

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Regular Versus Irregular Migration: Does the Humanitarian Pathway Differ? A Comparative Study Between Two Arab Asylum Seekers in Belgium and Italy¹

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Abstract

In the refugee and migration context, researchers are keen to approach variables that regularly link irregular, political to economic, and original citizenship to asylum seekers. These variables affect people's attitudes towards refugees at individual and governmental levels. This study investigates the humanitarian pathway as an essential track to differentiate migration trajectories in Europe by examining two separate cases: a Syrian man who lived in Lebanon and regularly resettled from Lebanon to Italy supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and a homosexual young Lebanese man who left Lebanon for Belgium through irregular routes, more specifically, the death boat way which refers to the maritime dangerous and tragic route taken by migrants, refugees, or travelers who attempt to cross risky seas in unsafe or overcrowded boats, often leading to fatal consequences, noting that "Central Mediterranean is the deadliest known migration route in the world, with more than 17,300 deaths and disappearances recorded since 2014 (Black, 2021). Based on the researchers' practice work, both agreed to conduct interviews. The Syrian refugee was recruited through his involvement in an integration project of an NGO that provides educational support for Syrian refugee children and facilitates their integration into the host community in Lebanon. The second participant, a Lebanese man, was recruited through one researcher's work in the field of prostitution. The researcher invited him to be a guest speaker in classes on human behavior and the social environment for social work students. The research aims to reveal the differences between the two cases' regular and irregular human rights-based treatment. The qualitative narrative analysis method was employed to collect data on the official governmental attitudes of Italy and Belgium, as well as the detailed processes and procedures individuals undergo before obtaining citizenship in a European country. Four essential themes emerged from the research: intrapersonal, cultural/social, financial, and political factors. The four key themes of the

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participants' stories differ regarding regular and irregular immigration. Despite the differences in their first reception phase process in which the irregular refugee man suffered and needed to overcome the initial reception complications, both refugees were found to have received equal opportunities for citizenship and protection, regardless of their migration path after arriving in the destination countries.

Key Words:

regular migration; irregular migration; European Union; Arab; Belgium; Italy

1 Introduction

Due to the many challenges migratory processes bring about, immigration is a concern for both immigrants and the countries receiving them. With the increase in multi-layered crises in developing countries, most notably wars and political instability, or economic and social crises, the number of those wishing to immigrate to countries that offer political, financial, and social security, along with living opportunities that uphold human rights, has significantly risen.

International conventions and agreements on immigration and migrant affairs highlight the restrictions and challenges faced in host countries, as exemplified by policies implemented during recent political, health, and socio-economic crises, such as the Ukrainian-Russian war and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the framework of promoting human rights, many questions arise regarding the issue that links immigration and the rights of immigrants, including how they are received and the different ways they seek safer, more stable places away from their homelands.

Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the differences in how governments handle various immigration cases, whether individuals have entered through regular channels or resorted to irregular methods in search of safety. This is achieved by answering the main research question: Does the humanitarian pathway differ between regular and irregular migration?

2 Contextual Background

2.1 Definitions

In the beginning, it is necessary to provide some definitions for fundamental concepts and a brief overview of the countries this study focuses on to clarify the contextual background.

2.1.1 Refugee Definition

“A refugee is someone who has been compelled to leave their country and cannot return because of a serious threat to their life, physical integrity, or freedom because of persecution, armed conflict, violence, or serious public disorder. It is a legal status that provides an individual with certain rights and protections” (UNHCR, 2024a).

2.1.2 Regular and Irregular Migration Definitions

Regular migration refers to the lawful way to enter a country and have permission to reside there. The goal is to improve the life circumstances of migrants and invest in the host countries' economy and society (International Organization for Migration, 2019). Irregular migration refers to the irregular way to cross a country's borders without having visas,

permits, or other documentation required for lawful entry or residence in a country (International Organization for Migration, 2019).

2.1.3 *Asylum Seeker's Definition*

"An asylum-seeker is someone who has or intends to apply to be recognized as a refugee, but their application has yet to be processed" (UNHCR, 2024a).

2.1.4 *Human Rights Definition*

"Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination" (United Nations, 2024).

2.1.5 *Brief on Belgium, Italy, and Lebanon*

Belgium is a European country in the west of Europe, bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The capital is Brussels. The population of Belgium is around 11.8 million, and it has several official languages, including Dutch, French, and German. Belgium is a federal constitutional monarchy with cultural diversity and a high-income economy that depends on critical industries (European Union, 2024a).

Italy is a country in the South of Europe, extending into the Mediterranean Sea. It shares borders with France, Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia. The capital is Rome. The population is around 60 million, and Italian is the official language. Italy is a parliamentary republic with the third-largest European economy and a prosperous heritage (European Union, 2024b).

Lebanon is an Asian Arab country bordered by Syria, Palestine, and the Mediterranean Sea. The capital is Beirut. The population is around 5.5 million, and Arabic is the official language. The government is a parliamentary democratic republic with many religious groups. Lebanon faces economic, political, and financial instabilities (Al-Jazeera Media Network, 2024).

2.2 **Relevant Theories**

The following theories provide the framework for the course of the study.

2.2.1 *Theory of Borders and Borderlands*

The Theory of Borders and Borderlands is primarily used in social sciences, particularly cultural studies, sociology, and geography. It explores the dynamic and often complex interactions that occur in border regions – areas that are geographically or metaphorically at the intersection of different cultures, nations, or identities. Five essential critical points of the theory are presented in the following: (1) Borders as social constructs: Borders are not just physical barriers but social, political, and cultural constructs. They define the limits of state sovereignty, cultural identity, and belonging. The theory argues that borders are fluid, not fixed, and are shaped by historical, political, and social forces. (2) Borderlands as hybrid spaces: Borderlands are the regions or spaces on the edges of borders, often marked by a blending of cultures, traditions, and identities. These areas can become hybrid zones where different ways of life meet, merge, and sometimes clash. People in these borderlands may simultaneously navigate multiple cultural, linguistic, and political

worlds. (3) Cultural interaction and exchange: The Theory of Borderlands highlights how border regions often develop unique identities, practices, and social structures due to their exposure to multiple cultural influences. These areas often involve cultural exchange, adaptation, and negotiation, where different norms and values coexist or intersect. (4) Conflict and tension: While borderlands can be areas of cultural richness, they can also be sites of tension, conflict, and marginalization. The theory explores how power dynamics, such as those between nation-states or dominant vs. marginalized groups, play out in these regions, leading to struggles over territory, identity, and autonomy. (5) Theorists and literature: Scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa and Homi K. Bhabha have contributed to developing this theory, emphasizing the experiences of people living in borderlands, especially in the context of immigration, displacement, and diaspora. Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of the most significant works that blend the concept of borders with personal identity and cultural experiences (Al-Hayali & Atallah, 2022).

2.2.2 Identity Theories

Identity Theories encompass philosophy, psychology, and sociology concepts that explore the nature of identity and how it is formed, understood, and expressed. They deal with the relationship between an individual's self-concept (who they are) and the various social, psychological, and physical factors contributing to forming that identity. The critical aspects of identity theories are as follows: (1) Philosophical identity theory (mind-body), which posits that mental states (thoughts, feelings, and consciousness) are identical to physical brain states; (2) Social Identity Theory focuses on how individuals define themselves in their groups. It suggests that identity is not solely an individual construction but is shaped by group memberships, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, or social class. (3) Personal Identity Theory refers to the individual's unique characteristics and continuity over time. Philosophers like John Locke have discussed personal identity in terms of psychological continuity, suggesting that identity is tied to memory, consciousness, and the ability to recognize oneself across different points in time. Personal identity also explores self-awareness, self-concept, and how people understand and relate to themselves in the context of life experiences and choices (Desrochers et al., 2004).

2.2.3 Theory of Cultural Identity

Halls' Theory of Cultural Identity emphasizes cultural identity as a collective experience encompassing social, political, and economic identities alongside cultural inclusivity, which includes aspects such as ideology and theoretical practice. Cultural identity also encompasses rights-related relationships, which may affect the development of other identities. Hall's significance in articulating cultural identity is evident in two key dimensions: First, Hall presents cultural matters stemming from identity. He examines the subject's position within the culture, encompassing the relationships of power and the agency the subject can exert. Second, Hall views identity as an expression of underlying cultural dynamics, contending that the structure and praxis of culture provide the foundation for grappling with identity-related issues. This theory explores how individuals and groups define themselves through the culture(s) they belong to. It emphasizes that identity is not just an individual phenomenon but is deeply influenced by the cultural contexts in which people live, interact, and experience the world. Cultural Identity Theory addresses how people understand their sense of self, cultural heritage, traditions, values, and norms and how they interact with other cultures. The critical elements of cultural

identity theory include its formation, shaped by shared beliefs, values, customs, language, and traditions passed through generations. It is learned through socialization in the family, community, and broader society. It is dynamic and can evolve based on life experiences, exposure to different cultures, migration, or globalization. In addition, the social and group identity element could be based on factors such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or shared practices. This group affiliation provides a sense of belonging and a framework for understanding the world and the impact of Globalization and Cultural Identity, leading to the preservation and blending of cultural identities. While exposure to global cultures can result in more hybrid or cosmopolitan identities, it can also trigger a desire for cultural preservation or resistance against cultural homogenization (Yang et al, 2021).

3 Refugees' Status Worldwide and in Europe

3.1 Regular and irregular migration to the European Union

The European Union grants entry to non-EU nationals through regular procedures, allowing them to reside within EU states to improve their living conditions. This is implemented through laws and regulations, including the issuance of visas, residence permits and work permits, family reunification processes, asylum and refugee protection procedures, and the opportunity to apply for long-term residence (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024b). However, some people also enter the EU through irregular immigration, which refers to unlawful crossing into and remaining in a country, including unauthorized entry without documentation, overstaying a visa, and staying in a country with a rejected asylum application. People are turning to irregular migration due to limited ways of regular migration and push factors such as social and political instability in their home countries. At the same time, the irregular migration journey is not easy; many of these journeys put people's lives at risk. The sea is one of the main obstacles that migrants face, and crossing it represents the most dangerous way of irregular migration. The most common form of irregular migration is remaining in a country after an expired short-stay visa. EU countries put massive efforts into developing strategies, guidelines, technologies, and regulations to manage and secure their borders and limit irregular migration (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024b).

3.2 Migrants' Protection

In interviews conducted with migrants and refugees about their perceptions of protection, their opinions were mainly in line with the Refugee Convention: They see protection as obtaining residency or citizenship to feel safe and as the subsequent process of integration within the new society to reach their desired life (Stevens, 2017). Looking at international laws and agreements related to asylum and protection, we find that they are constructed from a top-down perspective that addresses the concerns of the most potent parties without listening to the voices of refugees and the strategies they follow to reach protection. Asylum policies adopted in the European Union follow human dignity and rights standards and adherence to the Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1976 Protocol. The European Union provides the right to asylum under the Charter of Fundamental Rights, but at the same time, this right remains a subject of debate. With the establishment of a unified asylum policy, fundamental rights for refugees have been recognized, and criteria for accepting asylum applications have been established. However, defenders of refugee rights see this as insufficient, as the states themselves impose obstacles to the arrival of refugees, such as interception at sea, which hinder the arrival of refugees. Considering

these practices, the effectiveness and actual impact of the protection laws have to be questioned (Stevens, 2017).

Syrians have started migrating to European countries attracted by favorable asylum policies and the benefits they provide. For this journey, they board smuggling boats from the Mediterranean coast, which cost them thousands of euros. As the numbers increased, European countries lost control over their borders. Consequently, the Turkish Aegean Sea emerged as an alternative to reach Greece and complete the journey through Serbia, Hungary, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. However, these countries soon took measures to restrict the arrival and entry of refugees and implemented deportations. Ultimately, the European Union countries took action to protect Greece's borders. However, smuggling operations persist, with fluctuating numbers (Hudson, 2018).

3.3 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Trans-sexual Refugees and Asylum Seekers

During the journey to European Union states, asylum seekers from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual communities face a lack of adequate protection, as they are exposed to harassment, discrimination, and violence, which prompts them to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity in the camps in which they are temporarily located. Police may commit these acts, UNHCR personnel, or camp employees who lack adequate training (Rodriguez, 2023).

There is no standard asylum regime in the European Union, which allows individual states to interpret the international institutional framework for claiming asylum regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Civil society organizations advocate for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual asylum seekers by working to reformulate existing policies and strategies and enhance the overall level of protection they receive (Schnyder, 2020).

3.4 Syrian Refugees in Italy

Since 2011, more than 1.1 million Syrian asylum seekers have arrived in the EU. Germany hosts the most Syrian refugees in Europe, with over 800,000 Syrians, followed by Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, and Greece (UNHCR, 2021). In 2022, around 132,000 first-time asylum applications were from Syria. 94% of Syrian applications received first-instance decisions, making them the top recipients. In 2022, Syrians represented the most significant population residing irregularly in the EU (Eurostat, 2023).

Italy's position in the Mediterranean Sea often makes it the first strategic destination for immigrants who try to reach Europe. For decades, Italy has hosted waves of immigrants from the Balkans and North Africa. However, taking the sea route to reach Italy has always been very risky; many people have died or been lost in the Mediterranean Sea (Statista Research Department, 2024b).

Italy is a developed country that supports the essential rights of displaced individuals. It empowers them to build their futures, focusing on protection, integration, and sustainable life conditions (UNHCR, 2024b). Moreover, Italy, Belgium, and other countries support the migration section in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognizes immigration as a driver of sustainable development for migrants, their families, and host communities (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

Italy ranked as the fourth most popular destination for immigrants in 2021, hosting approximately 248,000 individuals, which accounted for around 11% of all immigrants to the EU. Additionally, Italy issued 338,000 residence permits to non-EU citizens in 2022, placing it fourth among EU countries. Of these permits, 40% were given for family reasons. In 2020, Italy ranked fifth in the EU for the highest number of first-time asylum applications, accounting for 9% of the total, with 72% of applications resulting in positive final decisions (Eurostat, 2023).

On the other hand, Italy, like other European Union countries, faces challenges with irregular immigration. In 2022, Italy recorded the highest number of refusals at sea borders and ranked third among EU countries, accounting for 12% of irregular immigrants in the EU (Eurostat, 2023).

In 2022, Syrians were among the four most common nationalities seeking to immigrate to Italy (Statista Research Department, 2024b).

3.5 Lebanese Refugees in Belgium

Lebanese immigration began in the mid-nineteenth century during the Ottoman period, with migrants heading to America, Mexico, and the United States. After World War II, the migration process resumed, and the regions of destination expanded to Australia, France, and West Africa. In the late 1950s, economic conditions played an essential role in driving the migration of skilled workers to the Gulf countries. Many Lebanese migrated after the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, with Canada and Australia being among the most prominent destinations offering humanitarian asylum. After that, Germany and Scandinavia emerged as new countries of destination. After the 2000s, challenging economic and political conditions pushed Lebanese to leave their country. Over the years, economic, political, and social conditions have played an essential role in Lebanese migration (European University Institute, 2017).

The European Union hosts a large Lebanese population in France, where 11,934 Lebanese people live (Statista Research Department, 2024a), as well as in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Belgium supports refugees by establishing several programs and policies for their integration, including language learning opportunities, economic and social participation, and everything that supports and facilitates their lives and future (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024a).

In 2023, 5.2% of Belgium's population were third-country nationals, which equates to around 606,600 people. Most are from Morocco, Turkey, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. About the status of subsidiary protection in particular, most beneficiaries in 2022 were from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Palestine. In 2024, Belgium granted temporary protection to approximately 77,645 Ukrainians (Migration & Home Affairs, 2024a). Belgium's residence permits are primarily issued for family reasons, accounting for around 49%, followed by permits for employment and study purposes (Eurostat, 2023).

Belgium decides on asylum applications according to the criteria established by the Geneva Convention and the related harmonized legal standards of the EU. Its integration program includes language, civic education, and vocational training. Asylum seekers cannot work immediately but must wait months after submitting their applications. Children have the right to attend school, and every person is entitled to essential

assistance (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024a). The exact number of Lebanese in Belgium is unclear, as it is not considered one of the nationalities with a significant population.

4 Migration and Social Work

Migration studies involve multiple economic, social, and political aspects. Poverty is one aspect that plays a significant role in migration, as migration and development are closely interlinked, driving progress and contributing to economic growth. The family also plays an essential role in someone's decision to migrate, and it is the task of social workers to intervene to understand the dynamics of families and to work to address them. In addition, this process is also facilitated through the social networks of those migrating.

Social workers intervene professionally through three essential dimensions: considering the immigrant himself and his family if they exist (Micro-intervention), the group of immigrants (Mezo intervention), and the macro level, which considers the hosting communities, advocacy, and policymaking (Mansour, 2021).

Migration is regulated by policies that can be restrictive and disadvantageous to migrants, necessitating social workers to advocate on their behalf and remove the obstacles and barriers they face. Migrants may also face exploitation, which highlights the critical role of social work in addressing these practices. Following the migration process, social and cultural changes affect migrants, requiring social workers to intervene and support them in managing these transitions (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Massey et al., 1993).

5 Methodology

5.1 Methods

This study employs a narrative research method focused on the experiences of two refugees. Narrative research emerged from the need to access individuals' experiences through their stories and the context in which these stories were lived (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research has become more accepted as a postmodern research method through which personal stories can be transformed into valid knowledge (Fraser, 2004). As a qualitative approach, narrative research fits the need to explore individuals' lives through their stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In social work, the narrative approach helps understand people's stories based on what individuals disclose through their talks, facial impressions, body language, and context. This gives authority and value to people's stories (Fraser, 2004).

Narrative methodology in social science contexts also employs storytelling as an interpretive approach to understanding how people interpret events and actions. Researchers obtain narratives using interviews as a data collection method. These interviews examine subjectivity and how culture and identity impact the human experience. In addition, this method documents various perspectives and analyses gathered information to distinguish similarities and discrepancies in experiences and behaviors (Mitchell, 2003).

To conduct narrative research, the research problem must be suitable for this approach. If this criterion is fulfilled, the stories of one or more individuals are selected to gather different types of data and information, which are later analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As with any research method, the narrative approach has strengths and limitations. Its strengths lie in providing depth and a rich understanding of people's experiences despite their complexity, making it a flexible and insightful method. On the other hand, narrative research tends to be subjective, as the researcher's perspective is often evident. It is a time-consuming endeavor that lacks generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5.2 Sample

The study applied a non-probability, purposeful sampling technique. It adopted a qualitative approach and collected data simultaneously. The sample consisted of two refugees who left Lebanon for the European Union. Participants were selected through professional and personal relationships, following a non-probability purposive method.

The sample represented both regular and irregular migration pathways. Data was collected through interviews, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes, guided by semi-structured questions. The interviews covered 18 key topics, including migration decisions, costs, the journey, feelings, opinions, and other relevant details. The complete list of questions is included in the Appendix.

5.3 Analysis

In the analysis, storytelling was considered a natural part of being human; by analyzing data and examining participants' stories, we assumed we could gain insight into cultural, political, and personal contexts.

The collected stories were analyzed using several phases of line-by-line analysis. First, the stories and experiences were attended to by focusing on feelings, speaking tone, and body language. Next, the transcripts of these stories were reviewed, followed by interpreting the data by categorizing them into sets of ideas and narratives. Every story was broken down into parts for analysis. The researcher then revisited the results of previous phases, exploring different domains of experience, linking them, and identifying similarities and differences before formally writing the narrative (Fraser, 2004).

6 Ethical Concerns

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI-IRB-2024-F07). Both participants were given an informed consent form, which they signed before the interview. The form explained that participation is voluntary, that withdrawal can happen at any moment, and that their data would be kept secure and anonymous. All data was securely stored on a password-protected computer, with hard copies in locked storage. Participants' names were removed prior to the analysis.

7 Results and Discussion

7.1 Study Sample

Table 1: Interview Participants' Characteristics

Personal Characteristics	Refugee 1 (to Italy)	Refugee 2 (to Belgium)
Age	47 years	33 years
Nationality	Syrian	Lebanese

Marital Status	Married – 3 children (10 years/ 9 years/ 6 years)	Single
Level of education	Bachelor in Primary Education	High School
Job description (before immigration)	Syria: Teaching and Freelance Work Lebanon: School Principal for Syrian Students	Theater dancer
Job description (after immigration)	-Bus Driver in a Center for Special Needs -Cultural Mediator for the Humanitarian Corridors Program, Syrian Refugees Section, and Member of an Interfaith Dialogue Organization	Clothes shop
Birth Order	The oldest brother in a family of ten siblings	The youngest in a family of nine siblings
Residential Area (before immigration)	Al-Qusayr in Syria Akkar in Lebanon	Jnah in Lebanon

This research has collected two stories. The first story refers to a regular migrant on a direct flight from Lebanon to Italy, which took a few hours. The second story refers to an irregular migrant who travelled for ten days from Lebanon, crossing Turkey, Lesvos Island in Greece, Athens, Macedonia, Serbia, and Germany until he arrived in Belgium.

7.2 Narrative Analysis

This analysis followed the phases of Fraser's (2004) line-by-line analysis to examine the participants' stories.

The first phase entailed analyzing the emotions experienced throughout the story. Listening to the story of the first refugee (story 1), we found him confident and fluent in sharing his narrative. He told his story clearly and presented all the details despite several years since the journey. This reflects how the immigration procedures appeared straightforward and organized for him. All stages of his regular immigration procedure, from Lebanon until his settlement in his new home, were planned out for him by the receiving party.

Contrarily, the refugee in the second story (story 2) told his story briefly, focusing on the answers to the interview questions, without mentioning many details compared to story 1. Certain events, such as the order of the countries he passed through on his journey, had been forgotten or were unclear due to the number of crossed countries and the chaos of the journey. However, we also noticed that this refugee focused on the result: reaching Belgium. Enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment were apparent in the interview through his focus on achieving what he wanted.

In phase two, both interviews were transcribed and translated from Arabic (Lebanese colloquial dialect and Syrian colloquial) to English.

In phase three, each transcript was interpreted, divided into sets of ideas and scenes, and organized into lines (Fraser, 2004). The first story (of a Syrian refugee) is 137 lines long, while the second story (of a Lebanese refugee) is 89 lines long. These stories contained different themes within four primary contexts:

- Intrapersonal factors, including feelings, hope, decisions, danger, and loss.
- Cultural/social factors, including support, challenges, integration, values, and disintegration.
- Financial factors refer to the cost of migration.

- Political factors, including regulations, human rights, and public policies.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth phases involved reviewing the previous domains of experience in both stories, linking the “personal” and the “political,” and identifying commonalities and differences between the two participants (Fraser, 2004).

The researchers composed the article through a scientific and critical lens in the seventh phase. By diving deeply into the four primary contexts of the stories’ themes, each section reviewed what the interview participants had said. Their contributions were analyzed and subsequently compared to human rights.

7.3 Intrapersonal: Feelings, Hope, Decisions, Danger and Loss

In the feeling domain, the participants expressed various sentiments, which varied between the two stories and within each. Refugee 1 (story 1) expressed fear and worry in Lebanon. Before leaving Lebanon, inner peace had not been found. At the same time, there was always a dream present to return to Lebanon one day. The second refugee’s feelings were different (story 2). They were generally positive. He expressed feelings of excitement, happiness, and pleasure. In addition, he found inner peace in his country of destination.

By the nature of his work before immigration, the first refugee finds hope in helping people in Syria, while the only hope for the second refugee is found outside Lebanon.

Another significant difference between the two stories is the migration decision. In the first story, the participant made a forced decision, which was considered after many trials to find solutions to his current situation. In the second story, the desire for migration was in the participant’s mind without hesitation, and a sense of adventure and discovery led him to migrate.

Refugee 1 was threatened and lived in a dangerous situation before migrating to Lebanon, which forced him to leave. The second refugee was threatened during his migration journey, which exposed him to many dangers. The trajectory path was multidirectional, and diverse means of transport, such as airplanes, boats, trains, and walking, were used to reach the destination. The participant was also exposed to death on his journey.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes many individual rights: security, freedom of movement, asylum, a dignified life, and a sense of hope and peace. The two stories reviewed make it apparent that some aspects mentioned are consistent with these rights, and others violate them.

In the first story, the refugee lacked a sense of security while in Lebanon, as he was threatened, which prompted him to decide to migrate after he had lost a sense of inner peace. This contradicts Article 3 of the Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates the individual’s right to “life, liberty, and security of person”, and Article 5, which stipulates that “No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (United Nations, 1948).

Furthermore, the refugee sought assistance to leave Lebanon after feeling pressured and unable to stay due to the threat to his right to life. This is consistent with Article 14 of the Universal Declaration, which affirms the individual’s right to seek asylum to escape persecution (United Nations, 1948).

The refugee in the second story did not have access to this right and consequently resorted to irregular immigration methods at the beginning of his journey. On his migration path, he faced many dangers and challenges through the means of transportation used, including death boats. This contradicts the first and third articles of the Universal Declaration, which emphasize human dignity and the right to life (United Nations, 1948).

Despite the differences in the reasons for migrating in the two stories, what unites them is the desire to live a dignified life and feel hope, among the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration to every individual. The refugee in the first story could not freely choose his destination, as he was restricted by the association that assisted him in leaving, thus limiting his options to choose his residence. In contrast, the second refugee had the freedom to choose his destination. The refugee in the first story also aspired to achieve self-fulfilment and help others through his work with civil institutions, which aligns with Article 29 of the Universal Declaration that imposes duties on individuals towards their communities (United Nations, 1948).

7.4 Cultural/Social Support, Challenges, Integration, Values and Disintegration

Regarding the border dimension, the support participants received from their surrounding environment played an essential role in their journey. Both participants received human support. Family members accompanied the first participant to his migration destination and received unlimited support as he described it. Similarly, a friend accompanied the second participant to his migration destination.

At the same time, both participants have also faced challenges; at specific points in their journeys, they lived under the pressure of insecurity and threats.

The participants adapted and learned how to interact with the locals by living in their countries of destination. For the first refugee, his active participation in interfaith dialogue significantly aided his integration process, as he engaged in conversations with people of Christian faith and participated in positive interfaith activities, such as praying in a church and attending Ramadan Iftar there. These activities helped him integrate quickly, become familiar with, and form meaningful connections with others. In contrast, during his time in Lebanon, he faced challenges engaging in interfaith dialogue with Muslim clerics.

Being homosexual, as the second refugee expressed, made him suffer and affected how people treated him in Lebanon, where he considered his gender-based choice as a right. His relevant values were considered significantly throughout his narrative.

On the other hand, not knowing a foreign language made the integration process difficult for both participants. The first refugee also expressed difficulties with getting accustomed to the local food.

A set of rights can be identified by examining the broader context of local communities, their culture, integration within them, and the challenges faced. The second refugee expressed the hate that he faced from the other refugees who were non-homosexuals that he met on the border of host communities that he crossed, which experienced such adverse treatment because of his belief (being gay) as the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration (United Nations, 1948). In the same context, being homosexual, the police facilitated his asylum procedure to prevent clashes with the others. This contrasts with the first refugee who

received strong support in Italy and found an opportunity to integrate into the new society through participation in interfaith dialogue, strengthening this freedom.

The refugee in the first story initially faced difficulties in integrating due to language barriers, highlighting the importance of empowering refugees and giving them the right to education regarding language acquisition.

The two refugees faced problems related to the right to have a standard of living adequate to health, including access to food, as stipulated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration (United Nations, 1948). The first refugee and his family had access to adequate free food from their arrival in Italy but did not accept and liked local food. However, the second refugee had to pay for food while arriving in Belgium.

Respect for human rights in the countries of destination positively impacted both refugees. It facilitated their integration and stability, helped them open up to others, and respected their culture.

7.5 Financial: Costs

For the first refugee, the migration journey did not cost anything; everything was covered at the host country's expense. The second refugee bore the high cost of migration himself.

Financial costs play a significant role in the migration process. According to the Geneva Refugee Convention, host countries bear the costs of assistance and support for refugees who cannot afford it according to the same standards accorded to their nationals (Art. 23 Geneva Refugee Convention). The first refugee received full financial support for his migration, while the second had to bear the very high cost. This disparity creates a gap between migrants, making financial status a controlling factor in the migration process. Therefore, there is a difference in how far both could seek asylum, according to Art. 14 para. 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, the role of financial support in protecting the rights of refugees and facilitating their migration humanely and safely indicates the need for enhanced international cooperation to ensure that refugees have equal opportunities to migrate, regardless of their financial status.

7.6 Political: Regulations, Human Rights, and Public Policies

The process of the migration trajectory for the first refugee was straightforward and clear. It was a direct journey from Lebanon to the country of destination; he got an airplane with his family, they were accommodated in a house, and he was treated very well. On the other hand, the second refugee's journey was more complicated. He crossed several countries to reach his destination, and the accommodations were in camps with strict regulations. To avoid bullying, a transgender friend of the second refugee informed the police of the border to facilitate the process required at the border. Returning to the research's central question, "Does the humanitarian pathway differ between regular and irregular migration?" the analysis of the narratives reveals a paradox: while there are differences between regular and irregular migration concerning human rights, there are simultaneously no differences.

To explain this in more detail, we look at the second story, in which we find differences between regular and irregular migration regarding human rights. The second refugee made the decision to apply for subsidiary protection in his country of destination based on his sexual identity. In addition, the immigration process was prolonged, complicated, and

not guaranteed, with constant dangers throughout his journey, which spanned multiple countries. He paid for the whole journey, which was expensive, and he had to stay in crowded camps.

To explain the second part of the answer provided to the research question, namely that there are no differences between regular and irregular migration in terms of human rights, it needs to be highlighted that the immigration process for both participants was manageable, and they both received human support. After they arrived in the European Union, both refugees experienced stability and safety. Both were entitled to the right to citizenship of their host country, and the process was transparent, and they became Belgian and Italian citizens.

Regarding the relationship between public policies and human rights, we find that the regular migration path of the first refugee was direct and organized since it followed established migration policies. On the other hand, the second refugee's irregular migration involved numerous risks and harsh conditions. Upon arrival, the first refugee found safety, whereas the second refugee was forced to reside in camps under strict regulations. Despite the second refugee's irregular migration path, he was granted protection upon disclosing his sexual identity, which aligns with the protection of the rights of minorities, as outlined in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948).

Upon arrival in their countries of destination, both refugees received equal opportunities for citizenship and protection, regardless of their migration path and reasons (political protection and safety from rejection and bullying for life). Thus, the European Union's policy appears in line with Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms the right to nationality (United Nations, 1948).

In conclusion, while regular migration provides a safer environment at the beginning, countries that adhere to human rights ensure that refugees, regardless of their migration path, have the opportunity for a stable and secure life in the long term.

8 Strengths and Limitations

Finding refugees willing to be interviewed about the topic under study is difficult, especially when detailing experiences with irregular migration. This study contributes to the literature on refugees' rights within humanitarian pathways in regular and irregular migration. Two participants with differing stories and backgrounds were selected for the study. Interviews were conducted with these participants to enrich the collected data and obtain as much detail as possible. It was noted that certain groups, such as immigrants, those with unstable housing, survivors of natural disasters, war-affected individuals, marginalized sexual communities, and underrepresented ethnic groups, are often challenging to reach through surveys (Bacher et al., 2019).

Limited time and restricted human resources prevented the inclusion of a larger sample in the study. Therefore, a larger sample is recommended for future studies to uncover more stories and offer broader perspectives. Additionally, combining quantitative and qualitative methods would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the issue and the potential for generalizable findings.

9 Conclusion

This study presented the journey of two refugees from Lebanon to Europe in relation to human rights considerations through a line-by-line analysis of data collected through interviews. The key themes of the two stories emerged within four primary contexts: intrapersonal, cultural/social, financial, and political factors.

The emerging themes in their stories show divergences between regular and irregular immigration. However, they also align with Halls' Cultural Identity Theory, as they reveal collective experiences encompassing social, political, and economic identities and cultural inclusivity through daily routines and professions. Additionally, according to their narratives, both participants were exposed to multiple cultural influences, resulting in the development of unique identities in both countries, as is explained by the Borderlands Theory. This is further confirmed by the fact that, after arriving in their destination countries, both refugees were granted equal opportunities for citizenship and protection, regardless of their migration path.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

- Question 1: How did the idea of immigration come about? What is the reason?
- Question 2: How did you make the decision?
- Question 3: Where was your desired destination?

- Question 4: Did you tell anyone? Who?
- Question 5: What was your immigration method? How long did it take from the decision day to the actual day of leaving?
- Question 6: What did you take with you?
- Question 7: How much did it cost?
- Question 8: What was your feeling (desirous/excited/scared)? Why?
- Question 9: Did you successfully leave Lebanon and reach your destination country for the first time?
- Question 10: Tell me the trip's details. Which hour? What were the arrangements from leaving Lebanon to arriving? What did you eat? What did you drink?
- Question 11: Who was receiving you? What did they do?
- Question 12: Were you scared when you arrived? Why? Of what?
- Question 13: Tell me what happened to you from when you entered the first transit country to when you arrived at your destination.
- Question 14: How did they treat you?
- Question 15: What challenges did you face?
- Question 16: What are the advantages and opportunities that the country of immigration has granted you?
- Question 17: Would you recommend others to follow your path and immigrate? Why?
- Question 18: Would you do this again if time went back?