without this number (Interview 9, 21-04-2021). The coordinator of Villa Peace told me that some universities and colleges have special spots for undocumented migrant people. Yet, it is difficult to obtain such spot (Interview 4, 31-03-2021). Next to the fact that it is impossible to rent a space to live and nearly impossible to follow a study program after a migrant person turns 18 years old, migrant people are not allowed to work. In order to generate an income, many undocumented migrant people look for irregular jobs. However, many people who could create jobs for undocumented migrant people, such as babysitting, painting a house or gardening, are afraid to offer a job to undocumented migrant people since they are afraid that they will be an accomplice to an illegal practice. Therefore, it is hard for undocumented migrant people to find irregular jobs in the Netherlands, generate an income, and provide themselves, their families, and the communities in the country they came from with food and remittances. On top of this, it is also not allowed for migrant people to do voluntary work. As a result, it is hard for undocumented migrant people to create a daily structure, build a network, and blend into the society.

In terms of access to a house and work, the situation in Mexico is different for undocumented migrant people. The voluntary worker at Casa Sol that I spoke to, told me the following:

*“Every day if the person goes out to look for work, they might find something not really well paid and safe to do, but there are things. For example, for men, sometimes there was a truck coming through the entrance of Casa Sol saying, I need to clean an area to, to chop the grass with machetes. I need 11 men to chop a field and I will pay you 200 pesos for the day. And men would come and jumped into the truck and the first 11 who would make it, they would have work for the day. The next day, a woman would go to a house to clean in the next day. [...] So, these kinds of jobs are irregular in terms of they don't happen every day. But there are a lot more options to my view of things.”*

*(Interview 12, 11-07-2021)*

Hence, one can say that in Mexico, it is more normalized for people to do irregular jobs. In addition to that, it is also easier to rent a room or house in Mexico when a person is undocumented. Where in the Netherlands the Social Security Number is required for almost everything, that is not the case in Mexico. Therefore, it is easier for a group of undocumented migrant people to rent a space together. Nevertheless, this does not mean that undocumented migrant people do not experience any obstacles in their daily life. Although it is easier for undocumented migrant people in Mexico to find work or a house than in the Netherlands, the conditions under which they work and in which they live are not good. When they find a home, they often share it with many others and when they find work, they often make long days, get underpaid, and do heavy work under dangerous and poor conditions.

However, where the migration discourse on undocumented migrant people in the Netherlands would be mostly about access to rights, the migration discourse on undocumented migrant people in Mexico is mostly focused on the experiences of violence and abuse on the road. Due to the fact that the USA forced Mexico to implement restrictive immigration policies and border controls, many migrant people are forced to enter and travel through Mexico irregularly. In order to avoid Immigration Officials, migrant people are travel via dangerous routes up north. They walk for hours on shoes in bad conditions or on bare feet, go days without food and water, and on the road, they risk to run into gangs or Immigration Officials that use violence against them, rob them, and rape them. As a result, many migrant people cope with both physical and mental health conditions, such as sores, dehydration, and fevers, but also STD's, trauma, and depression. Alex, a Honduran migrant person whose story is reported in an article on Casa Sol told the following:

*“Because I was on the train, climbed up, and there was a checkpoint and the security guards started throwing stones at us to make us fall.”<sup>30</sup>*

Hawkins (2019) tells the story of Gabriel, a migrant person from El Salvador who tried to grab on the train when “dodging thieves and other migrants [...] kicked at their hands.” Thereby, the hours they spent on the train caused them extreme sunburns, blisters, burns from a hot iron railing and a “face stained by smoke from sitting too close to the locomotive during cold nights and long days” (Hawkins, 2019). However, the long and dangerous train ride is not the only difficulty migrant people experience on their journey.

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<sup>30</sup> This quotes was retrieved from an article on the sheltering organization, mentioning the organization's real name in the title. To protect this organization's privacy, this reference cannot be included in the references.

*“[...] We also see the terrible effects of the violence of the gangs that attack them on the way in order to rob them; machetes, beatings, abuse and sexual violence. Cruel and inhumane stories.”*

*MSF doctor<sup>31</sup>*

In addition to these serious experiences of robbery, violence, and sexual exploitation, undocumented migrant people face many daily, practical obstacles<sup>32</sup>. In this regard, the voluntary worker of Casa Sol that I spoke to, gave the example that when he needs to go to the hospital for treatment himself and pay the equivalent of 50 euros, this is not a big problem. Unfortunately, for undocumented migrant people, this is a completely different story. For them, this sum of money can be translated into a week's worth of food for an entire family. Besides that, undocumented migrant people often live in uncertainty. Every day it is uncertain how and if they can get food, where they can sleep, and how and where to they can continue their journey. What seems to be a small issue for a person with documents, can thus appear to be a huge problem for undocumented migrant people.

These questions of uncertainty, but also mental health issues such as trauma and depression were also often mentioned in the conversations with the staff of SNDVU and Guest Foundation, and in the conversations with the residents of SNDVU. However, in contrast to the case of migrant people in Mexico, these mental health issues were mostly related to experiences of social stagnation. After years of living undocumented in the Netherlands, staff members of SNDVU see that their residents sometimes lose their resilience and get stuck in a depression (Interview 7, 19-04-2021). This became clear when I talked to Lina who has spent 20 years in the Netherlands and already lived in a house from SNDVU for almost nine years. She told me that, although she used to undertake many activities such as teaching children to sew and go to the church, she cannot find motivation to do something anymore because her “brain is so tired” (Interview 10, 21-04-2021). Besides that, many undocumented migrant people cope with a fear for the police. If a police officer asks them for any reason for their legitimation documents, which they do not have, they will be put into detention and might even get deported. A volunteer from Guest Foundation told me a story about a girl that went to school by bus when the bus driver braked too hard, causing a

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passenger that was standing in the bus to fall. The police came to talk to the witnesses, but when you are a witness of an incident, you must be able to identify yourself – something this girl could not do. Although the police did not ask any further when she said she did not see anything and had to go to school quickly, this girl was too afraid to go by bus again and choose to bike one and a half hour to school every day (Interview 9, 21-04-2021). Such fears of getting caught by the police, gives many psychological complaints such as addiction, problems to sleep, and traumatic complaints.

The fact that the focus of media platforms and research on the Mexican context of undocumented migrant people is mostly focussed on the violence they experience on the road, does not mean that the problem of access to rights that was visible in the Dutch context does not exist in Mexico. Although it is a bit easier for undocumented migrant people in Mexico to find irregular jobs and rent a place to live, it is in both countries nearly impossible to get access to health care when you are not subscribed to a sheltering organization. Most hospitals, dentist, and general practitioners require undocumented migrant people to be subscribed to an organization in order for them to receive the help they need. Thereby, to be able to access funds to pay for the medical care that they need, they are only able to request such funds via a sheltering organization.

Because undocumented migrant people in Mexico and the Netherlands are unable to do many things by themselves, many migrant people become very passive after a while. “Even when they receive status and are allowed to arrange such things by themselves, they do not know how to do it anymore. They have been taught not to do anything by themselves” (Interview 9, 21-04-2021). Besides that, the fact that they have no sight on the future, gives migrant people a lot of stress. Florent became emotional when we spoke about his future. “It’s a difficult situation. Difficult period. I have a lot of stress.”, he said. When I asked him about what was going on in his head, he answered: “I don’t know my future. I don’t know my future here in Holland. You come here, young, but now I am almost 49 years, so I am old. And I don’t know my future” (Interview 6, 14-04-2021).

As this chapter shows, undocumented migrant people in both Mexico and the Netherlands have to deal with a wide range of different issues and difficulties. Although issues and daily struggles cannot be translated to experiences of immobility directly, the data showed how most difficulties that undocumented migrant people experience are related to feelings of depression and social stagnation. Migrant people who are limited in their daily life, whether they cannot work, live on the streets, are lonely or suffer trauma and depression, often experience forms of social stagnation. As I explained in the theoretical chapter of this

thesis, social stagnation can be understood as a form of immobility as they are limited in their social connections in order to travel further or build up a social safety net in the concerned society. Besides that, many migrant people for example also experience forms of immobility as they experience limitations to their freedom of movement. As most undocumented migrant people in Mexico are on their way to the USA, many of them do have the aspiration to migrate. However, the various obstacles that were elaborated on in this chapter, affect their capability to actually do so. For example, if a person gets injured and has to spend their money on a medical treatment, this often means that the person in question does not have enough money left to travel further. He or she first has to work in order to earn money again. Thereby, the injury itself can also impede the capability to migrate as a treatment can take some time or the person in question first has to heal in order to continue their journey. However, in Casa Tochan as well as in Casa Sol, there are many migrant people who decided to apply for asylum in Mexico. If that is the case, there is an aspiration to stay that can imply voluntary immobility. Especially if the migrant person in question has the means to travel somewhere else. However, for many undocumented migrant people in Mexico, the reason they apply for asylum in Mexico is the fact that they cannot enter the USA or because they have been deported. In this case, there is the aspiration to stay, but there is no capability to migrate. This means that the person in question experiences an acquiescent immobility, as they see staying in Mexico as the only solution.

As was mentioned in Chapter 4, Guest Foundation and SNDVU assist people with one of the following three future perspectives: a new asylum procedure, re-migration and return migration. As all residents and guests have applied for asylum before, to a certain extent, they all have an aspiration to stay in the Netherlands. Therefore, their capability to migrate is a deciding factor in their future perspective. If a person is preparing a HASA, this is because this person cannot return and there is a good chance for the person in question to finally get a residence permit. In this case, there is no capability return to the country the person came from, as this country is unsafe. However, this does not mean that there is no capability to migrate at all. As following asylum applications are rejected as well, re-migration to another country is still an option. In that case, the capability to migrate depends on access to means of transportation and money. If a person decides to return to the country where they came from or to apply for asylum somewhere else, one could argue that their aspiration to stay changes to an aspiration to migrate. However, such conclusion is made too easily. For some of them, return migration or re-migration is the only option they have as they cannot get a residence permit. The fact that the person in question makes the choice to migrate, does not necessarily

mean that there is an aspiration to stay as moving is the only option. Therefore, I argue that this model is incomplete, as the case of the Netherlands shows that ‘involuntary mobility’ is also a common situation for undocumented migrant people who want to stay in the Netherlands, but have to leave. In addition to that, limitations to the freedom of movement do not always have to be about migrating to another country for a longer period of time. For example, Florent mentioned that he cannot always visit his girlfriend and son since he does not always have enough money for the train. Rashid mentioned how he wishes to see his mother, who lives in Iran, one more time in his life. However, as long as he does not have documents, he cannot go back to Iran. If he does that, he has to start all over again.

In sum, if we look into all constraints to the life of undocumented migrant people in Mexico and the Netherlands, I can conclude that undocumented migrant people in both contexts have to deal with serious experiences of immobility.

## 7. Undocumented migrant people and sheltering organizations in times of COVID-19

The fieldwork period for this thesis took place in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, both the Netherlands and Mexico had to deal with certain measures in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and sheltering organizations in both countries had dealt or are still dealing with outbreaks of the virus within the sheltering organizations. Along with the daily obstacles that undocumented migrant people already experience due to them being undocumented, the migrant people that I spoke with told me that they have experienced great limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the moment of the first interview with the voluntary worker of Casa Sol, the Base Team just put the voluntary staff in quarantine due to multiple infections within the house.

*“When I arrived, it seemed so relaxed. People weren't wearing masks a lot. I mean, there were a few people wearing masks, all of the Base Team worn masks all the time, but not us. [...] I could feel people, was very at ease, you know, with the measures.”*

*(Interview 11, 19-06-2021).*

At that time, the only measure was that the house could only shelter a maximum of 150 people. These people could only leave and re-enter the house for work and necessary appointments. This was a big change since migrant people used to be able to walk in and out of the house between 9 am and 6 pm, and now they could only leave the house with a permit that was signed by the director of the sheltering organization or a member of the Base Team. Almost nobody was wearing facemasks and the regular program in the house was continued. However, since then, the sheltering organization had to deal with multiple COVID-19 infections. The first case since my participant arrived was a young woman. When she got COVID-19 related symptoms, the COVID-19 protocols got activated. The woman and the people who shared a room with her were immediately put in isolation. After a few days her test result came in and appeared to be positive. In the meantime, the staff continued to give all the services. However, from now on, no one could enter the shelter anymore. People could leave if they wanted to, but they could not come back anymore. After two weeks, no more cases were confirmed and the outbreak seemed to be contained. The staff decided that normal

operations and assistance could be resumed, and that migrant people could enter the shelter again.

*“We moved on and we reopened the house and that meant that we opened the house again for people to come in and live in the house. We started on Monday seventh, I think Monday of last week we started telling the people outside the house that they could come in. [...] And then we got filled. The house was, was plethoric. The house as was filled with life and children were running around. Everyone was happy.”*

*(Interview 11, 19-06-2021)*

However, this plethoric vibe came to an abrupt ending, when another person got sick the same night the shelter opened again. My participant took the person to the hospital, where they advised him to take a COVID-19 test. The test result came back positive and from that moment on, everything changed. Where the woman who was first tested positive was sleeping in a small LGBTQIA+ room with only a few other people, this man shared a regular room with 30 to 40 bunkbeds. He and the ten people around him were placed in isolation, but soon in total eighteen people tested positive on COVID-19. The COVID-19 protocols got activated again and only the basic services such as food, shelter itself, and basic medical aid were continued. All other forms of assistance, such as juridical assistance, were suspended. Since migrant people were not allowed to leave the house of Casa Sol and re-enter, many people decided to leave because when they stayed in the house, they would not be able to work and earn money. Due to the closing of the doors of the shelter, the population of Casa Sol went down from approximately 140 migrant people to approximately 30 migrant people. Only the very vulnerable people, such as elderly, families, unaccompanied minors, and people without a network, stayed in the house. During our conversation, my participant filmed the outside area of the sheltering organization with the camera of his phone. While pointing the camera outside, to a soccer field with little tents, he told me the following:

*“And over there, [...] there are also some trees and you can see some little stands. Food stands over here. These are all run by immigrants. It's like a community outside the shelter.”*

*(Interview 11, 09-06-2021)*

The people who were living in those tents are those who could not enter or re-enter, due to the COVID-19 measures. They are waiting there until they can go back in again. For now, they created a proper community. The fact that there are people living outside of the shelter in tents, illustrates how many migrant people there actually are in the border region and what the effect of the COVID-19 measures actually is on their life

Because the residents and guests of SNDVU and Guest Foundation live in separate houses, these organizations have dealt with less infections than Casa Sol in Mexico. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a big influence as well on both sheltering organizations. Due to strict measurements, there have been less interactions between the staff of the sheltering organizations and their residents, guests, and visitors. For example, SNDVU used to have a weekly consultation hour on Tuesday mornings. During this hour, the residents could come to the office of the organization to have a conversation and discuss any problem they had. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, these consultation hours have been suspended. Besides that, where house visits by some staff members to visit residents in their houses and drink tea with them happened quite often, the quantity of these visits has decreased as well. At Guest Foundation, the number of interactions between the staff, their guests, and visitors have decreased a lot as well. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Guest café has been suspended, and guests and visitors are required to make an appointment to come by the office to discuss a problem that they are dealing with. As a result, the staff of Guest Foundation noticed that there is a greater threshold for people to come to the organization with a problem. One of the voluntary workers mentioned that “they think like, yeah, I don’t want to come with a problem while you should have as little contact as possible” (Interview 9, 21-04-2021). Yet, if people do not speak about their problems, these problems can build up and lead to bigger problems.

Like the rest of society, undocumented migrant people have been quite isolated and lonely during the past one and a half years that have been dominated by the pandemic. When I asked the coordinator and a voluntary worker of Guest Foundation whether the effects of the pandemic have been different for undocumented migrant people than for people who have documents, they had a two-fold answer. On the one hand, they argued that many undocumented migrant people have felt even more lonely and isolated than people who do have documents. Many places for daycare and activities have been suspended, which made it even harder for undocumented migrant people to socialize. Thereby, they pointed out that the situation has also been different for people who have been in the Netherlands for quite some time, speak the language, and had the chance to build a social network around them, than for

people who arrived recently and do not have that network yet. On the other hand, the coordinator of Guest Foundation made an interesting comment, arguing that undocumented migrant people always live in a certain lockdown.

*“If you go shopping, if everything is open, they are always very careful in the streets. Now we are scared to walk outside in the night due to the curfew. They are always scared, because it’s dark outside and they are black. [They think,] what if the police comes because I walk here in the dark and I am black. If they ask me to identify myself, I will be deported”*

*(Interview 9, 21-04-2021).*

Also, the residents of SNDVU told me that they experience multiple limitations to their daily life due to the COVID-19 measures. All three told me that since many activities were cancelled or held online, they were often bored of staying at home. Rashid spoke about how he used to go to the gym with a friend, and how he used to play football and play guitar. Now, all those activities are suspended. Lina, Rashid, and Florent also mentioned that they missed the church masses, which were now held online. Lina told me her friends are all people that she goes to church with. Now that the church masses are suspended, she barely sees them and she gets very bored. Also, Rashid and Florent told me that the church masses were now cancelled or held online. When I asked them if they liked the online masses, Florent told me the following:

*“Online, I say it’s not good, but for corona, is good. But cannot stay with many people. No. Now, for corona is good. Yes. But without corona is very very good, because then you can drink coffee, have a chat.”*

*(Interview 6, 14-04-2021)*

The fact that they all talked about how they miss the church masses, shows how important the church is for them in their daily life. It is a place where they meet people and where their social life takes place, but it is also a place where they find hope by praying to God.

Besides the boredom of staying at home by herself, the COVID-19 measures gave Lina also a lot of stress. In the beginning of the pandemic, the residents still received their

living allowance in cash. However, as a means of combating infections, many stores decided to stop accepting cash and switch to only debit card payments. Therefore, it was hard for residents and guests of SNDVU and Guest Foundation to buy food and medication, as they did not have a debit card.

*“In the beginning of COVID, yes, I was really bothered. Really bothered. Not going to stores. When I wanted to go to the drugstore, buying medications, they don’t give it to me. I cried twice. Really. Really, I cried. I needed paracetamol. They did not give it to me. You have to pay by card. I cried, I don’t have a card. I’m gonna die.”*

*(Interview 10, 21-04-2021)*

During the pandemic, SNDVU made a transition to so-called ‘money cards’. Now, the residents of SNDVU receive their living allowance on those cards, which work as a debit card. However, the guests of SNDVU still receive their living allowance in cash and still face problems because cash is less accepted now. Although the disappearance of cash has increased since the pandemic started, this had been an issue from before the pandemic, since some stores only allow cards regardless the pandemic.

Next to these practical problems, fear for contamination with the virus is also mentioned multiple times in the interviews with Florent.

*“Pfff, corona is for me, I am afraid to get corona. Because I have a heart disease. Watching much television, seeing many people die because of this disease. For this reason, I don’t want to have contact with others, no visitors. I only want to call. Yes. That is important for me. I am fragile, I think. Fragile. Yes, I am scared to get corona. So, there’s a chance my life becomes fatal. So. That’s why I am scared.”*

*(Interview 6, 14-04-2021)*

Besides these practical, daily struggles due to COVID-19 measures, a great limitation for undocumented migrant people and people who seek asylum has been the closing of the office of the IND in the Netherlands (Interview 7, 19-04-2021) and the temporary halt of the processing of asylum requests by COMAR in Mexico. Due to this situation, many asylum

procedures have been delayed. Besides that, in Mexico, the INM has been sending people away without a hearing (Arriola Vega & Coraza de los Santos, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to prevent the spread of the virus, thus have a great impact on the life of undocumented migrant people in both the Netherlands and Mexico. As for everyone, quarantining seriously contributed to experiences of immobility. Especially as the house of Casa Sol at one point closed its doors, this did limit undocumented migrant people in their mobility. For the population of Casa Sol, there is a choice to be made between having a place to sleep and an income. Besides that, the issues that we experience as small, practical problems, can appear to be a large problem for people who have no documents and therefore lack access to things that seem to be the most normal things in the life of a person with documents. Nonetheless, while for SNDVU and Guest Foundation residents, the COVID-19 related restrictions are somewhat mitigated by switching to money cards and being given living expenses, the issue of survival for undocumented migrant people in Mexico is even more pressing.

## 8. Relations between sheltering organizations and undocumented migrant people

As was pointed out before, sheltering organizations are an important element in the migration discourse and play a significant role in mobility control, as they can both facilitate and prevent mobility. In order to analyze how sheltering organizations in Mexico and the Netherlands take on and carry out this role, it is useful to pay attention to the forms of care and assistance that are taken on, but also to the interactions and relations between the staff of the sheltering organizations and the undocumented migrant people that stay in those sheltering organizations.

All the four sheltering organizations that were subject to this research share the objective to create a safe and welcome space for undocumented migrant people where they are seen and receive the assistance they need. To achieve this objective, all the organizations offer shelter, food, hygienic services, medical assistance, and juridical assistance. In addition to that, the sheltering organizations in the Netherlands also offer financial assistance to their residents and guests. The interactions between the staff and migrant people to provide these forms of assistance consist mostly of appointments at the offices at the sheltering organizations. However, besides these appointments, it is also common in all four organizations for the migrant people to come by the office spontaneously. They can come over to ask for help with a specific problem, but also for a chat.

The staff of SNDVU pointed out that they position themselves in a certain way towards the residents. One of the employees told me that, besides the necessary appointments and conversations with residents that are part of her function within the organization, she also finds it important to have social interactions with residents to build a relationship of trust. Sometimes she visits a person at their house to drink a cup of tea together and to see how that person is doing (Interview 1, 24-03-2021). The coordinator of SNDVU also told me that she sees most of the residents quite often, even though that is not part of her function as coordinator.

*“We are an office and clients walk past us and I walk past them too of course, so then it's just a matter of having a chat. [...] I've been working there of course for quite a long time, so especially people who have been, [...] staying with us for a long time know me quite well. So, sometimes*

*they ask if you would like to come and have tea. So, sometimes I do. But now with corona time it is a bit difficult, but yeah. So in that way [...] yes, I see quite a few people. [...] Residents come regularly to their contact person and then I walk in.”*

*(Interview 8, 20-04-2021)*

Although everyone has a good relationship with the people that they assist, not everyone has such an informal relationship with the residents. As one of the employees points out, the sort of relation between migrant people and the employee, “varies from employee to employee as well” (Interview 1, 24-03-2021). Some of them visit someone at home for a drink or a meal, while others try to keep their relationship with the residents more businesslike. According to this employee, this is sometimes the case for the juridical employees. As she says, “they sometimes want to keep this more separate” (Interview 1, 24-03-2021). Also, the administrative worker told me to take on a different attitude than her co-workers. She mentioned that she consciously positions herself “looser” to give the residents that come to her for money-related issues the idea that they do not have to talk about their situation with her. Thereby, she says that she does not want to know details of the residents’ background since she still has to remain “strict” within her function as administrative worker (Interview 3, 31-03-2021).

Also, the staff of Guest Foundation describes their relationship with the guests and visitors as very informal and personal:

*“I would say, with one third of the people I have a lot of personal contact as well. That is very easy going, they, they just come, yes, they just bike past my house and if they see that I’m there they come in for a coffee and then we chat.”*

*(Interview 9, 21-04-2021)*

Besides that, many migrant people would just come by the office or call them if they have a problem of any kind and they would see everyone weekly when they have a joint dinner at the Guest café.

The relations between the staff of Casa Tochan and Casa Sol and the undocumented migrant people that stay in the shelters, is different from the relations between SNDVU, Guest Foundation, and their residents and guests. Since in both organizations, the staff works and,

partially, lives in the same house as the migrant people, the migrant people and the staff spend a lot of time together during the day. The staff wakes up at 6 am from 7 am on, when they wake up the migrant people to start the day, their work activities begin and these last until the moment everyone goes to bed. During the day there is a period between 2 and 4 pm in which they can relax. Yet, the short-stay voluntary workers have to be alert the whole day in case anyone needs something from them or in case there is an emergency.

*“It's overwhelming. Sometimes when people, when, when the shelter was full of people, and you listen and you hear your name all the time. So, I was like and it eats your mind, you know, it eats your nerves.”*

*(Interview 12, 11-07-2021)*

However, the voluntary worker describes the contact and interactions with migrant people in the house as very nice and intimate. They wake them up, they eat together, they do activities together. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that emotional relationships between the staff and migrant people are not allowed by the sheltering organization. When you arrive to Casa Sol as a voluntary worker, you get a manual which states that it is forbidden for voluntary workers to enter into personal and emotional relationships with other voluntary workers and migrant people and they are not allowed to have any “favorites” (Interview 12, 11-07-2021). He called the manual a bit outdated and he finds it impossible to avoid such relationships.

*“In the end, if you spent so much time with people, people are people and you can stop emotion. Sometimes you can't. We [...] cannot program ourselves. Of course, there is this part of having emotional intelligence. You know. There's a term like this in psychology. So, knowing how to navigate your emotions, how to deal with them. Yes. That's one thing and you can be respectful of people. You can put your boundaries with people, et cetera, or read people's boundaries and not cross them. But it's impossible not to like someone, if, if that's your kind of person. In, in two months of living there, I really liked some people more than others. I really did. And I talked more with those. I spent time with them, because I*

*had a good time with them and not with others. And [...] one important thing is that you build trust with people and these relationships are based on trust on, on deep emotions.”*

*(Interview 12, 11-07-2021)*

However, it is not always only having fun with the migrant people. Along with their position as volunteer, an important part of the job is to enforce the rules of the house on the population. This became even more important with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, because since then there are even more rules, such as wearing a mask, keeping the one-and-a-half-meter distance and following the walking circuits in the house. When he looked back at his voluntary work in the shelter three years ago, he mentioned that he sometimes felt like he “became like a cop” (Interview 12, 11-07-2021). Before he came to Casa Sol this time, he promised himself not to do this again, but although he was more conscious about it, he still did it.

*There [...] needs to be a balance between the compliance of the rooms to stay there, because these are conviviality rules. If there are no rules. Yeah. People, I mean, it would be as in the streets. It's like the law of the strongest, you know. I think [...] the fitter and the stronger would prevail and the weak was not. So, rules make it easier”*

*(Interview 12, 11-07-2021)*

Besides the COVID-19 measures, there are not many house rules in Casa Sol. The rules that do exist, are quite similar to the rules that exist within SNDVU and Guest Foundation, such as no smoking inside the house, no consumption of alcohol or drugs inside the house, and no violence inside the house. An additional rule that only came up in the case of Casa Sol, was the rule of no businesses inside the house. This rule was established in order to prevent coyotes from entering and doing businesses in the house. As coyotes are an important element of the Mexican migration industry and many migrant people happily make use of their services, sheltering organizations such as Casa Sol and Casa Tochan are fruitful business places for coyotes. However, in order to protect migrant people to end up in dangerous situations, businesses within the house are not allowed.

Also, within Guest Foundation and SNDVU, there are not many rules for the residents and guests who stay in the shelter. In the addition to the house rules that were mentioned

above, SNDVU and Guest Foundation find it important that the people they assist are open to the organizations' ideas and advice, and are willing to collaborate with them. For guests of Guest Foundation this means that they are expected to participate in a training to work on their future and to make an action plan with their mentor. Besides that, both organizations expect their residents and guests to regularly make use of the room. If they notice that a person frequently sleeps somewhere else and does not sleep in the room often, they will have a conversation with the person in question to discuss whether they can give the room to someone else who needs it. In addition to that, SNDVU does not allow the residents to have guests after 10 pm and guests are not allowed to spend the night.

Despite that there are some rules that some people do not agree with, undocumented migrant people who stay in the sheltering organizations, in both the Netherlands and in Mexico are in generally very grateful for their work. With the work that sheltering organizations such as Casa Sol and Casa Tochan do, these organizations are seen as “small oases in which to recover, find information, and access a computer or a phone to contact family”<sup>33</sup>. A Honduran migrant person that stayed at Casa Tochan said he feels supported by the sheltering organization. “It feels wonderful because one is tired and there is a place where you can rest with peace of mind” (Powel, 2021). As the title of Powel's (2021) blogpost states: Mexican sheltering organizations are seen as stepping stones to safety.

Also, the residents of SNDVU that I spoke to said they were very happy with SNDVU. They told me that they are good people with good hearts and that they can always come to them whenever they have a problem. They also expressed that, in compared the shelter with other places where they have been before, that SNDVU was a particularly good place. They liked the fact that they can live semi-independently, that they can leave and come back home whenever they wanted, and that they received an allowance to buy food by themselves. Especially Rashid expressed his frustrations about AZC's and other sheltering organizations where they received three meals a day on a specific time. When he missed the meal because he was not hungry at the time or had to be somewhere else at the time, he had to wait until the next meal before he could eat. In addition to that, he told me that he preferred to get money over food, so that he could decide himself what he wanted to eat. Lina and Florent shared his feelings. They all appreciate the independence that SNDVU gives them. However, they still see it as burden that they have to share their house with other people and they dream

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<sup>33</sup> This quote was retrieved from an article on the sheltering organization, mentioning the organization's real name in the title. To protect this organization's privacy, this reference cannot be included in the references.

of having a place for themselves. Additionally, Lina and an employee of SNDVU told me that not everyone appreciated SNDVU as much as others. Some of them have problems with the rules, which are written down on a plasticized piece of paper that hangs in every house of the organization. They notice that people do not always agree with the rules because sometimes people break them, but also because the employee once noticed that this piece of paper was taken down all the time. When she asked the person who took them down why he did that, he told her that when he had friends over, he was ashamed of living in a shelter and therefore, he did not want them to see these rules.

As was mentioned in the theoretical framework, another way to perform a migration discourse is the use of language and categorizations of migrant people (Dahinden, Fischer, & Menet, 2021). In the introductory and methodological chapters, I stated that this research was inspired by the work on de-migrantization by Dahinden (2016) and therefore, this research would go beyond the use of the state migration apparatus and categories such as “migrant”, “refugee” and “asylum seeker”. As I find it important that this use of language does not only develop within the scientific discipline of migration studies, I analyzed the use of such categories within the sheltering organizations. First of all, most people I spoke to told me that they are aware of the effect that their way to refer to undocumented migrant people can have on them. Therefore, many staff members of SNDVU told me they would refer to the people they assist as their residents. Staff members of Guest Foundation and Casa Tochan refer to them as guests or visitors, and Casa Sol speaks of their population. However, it stood out to me that within those organizations the way people refer to undocumented migrant people differs per function. For example, as the relation between some juridical employees and residents of SNDVU is more businesslike, they sometimes refer to them as clients. One of the staff members of SNDVU, who is not a juridical employee explained that she personally prefers the term residents, as she feels like the use of the term clients creates a distance between the organization and their residents, which is something that she, within her function, and the organization itself do not want to create.

In addition to that, a second argument was made in the theoretical framework of this thesis, that the performativity of the migration discourse within sheltering organizations can be analyzed as both humanitarian aid and mobility control. The rules that sheltering organizations impose on their residents, guests or population contribute to a certain form of immobility as undocumented migrant people are not completely independent and the residents of SNDVU, for example, are not allowed to have people over after 10 pm. However, as the staff and residents of SNDVU said, these rules are generally accepted by the residents and,

compared to the many forms of assistance the sheltering organizations offer their residents, guests, and population, these rules are negligible as a form of immobility. In contrast, by helping their residents or guests to gain some money, increase their social network, offer juridical assistance, and help them to make a plan for the future, I can conclude that sheltering organizations are mostly facilitators of mobility.

## 9. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to get a better understanding of the ways in which sheltering organizations shape the immobility experienced by the migrant people who receive help from these organizations. As it was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the focus of this research was on the Dutch and Mexican migration discourses in which sheltering organizations operate and how those discourses are performed by the people working and volunteering for those organizations. In order to achieve this research objective, I started this thesis with the following question:

*How do migration discourses, that are performed by people working in sheltering organizations, shape the immobility experienced by undocumented migrant people that are assisted by them?*

In order to relate the Mexican and Dutch context to each other, I attempted to answer this research questions for both contexts, using a combination of Ethnographic Analysis, CDA and Relational Ethnography. However, due to an imbalance in the retrieved data between both contexts, it was not possible to draw hard conclusions on this relation. Yet, I will describe the similarities and differences between both contexts that have been analyzed and I will guide in the direction towards tentative concluding remarks on this relation.

In the interest of having a structured data collection and analysis, I split up the research question into three sub-questions: 1) which elements of the migration discourse can be analysed in the interactions between migrant people and workers of the organizations?; 2) how are migration discourses performed by people working in the shelters?; and 3) in what way do migrant people that are assisted by the sheltering organizations, experience immobility?

The migration discourse can be understood as a constituent part of migration as a phenomenon. This discourse includes migrant people's stories, networks, and experiences, but it also includes immigration policies, governmental immigration institutions and NGO's. Analyzing the migration discourse in which sheltering organizations such as SNDVU, Guest Foundation, Casa Sol and Casa Tochan operate, two integral elements to the migration discourse could be observed: the migration industry on the one hand, and the migration regime on the other hand. As the research pointed out, sheltering organizations are part of a

big network on which they rely to provide undocumented migrant people with the right assistance. As organizations and institutions within this network provide services that facilitate, constrain or assist migration, they can be broadly understood as elements of the migration industry. Following this definition of migration industry, sheltering organizations themselves can be understood as a part of the migration industry, while negotiating with the migration regime. As they offer shelter, food, hygienic services, medical assistance, and juridical assistance, they work in order to make the life of undocumented migrant people better. While at the same time, they negotiate with the migration regime by sheltering people who are officially not allowed to be here. As the migration regime – existing of laws, policies, governments, and institutions such as the IND, DT&V, COMAR, and INM – defined that the migrant people in question are not welcome, as they are undocumented, those organizations negotiate with this regime as they offer undocumented migrant people the assistance, they need in order to live in the country where they reside.

These forms of assistance and the negotiation with the migration regime, can be understood as performativity of the migration discourse. The way in which the migration discourses are performed by sheltering organizations, can be analyzed as both humanitarian aid and mobility control, as the forms of assistance by sheltering organization can be understood both as forms of care and control. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the relations between the staff of sheltering organizations and the people that they assist. Within all sheltering organizations, the relations between residents, guests, visitors, and the staff is described as good. Besides the necessary appointments and contact moments in order to provide the migrant people with assistance, in all organizations the relations are also built on personal interactions. For example, the staff of SNDVU and Guest Foundation visit their residents and guests at home or they come by the office. In Casa Tochan and Casa Sol, where the population lives in the same house as the staff works and partly lives, the staff and residents spend the whole day together. As a result, emotional relationships and friendships can occur. These relationships are important, as they create bonds of trust, which are essential for the migrant people to feel safe and to work on a sustainable future for them. However, sometimes, friction between the staff and undocumented migrant people who stay at the shelter can arise, as the staff has to enforce the rules of the house on the people who stay at the sheltering organization. The rules that sheltering organizations impose on the undocumented migrant people that stay in the organizations are part of these relations and can contribute to a certain form of immobility, as undocumented migrant people are not completely independent and have to live according to someone else's rules.

However, the data analysis showed that these rules are generally accepted by the residents. Therefore, these rules are negligible as a form of immobility. Nevertheless, the data revealed other causes for immobility. In both Mexico and the Netherlands, undocumented migrant people have to deal with a wide range of different issues and difficulties. Although these difficulties and issues cannot be directly translated to experiences of immobility, I argue that they do contribute to these experiences. As most of these difficulties are in some way related to feelings of depression and social stagnation, these issues can ultimately result in a form of immobility. Following the aspiration-capability model by Schewel (2020), various categories of mobility and immobility can be analyzed in the contexts of Mexico and the Netherlands. Besides the cases of social stagnation, the limitations to the freedom of movements also play an important part in the life of undocumented migrant people. Where in Mexico many migrant people have the aspiration to migrate but due various circumstances lack the capability to do so, they often experience involuntary immobility. The people who do have the aspiration to stay in Mexico and apply for asylum experience, depending on whether they have the capabilities to go somewhere else, voluntary or acquiescent immobility. In the Netherlands, this division of categories of immobility is a bit more complex, as all of the guests and residents of SNDVU and Guest Foundation applied for asylum and thus had the aspiration to stay, some are pushed to return or remigrate. Therefore, I suggest to add a fifth category of forced mobility.

In addition to the regular struggles, undocumented migrant people are also hit by the COVID-19 measures. As these measures limit the world population in their mobility, they also impose a difficult time on undocumented migrant people. As some do not have a big social network, undocumented migrant people became socially isolated, and in the case of Mexico, the closing of the doors of Casa Sol exposed the people to the choice between a place to sleep or earning an income to travel further.

In sum, I can state that undocumented migrant people in both Mexico and the Netherlands experience serious forms of immobility as they are limited in their freedom of movement, but also often experience forms of social stagnation. However, it became clear from the data for this thesis that, in the Netherlands, these forms of experienced immobility are mostly fuelled by the migration regime as governmental institutions, and systems make it nearly impossible for undocumented migrant people to properly function within the Dutch society and less to contribute to this society. In Mexico, this immobility is mostly the result of the migration regime, as strict border controls in Mexico and the USA keep them from travelling further. However, also violence by gangs and state officials are direct causes for

limitations to the freedom of movement and mental issues that can lead to social stagnation. Therefore, I can conclude that undocumented migrant people and sheltering organizations in both contexts definitely “exist in a state of mutual dependence and struggle” as Desmond describes it (2014, p.573). Although hard conclusions based on differences and similarities between both contexts could not be made, both contexts face relatable situations and issues regarding irregular migration.

In Chapter 2, I reflected on the difficulties that I faced in attempt to get access to sheltering organizations during the fieldwork project. I noted that these difficulties have to do with the priorities that organizations set for themselves. Handling research applications is often not one of them. During the research process, these issues have often crossed my mind and I have been encouraged by my supervisor to reflect on them. Why do we want to do research involving people for whom this research is not their priority? How can we ensure that this research is relevant for the people that are involved in this research and why do we want to study other communities than the ones we find ourselves in? These are questions that have been constantly in my mind during this research process and to which, unfortunately, I do not have an answer. However, I believe that these questions are important to reflect on our research and on ourselves as researchers. For future research, I make a note to myself and to others, to keep asking ourselves these questions during the research process.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that there is still a lot of research that can be done related to the lives of undocumented migrant people in the Netherlands and Mexico, but also in other parts of the world. I also believe that research on this topic is really needed to create awareness within the society. We must continue to tell the stories of these organizations and migrant people, because if one thing has become clear to me while conducting this research, it is that there is still very little understanding of the situation surrounding undocumented migrant people among the Mexican and Dutch population. Additionally, I do not expect Mexico and the Netherlands to be exceptional situations and I believe that this understanding is essential in the search for a lasting and sustainable solution to this problem.

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## 11. Appendices

### 11.1 Appendix 1

<b>THE NETHERLANDS</b>			
<b>Fieldwork: March 2021 – April 2021</b>			
<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Respondent</b>		<b>Date</b>
Interview 1	Employee of SNDVU, department for living guidance		24-03-2021
Interview 2	Employee of SNDVU, department for activation		24-03-2021
Interview 3	Employee of SNDVU, administrative worker		31-03-2021
Interview 4	Coordinator of Villa Peace		31-03-2021
Interview 5	Rashid, Resident of SNDVU		14-04-2021
Interview 6	Florent, Resident of SNDVU		14-04-2021
Interview 7	Employee of SNDVU, social-juridical department		19-04-2021
Interview 8	Coordinator of SNDVU		20-04-2021
Interview 9	Coordinator of Guest Foundation		21-04-2021
	Voluntary worker at Guest Foundation		
Interview 10	Lina, resident of SNDVU		21-04-2021
<b>Observations</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Happening</b>	<b>Date</b>
Observation 1	Office SNDVU	Introductory meeting	12-03-2021
Observation 2	Office SNDVU	Lunch	24-03-2021
Observation 3	Office SNDVU	During Interview 3	31-03-2021
Observation 4	Office SNDVU	After Interview 3 in the hallway	31-03-2021
Observation 5	Villa Peace	Daily activities	31-03-2021
Observation 6	Office SNDVU	Introductory conversation with Rashid	7-04-2021
Observation 7	House of SNDVU	House visit Lina	21-04-2021
Observation 8	Office of Guest Foundation	Before, after and during interview	21-04-2021
<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>Content</b>		
Source 1	Website SNDVU		
Source 2	Contract for residents of SNDVU		
Source 3	Website of Villa Peace		
Source 4	Contract for visitors of Villa Peace		
Source 5	Document on the asylum procedure in the Netherlands by the Service for Immigration and Naturalization (IND)		
Source 6	Document on sheltering and counselling practices during an asylum procedure by the Central Organ for Shelter for Asylum Seekers (COA)		

## 11.2 Appendix 2

<b>MEXICO</b>		
<b>Fieldwork: May 2021 – June 2021</b>		
<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Data</b>
Interview 11	Voluntary worker at Casa Sol	19-06-2021
Interview 12		11-07-2021
<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>Content</b>	
Source 1	Document on how to apply for refugee status in Mexico by UNHCR	
Source 2	Blog on volunteering in Mexican sheltering organizations for migrant people by Sean Power (2020)	
Source 3	Website of REDODEM	
Source 4	Website of Casa Tochan	
Source 5	Article on Casa Tochan and the Mexican immigration system by Elizabeth Hawkins (2019)	
Source 6	Website of Casa Sol	
Source 7	Article about Casa Sol (2017)	
Source 8	Article about Casa Sol (2018)	
Source 9	Article on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on undocumented migrant people by Luis A. Arriola Vega and Enrique Coraza de los Santos (2020)	