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EDITORIAL

The European Commission's Proposed Revision of the Safe Third Country Concept: Changing Approaches in a Changing Environment[1]

Dr. Réka Friedery[2]

The European Commission presented a series of legislative amendments aimed at facilitating the implementation of the "Safe Third Country" mechanism by Member States within the European Union in the context of assessing asylum claims.[3] These revisions were accompanied by a reaffirmation of the continued importance of safeguarding fundamental rights and ensuring compliance with international legal obligations.

The revisions can be seen as part of a long process. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum (Migration and Home Affairs, 2024) strengthens provisions for return and readmission and further clarifies how safe third country designations can be used. Beside this, the safe third country concept is of pivotal importance in the context of recent agreements or partnerships concerning migration between the European Union and third countries, such as Tunisia (European Commission, 2023), Egypt (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2024) and Mauritania (European Commission, 2024), that frequently entail an implicit reliance on the safe third country principles, albeit without explicit reference to such principles.

The safe third country concept is a legal mechanism within EU asylum law that allows Member States to declare an asylum application inadmissible if the applicant has already found — or could have found — protection in a non-EU country deemed "safe." Hence, individuals fleeing persecution should seek protection in the first safe country they reach, rather than choosing their final destination. Regarding primary law, Article 78(2) point (d) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) stipulates that the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall adopt measures for a common European asylum system comprising common procedures for the granting and withdrawing of uniform asylum or subsidiary protection status. Regarding secondary law, the safe third country concept is outlined in the Asylum Procedures Directive (Directive 2013/32/EU),[4] which stipulates the criteria under which asylum claims may be declared inadmissible. The designation of a third country as "safe"

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[3] Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 as regards the application of the 'safe third country' concept {SWD (2025) 600 final}. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0259.
[4] Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast) OJ L 180, 29.6.2013, pp. 60–95.

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is dependent upon the satisfaction of specific conditions, including compliance with the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. But there are other conditions to consider too. Firstly, the principle of '*non-refoulement'*, which prohibits the return of individuals to a country where they would face a risk of serious harm. Secondly, the requirement for a meaningful connection between the applicant and the third country in question, such as previous residence or transit. Thirdly, the need for the availability of fair and efficient procedures for determining protection needs.

It should be noted that the EU legal framework distinguishes between national designations of safe third countries and ongoing efforts to formulate a common EU-wide list. However, the establishment of the latter has been hindered by political disagreements among Member States.

The European Commission's recent proposal introduces several significant changes to the existing regime.

- Firstly, it is important to note that the proposed changes include the elimination of the "connection" requirement. Previously, an asylum seeker was required to demonstrate a meaningful tie to a third country, such as prior residence or family links, in order for a safe third country designation to be valid. The latest revision to the regulations eliminates this requirement.
- Secondly, the permission of transit, or the establishment of formal agreements, is regarded as sufficient grounds. At present, the mere transit of a "safe" third country, or the existence of a formal agreement between the EU state and that third country, is sufficient to consider an asylum claim inadmissible. However, unaccompanied minors are exempt from this exception.
- Thirdly, the removal of suspensive appeal mechanisms where it is important to note, as appeals against such inadmissibility decisions would no longer result in the automatic suspension of enforcement. Consequently, individuals may be removed prior to the hearing of an appeal.
- Furthermore, it is recommended that transparency be increased, with Member States obliged to notify the Commission and their fellow Member States prior to concluding safe third country arrangements, thereby enabling oversight of these agreements.

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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Sea Rescue with Listener[1]: Migration and the Philosophy of Hearkening[2]

Krisha Kops[3]

Abstract

This paper examines the encounter between so-called 'locals' and 'migrants' or individuals with a migration background through the two intellectual senses of perception: seeing and hearing. It argues that this encounter is predominantly structured by a regime of seeing, which is not neutral but deeply embedded in socio-historical power dynamics. This visual regime is characterized by objectification, fixation, and distancing – modes of perception that distort social interaction and reduce the 'migrant' to a visible marker of otherness. As a result, the migration background moves from a contextual detail to a defining feature of identity, a process called 'migrantification'. In other words, the migration background becomes a foreground. To critically investigate this process, the paper employs a critical phenomenological approach, beginning with lived experience and moving beyond the classical Sartrean emphasis on the gaze. Instead, it reveals how the 'migrant' condition is shaped not only by being seen but by being seen in a particular way. Given the limitations of liberal discourses that aim merely to include 'migrant' voices, I propose an alternative orientation – one that centers the primacy of listening, or more precisely, hearkening. This auditory openness introduces a relational ethic, emphasizing receptivity, mutuality, and conceptual transformation in intercultural encounters.

Key Words:

Migration, seeing, listening, hearkening, phenomenology

How does it feel to be a problem?
W. E. B. Du Bois

1 Introduction: Philosophizing from the Boat

How can we philosophize about migration? The most common response is: "normatively". Normativity, after all, suggests a supposedly objective distance, a neutral gaze. It promises control, much like the quantification of an upper limit. The universal need not, or only minimally, engage with the particular. The Other remains a necessary abstraction, a problem reduced to a moral measure (Di Cesare, 2020: 19).

[1] This title and its recurring theme allude to Blumenberg (1996).
[2] This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License and was accepted for publication on 16/8/2025.
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In other words, one remains a spectator to the shipwreck.

If it is argued that philosophy, in order to be credible and relevant, should not merely "observe the storms of the times from its safe harbor" (Schellhammer, 2020), but rather venture out into the in-between, does this not apply especially to questions of migration? Could this not, in concrete terms, mean: "A philosophy of the migrant requires a spectator who is capable of moving from the internal to the external, and vice versa; able not only to recount and redeem the shipwreck, but also to pass judgement on it" (Di Cesare, 2020: 22-23).

In the following, we will dare to philosophize from the boat. Our concern will not only be to reconsider the role of the spectators but also to question the act of observing itself. Specifically, we will examine how encounters between 'locals' and people who have a migration background are dominated by a particular gaze and what this implies for the interactions between those involved (2). Subsequently, the position of the spectators will be contrasted with that of the attentive listeners to explore how encounters might be transformed as a result (3). I will argue that the interaction is shaped by a visual regime rooted in socio-historical power structures – marked by objectification, fixation, and distance – which reduces the 'migrant' to a visible sign of otherness. This shifts the migration background from a minor detail to a defining identity trait, a process termed *migrantification*. As an alternative, I propose a response grounded in hearkening, a form of listening that fosters relational ethics, mutuality, and openness in intercultural interactions.

I am concerned with interpreting encounters starting from the senses. Therefore, the purely linguistic dimension will largely be set aside. Not only is hearing the sensory aspect of the word, but this often-forgotten other side of language takes precedence over speaking insofar as it constitutes the very condition for it. This phenomenological approach, grounded in the senses, is particularly oriented towards the characteristics of each respective sense. It does not stop there, however, and proceeds from this foundation towards different relations with the world or modes of thought. We move, thus, within a tension between the sensory and metaphorical levels of these senses, which often inevitably intermingle and mutually influence one another (Espinet, 2009: 13-32; Grüny, 2018: 255).

Three further aspects should be emphasized. First, seeing does not always function in the way described below. Rather, what is at issue concerns a specific 'scopic regime' that often emerges in encounters between 'locals' and 'migrants'. Martin Jay (1994: 9) explains the meaning of scopic regime by highlighting the permeable boundary between the cultural and natural dimensions of vision:

> "[T]he universality of visual experience cannot be automatically assumed, if that experience is in part mediated linguistically. Natural science, therefore, itself suggests the possibility of cultural variables, at least to some degree. It implies, in other words, the inevitable entanglement of vision and what has been called 'visuality' – the distinct historical manifestations of visual experience in all its possible modes. […] Observation, to put it another way, means observing the tacit cultural rules of different scopic regimens."

Although Jay primarily refers to language here, it becomes clear over the course of his text that cultural variables arise from a range of additional factors. In a similar way, we can

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assume that certain historically mediated cultural variables contribute to the formation of a specific scopic regime in relation to the phenomenon described in this text.

In considering these regimes, it is important to note that, alongside the "*regard inhumain"* (Merleau-Ponty, 2001: 414), there exist far more affirmative forms of encounter and gaze.[4] These are shaped by distinct "ways of the gaze", "gaze content", "movement of the gaze", and, most significantly, by the "attitude of the gaze" (Waldenfels, 2016: 501-503), in which a particular worldview is revealed. On the other hand, the roles can be reversed, so that 'non-migrant' groups may undergo similar experiences. The specific effects of the gaze, however, shift accordingly and will be described below from the perspective of individuals with a discernible migration background. In parallel, an ideal scenario of listening – or more precisely: of hearkening – will be outlined as a counterpart. Other, especially negative forms of listening, such as obedience (*Gehorsam*), will be excluded for the purposes of this discussion (Welsch, 1996: 233-234).

Second, I do not differentiate the term 'migrant'.[5] Although the metaphor of shipwreck runs throughout the text, the focus is primarily on the notion of a migration background in general and on how the senses relate to it. This background is intended to allow for the inclusion of diverse migration experiences. It may be so concealed or outdated that it hardly influences an encounter – or only becomes visible within it, thereby turning into a *foreground* of migration. At the same time, it can also shape the interaction from the outset. Migration backgrounds are multifaceted: They can create connections, since each of us carries one, yet, they are also highly heterogeneous, encompassing vastly different experiences.

Moreover, I seek to avoid reproducing linguistic violence and therefore consciously refrain from using the stereotypical label 'migrant' wherever possible. I do not always succeed in meeting this standard, at times I even deliberately subvert it in order to draw attention to the very dynamics it entails. Almost as an act of counter-violence and empowerment, an undifferentiated 'migrant' 'we' is invoked, set in contrast to the anonymous collective of 'they' respectively 'one' (the German 'Man') (Heidegger, 2006: 126-130). This is intended to highlight the stereotyping inherent in the scopic regime – stereotyping that only begins to dissolve through hearkening.

Thirdly, each of the two sections is preceded by a description. This "personal digression", based on "[s]trange encounters", follows the methodology of Sara Ahmed (2006: 22; 2000: 14) as well as George Yancy's (2025: 41) "elevator effect". By capturing quotidian situations, this autoethnographic approach seeks to transform personal experiences into productive narratives for phenomenological-philosophical inquiry. To allow for identification, the scenes are deliberately kept abstract and anonymous. This aims to open a level of experience often neglected in purely normative discussions, a level that retains

[4] Positive forms of looking include, e.g., a "*regard libérateur*" (Fanon, 2011: 153), a successful, self-empowering "oppositional gaze" (Hooks, 1992: 116), the uninhibited and spontaneous gaze of a "person of essence" (Buber, 1954: 597), an "open" gaze that transcends the separation between subject and object and moves towards the unveiling of truth (Levin, 1988), and finally, the prereflective "circumspection" (*Umsicht*) (Heidegger, 2006: 137).

[5] For a distinction between the terms 'refugees' and 'migrants' in the German context, see for example Schwenken (2018: 42–47). Regarding the concept of migration and related issues, see Ehrenfeld (2024), who also provides further references.

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its emotional and even physical dimensions. The goal is to supplement the "epistemic shortcomings" of migration discourse, which arise from one-sided representations, with unheard perspectives (Markow, 2018: 23). This is achieved through a critical phenomenology that, unlike normative approaches, seeks, through its descriptive approach, to avoid dominating and objectifying individuals with a perceptible migration background (Di Cesare, 2020: 122).[6]

In other words, we want to be listeners during the sea rescue.

2 Spectator to the Shipwreck

We arrived at the train station of a small town. At first, we didn't notice the people's gazes, as we were looking at the station's architecture, and soon after, that of the town center. With every step, the number of gazes grew, at times even turning into stares. Some people stopped walking, others turned around to look at us. We looked at each other, puzzled, wondering whether something was wrong with us, whether we had toothpaste still on our faces. A few more glances, and then it became clear: apart from us, no one else seemed to have a migration background. Our skin, hair, and origin gave us away. The only difference: I was born in Germany; my friend was not.

Suddenly we could feel their gazes on us, almost inside us, even when we turned away from them. They were examining, suspicious, sometimes condescending gazes. Gazes that came (too) close, while the people themselves felt unsettlingly far away. We were seen, but only in a particular way. Their way. We felt shame. Their gazes made us aware that we had a different phenotype, a migration background. Not only did we feel foreign in their eyes, but the town – just moments ago admired – also began to feel foreign. A distance emerged between us and the town, its people, and even ourselves.

Because we could not escape their gazes, we looked back. No matter how intensely we looked, it seemed not to affect them. We had no choice but to move on, trying to ignore their gazes, even though they repeatedly tore us out of our sense of being. We moved, yet it felt as if we weren't making any progress, as if we were petrified under the weight of their stares. Although no one stood behind us, it felt as though their gazes lay on our necks.

Until we realized that we had lost our way. We searched for the right address, still feeling the gazes, even when no one was looking at us anymore. Then we noticed an older man walking past us on the other side of the street. We crossed to ask for directions. My friend didn't dare speak; her accent and grammatical mistakes had often led to her not being taken seriously or being dismissed as unreliable. But even when I spoke, the man didn't answer. He looked at us briefly, then through us, averted his gaze, and walked on.

2.1 Falling into Visibility: The Objectifying Gaze in Context

This scene illustrates how the gaze shapes the encounter between 'locals' and people with an (obvious) migration background. Just as the sense of sight dominates most of our interactions, influencing our understanding and thinking more than any other sense, even shaping

[6] Although my emphasis is on the phenomenological and theoretical aspects, I will occasionally suggest practical implications of these findings. Given the scope and length of this paper, these suggestions will remain provisional. To maintain the focus of the discussion, I will draw exclusively on theoretical research, omitting empirical studies that could, nonetheless, support my argument.

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culture as a whole (Welsch, 1996: 236-241). In many ways, this dynamic recalls what Jean-Paul Sartre (1995: 314) describes: "My being for-others is a fall through the absolute void towards objectivity."[7]

What does this mean in relation to our example? At first, our consciousness was in a non-thetic state (Sartre, 1995: 298). That is to say, there was no 'I' inherent in our awareness. We had consciousness of things, a form of awareness fully absorbed in its actions. Aware of the architecture we observed upon arrival, at times aware of the steps that carried us from the station into the town. Only the gazes of others pulled us out of this state. By seeing us, they caused us to begin seeing ourselves (Sartre, 1995: 299). The 'I' broke into consciousness. This is why we looked at one another in confusion. But this rupture, this fall, was more radical than in other situations. After all, we are seen every day – by family, friends, even strangers – without being thrown into objectification.

This marks the first difference from Sartre's account: The emerging self-consciousness is experienced as a genuine fall, producing a deeper sense of disorientation. Why were *we* the object of their gaze? What was wrong with *us*? And *what* did they see in *us*? What Sartre describes as becoming-an-object in the gaze of the other unfolds here in a more forceful way. The objectification is more intense than in other situations – or rather: while other gazes may still perceive one as a subject, here one is almost entirely reduced to an object. It is precisely in this moment that a central characteristic of vision manifests with particular intensity: More than any other sense, sight tends to objectify and, thus, enacts a sharp separation between subject and object (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 2001: 365).

Even if one – contrary to the existentialist perspective – agrees with Martin Buber that in interpersonal, dialogical encounters one can never appear to the other as a mere object, not even in a boxing match, because "the hidden activity of my being is capable of setting an insurmountable barrier to objectification" (Buber, 1954: 595), there are still people like us who are often regarded more as objects than others, despite a remaining moment of subjecthood.

"[S]ome-bodies are more recognizable as strangers than other-bodies", Sara Ahmed (2000: 30; cf. 2006: 142) aptly writes. This, she explains, is because they are already read and evaluated through the demarcation of social spaces. If perception is shaped by history and culture, then hardly any gaze can be free from pre-existing value attributions (Alcoff, 1999: 19). According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2001: 178), our perception is always subject to a "habitude perceptive". If we expand these actively learned bodily modes of perception to include a socio-critical perspective, this concerns not only the distinction between colors such as blue and red, but also the perception of certain phenotypes, accents, or other markers of migration. That is why, back then, people did not simply see us, they saw us through their specific, familiar mode of perception, their unreflective scopic regime: as more foreign objects.

Just as we must expand phenomenology to include a critical dimension, we should also complement Sartre's interpersonal perspective with a societal dimension that accounts for hierarchization and stereotyping. Precisely because of its objectifying and fixating properties, vision – more than any other sense – is particularly prone to being

[7] Translated by the author: "*Mon être pour-autrui est une chute à travers le vide absolu vers l'objectivité*."

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instrumentalized as a tool of power.[8] In this light, Frantz Fanon's (2011: 175n) critique of Sartre can be applied to our situation: Even though Sartre's account of alienated consciousness is fundamentally accurate, it falls short with regard to the 'Black' consciousness, since the 'White' man additionally assumes the Hegelian position of master. For us, this means: the 'locals' saw us from a position of greater power, from above. And it was this 'from above' that caused our fall.

2.2 Migrantification: Foregrounding the Migration Background

Another difference from Sartre's description lies in the fact that these gazes did not merely make us self-aware, but specifically aware of a particular part of ourselves: our 'migrant' identity. This is what we refer to as migrantification: Through certain practices – such as, in this case, a particular gaze – the background of migration is brought to the foreground. Until this occurs, it often remains so far behind us that we lose sight of it entirely. Much like our experience in the town, it ceases to function as a mere background, but becomes a dominant migration foreground, overshadowing nearly everything else.

This is similar to what is known as "corporealization" (Fuchs, 2000: 136). The body is always there, but only through experiences of estrangement, objectification, or distancing – such as pain, pregnancy, or the gazes of others – does it emerge from its role as a habitual body into our conscious awareness. Migrantification functions similarly: the migration background, like our body, is present in a particular way, sometimes more, sometimes less palpable. Yet, in moments like these, it steps out of mere functionality into consciousness (Fuchs, 2000: 125-126). And because it does so, it stands before us like a foreign object, opening up a distance between ourselves and it. In other words, migrantification refers to the act by which they – often members of the dominant group – reduce our identity to that of a mere 'migrant' through certain procedures. In doing so, they pull this aspect of our identity from the (sometimes long-forgotten) background into the foreground, to such an extent that it begins to overshadow our entire sense of self, even for ourselves.

According to Ahmed (2006: 131–132), "whiteness", on the other hand, functions like the habitual body, it lags behind, even behind action, and does not get in the way. For the 'locals', it is similar: their migration background has already fully dissolved into the environment, to the point of invisibility. It remains in the background and does not intervene – neither between them and their actions nor between them and the objects or people they encounter. This is not the case for our migration background, which cannot become neutral because it is continually brought into the foreground.

2.3 Dimensions of Distance and Disorientation

The distance and the accompanying subject-object split manifested on two levels. First – as already indicated – in relation to ourselves: the process of migrantification produced a distancing between the subject we were and the foreign object we were made to be, between "being-for-others" and "being-in-itself" or "being-for-itself" (Sartre, 1995). This becomes problematic when we are repeatedly looked at in this way, and our migration background is so frequently brought to the foreground that we become divided persons. Divided because the objectified part is more strongly determined by the image others have

[8] Be it the disciplinary gaze (Foucault, 1975: 197–229), the colonial gaze (Fanon, 2011: 153-158; Hooks, 1992: 115), or the patriarchal gaze (Dolezal, 2016: 54-57).

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of us than by our subjective self-image. Time and again, we are forced to view ourselves through the eyes of others, until we develop a "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 2008: 8).

The contentious Sartrean (1985: 81 ff.) finding that Jewish identity is primarily the result of external ascriptions applied, at least in part, to our situation. Initially, the 'migrant' aspect of ourselves was not dominant. Rather, we were shaped by the roots of either the country of origin or the country of arrival, perhaps a mixture of both or some other combination. Not to mention the many other components that comprise what we call 'identity'. The specific identity as a 'migrant' was, thus, established – at least to this degree – through the gaze of the other and the associated ascriptions. This can lead to a split, a rupture between self-image and external perception.

Secondly, the distance (as well as the separation between subject and object) arose between us and the observers, whose gazes paradoxically came too close to us.[9] Seeing is often described as the sense defined by distance (Welsch, 1996: 249–250). This is associated with its supposed objectivity and the related objectification, as well as an *affectlessness* (especially regarding the body). Exactly because the observers turned us into objects, they distanced themselves increasingly from us. As long as they watched us, they could maintain distance and did not have to allow us to come close. This distance suggested control. Whoever sits at the center of the panopticon can surveil everyone precisely because they do not have to let anyone get near. We can, accordingly, extend the observation that ethnic differences are often perceived as distance, despite spatial proximity, to the process of migrantification (Alcoff, 1999: 22).

Another characteristic caused by distance, which may not play a role specifically in our situation but does in others, is described by Donatella Di Cesare (2020: 183):

> "The imagination is blocked, held back by the numbers, inhibited by the mass. For a moment, the gaze fixes on a woman wavering as she disembarks from a ship. But how is it possible to feel something without having an understanding of her history, without knowing anything about her?"

Regarding the people in the boats, distancing and control prevent any genuine relationship, one is not affected. Objectification – such as reducing them to numbers – inhibits feelings and, therefore, prevents one from reaching the subject. Distance is also linked to its nature as a totalizing sense of simultaneity (Levin, 1988: 79, 97; Jonas, 1973: 199): Multiple objects appear simultaneously side by side on the tableau within our field of vision, crowds in which the individual gets lost.

Distance, therefore, enables a totalizing perspective that not only promises control but can also overwhelm through the resulting overall picture, while simultaneously creating a further sense of detachment. Precisely because the gaze captures so much at once, it often seems, metaphorically speaking, unable to see deeply or look beyond. It lingers on the surface of the migration foreground. As if from a distance, with its totalizing perspective, the migration background is, almost paradoxically, the only aspect that becomes visible and, consequently, foregrounded. What remains inaccessible to it is the

[9] Perhaps this could be described as a kind of "distant closeness": Although the observers distanced themselves more and more through their gazes, a part of them – namely their gazes themselves – came close to us, as will be examined in more detail below (Ohashi, 2018: 32–37).

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story that first renders the individual a unique person. Just as our story was unknown in the town, and there was no sign of any effort to get to know it.

At the same time, the town and its architecture distanced themselves from us, which until then had been closely connected to our conscious experience. Only when the gazes of others pulled us out of this state of consciousness did we realize how far this building and that wall actually were from us. A "complete metamorphosis of the world" (Sartre, 1995: 300, 308) took place, and the town flowed away towards the others. That is why we felt alienated from it, even though at the beginning we thought we were welcome. It became (again) the town of the residents. The slipping away of the world, and, for this reason, of the town, also became clear to us in the fact that we got lost. Either we could perceive the gazes or the world, both at the same time was impossible (Sartre, 1995: 298). And since the gazes kept pressing upon us, even when we did not see them, we lost hold of the world.

This phenomenological observation also requires a critical extension. Ahmed (2006: 9) describes migration as a process of dis- and reorientation. In this sense, 'home' may be the place where we are best able to orient ourselves. We were in the process of orienting ourselves, but the gazes threw us off course, giving us the sense of being "out of place" (Ahmed, 2006: 135). This disorientation also manifested in the fact that not only the observers but also we blinked, turned around, and looked again.[10]

Besides the relationship to the space itself, the disorientation also changed the perception of the things within it. Objects that had just seemed close to us suddenly receded into the distance or became alienated. The street, for example, was no longer a path to a destination, it became a path into the unknown. Unlike the 'native' body, which unobtrusively trails behind in its encounters with objects and others, the migration foreground pushed itself between us and the things (Ahmed, 2006: 132).

2.4 The Dissecting and Fixating Gaze

The characteristics of the gaze can be further deepened with Fanon (2011: 158):

> "And already the white stares – the only real ones – are dissecting me. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively slice away my reality. I am betrayed. I feel, I see in those white stares that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new type of man, a new kind. A Negro, that is all!"[11]

Applied to our situation, this connects to the previously described scrutinizing gazes, which can examine precisely because they hold a dominant position and stand above us at a distance. The microtome, simultaneously, slices beneath the microscope, enabling a close, supposedly scientific and objective examination that naturalizes the body in question. This examination here is like a dissection, metaphorically close to the rupture within our self-image. Accordingly, seeing is often described as the analytical sense, the one that takes things apart. More than that, it represents something invasive that penetrates us. No wonder Fanon *feels* this way. These are gazes we feel on and beneath

[10] Ahmed here refers to Nirmal Puwar.

[11] Translation by the author: "*Déjà les regards blancs, les seuls vrais, me dissèquent. Je suis fixé. Ayant accommodé leur microtome, ils réalisent objectivement des coupes de ma réalité. Je suis trahi. Je sens, je vois dans ces regards blancs que ce n'est pas un nouvel homme qui entre, mais un nouveau type d'homme, un nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi*!"

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our skin, a distance that is too close for comfort. When Ahmed (2000: 92; cf. 90) writes that "[m]igration stories are skin memories" because migration often comes with unexpected sensations on the skin – whether warmth, cold, or unfamiliar air – then these gazes are also such skin memories in a metaphorical sense: They leave marks that cut deep beneath the skin.

At this point, it becomes evident once again that we are dealing with a profoundly embodied experience, as the lived body constitutes a "fundamental phenomenon" (Waldenfels, 2016: 464). Sartre (1995: 298) even goes so far as to argue that the gaze refers to me not because it originates from a physically present person, but because I am vulnerable and possess a body that can be wounded.[12] Corporification and migrantification are closely intertwined. Since migrantification is often established at first glance through our appearance, through our (lived) bodies, we become aware of it at that very moment. Like the migration background, the (lived) bodily usually remains in the horizon, only now is it dragged into the foreground (Merleau-Ponty, 2001: 175).

Under the gaze of others, however, our (lived) body was degraded into a mere object, a body that no longer corresponded to our own lived experience. For example, we are usually not consciously aware of the darker tone of our skin. This process – often tied to (negative) emotions – has been described as a form of "confiscation" (Yancy, 2020; cf. Fanon 2011: 156). Much like an actual confiscation, our lived body was seized by authoritarian gazes, reduced to certain features, essentialized, deformed in the process, and returned to us as something alien: a migrantified body, estranged from ourselves. Our "body-for-itself", the spontaneous expression of our freedom, was, in Sartre's (1995: 345-400) terms, not only captured as a "body-for-others." It was not even transformed into a familiar other lived body, but into an unfamiliar other-other: a foreign body, one that served as a point of contrast for the familiar (Ahmed 2000: 54).

At some point, these gazes, much like in the panopticon, detached themselves from the observers, became autonomous, and created the feeling of being constantly watched (Foucault, 1975: 202–203). A gaze that, paradoxically, seemed to follow us even when fixed directly in front – as if coming from behind and striking us where we were most defenseless – now pressed down on the back of our necks even more (Waldenfels, 2016: 500).

Our fixation through the gaze, as described by Fanon, went beyond mere objectification, which Sartre (1995: 307) understands as a freezing in the midst of the world. This fixation also meant stereotyping and prejudice, forces that pinned us down. It was the counterpart to a gaze that, in its rigid and narrowed perspective, was itself fixed, both metaphorically and literally. This makes sense, insofar as vision is the sense most closely associated with establishing (*fest-stellen*), making manifest, and permanence (Nancy, 2002: 15; Welsch, 1995: 247–248). That is why the gazes weighed so heavily on us and gave us the feeling of being unable to move.

2.5 The Myth of Objectivity and the Politics of Invisibilization

The powerful gaze from above grants the authority to define truth. Its perspective determines reality. Vision, in particular, claims to be *objective*, a view from nowhere or

[12] For the connection between vulnerability and the emergence of the lived body, see Fuchs, 2000: 125.

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rather from everywhere, and in doing so forgets its own viewpoint and the limits of its horizon. It forgets that the visual field, with its finite roundness, always lies before us, whereas the auditory surrounds us (Ihde, 2007: 206-207). At the latest, with the rise of scientific rationality and the associated observation of nature, seeing gained importance in modernity due to this presumed objectivity. Even today, modern vision, shaped by technology, science, and patriarchy, relies on the "god trick" to supposedly see everything from everywhere (Haraway, 1988: 581). Yet even without acknowledging alternative ways of seeing, such as mystical ones, it remains undeniable that all seeing is embodied and situated. This applies not only to subjective perception but also to scientific observation.

When it became clear to us that we could not escape the power play of the gaze, we did everything we could to gaze back. The servants now stared at the masters, determined to transform from the seen into the seeing, in order to reclaim the wholeness that had been fractured by the master's gaze (Waldenfels, 2016: 500). But in the struggle to assert ourselves as subjects, our gazes had no effect against the prevailing scopic regime. Perhaps it was due to our small number, or more generally to the power imbalance between those who see themselves as 'natives' and those marked by a migration foreground, that we were never even able to engage in the Hegelian struggle for recognition.

Despite being repeatedly objectified, the encounter retained a certain "responsivity" and, consequently, a degree of subjecthood (Waldenfels, 2016: 320-336). We were looked at, albeit from an elevated, superior position – and we responded with gestures, facial expressions, a returning gaze. It seems impossible to experience a human interaction completely devoid of responsivity. The question is not whether we respond, but how. "Even one who shuts the door", writes Bernhard Waldenfels (2022: 92), "who shuts themselves off, who rejects the newcomer, still responds."[13] However, in encounters that become dehumanized, where we are increasingly turned into objects, responsivity fades. They can more easily pass by objects without concern; there is no need to respond to them. This, too, is characteristic of the visual sense: it can look away.

When the man, finally, walked past us as if we didn't exist, we were almost less than an object.[14] Even a dead body can still provoke reactions, a horrified glance, although perhaps one directed at the lost subjectivity to which the lifeless remains bear witness. Aside from the fact that the decision – if it was one at all – to completely ignore us and look away did, in itself, constitute a form of responsive behavior, we were, through the act of being-looked-through, deprived of responsivity to the utmost degree (Waldenfels, 2022: 98).

What happened here was not merely an evasion of response, for example, by reducing an individual to a bureaucratic case (Waldenfels, 2022: 92). Rather, it could be described as

[13] Translation by the author: "*Auch wer die Tür verschließt, wer sich selbst verschließt, wer den Ankömmling abweist, antwortet*."

[14] That the man was able to walk past us, as if we weren't there, reveals an underlying power dynamic. It is often people with a migration background who do not have this privilege. They are stopped at borders, or for so-called 'routine checks'. In reference to Ahmed (2006: 139–140), one might say that being stopped makes visible the fact that the 'native' body, unlike the body marked by a migration foregrounded, is able to move through space unhindered. Being stopped not only interrupts physical movement but is inseparably tied to the question of 'Where are you from?', placing the (lived) body in a state of sensory and social stress.

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an "existential negation": the moment in which we are no longer even perceived as foreign or exotic, because we are condemned to invisibility (Di Cesare, 2017: 154, 161). Building on Fanon's (2011: 175) descriptions, it has, therefore, been proposed to expand Sartre's existing categories of being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and being-for-others by introducing a fourth category: that of nonexistence (Sealey, 2020). This *being-(for)-nothing*, as we might term it, is described as an experience more profound than the shame and alienation Sartre outlines.

This act of "invisibilization" (Taylor, 2016: ch. 2) is not necessarily the personal decision of a single observer but tends to occur especially when 'migrants' are reduced to a dehumanized mass. This may be brought about as much by the images of people in boats described by Di Cesare earlier as by stereotyping and the negation of the other's perspective. In this case, it becomes irrelevant whether the onlooker genuinely gazes at the other, as noted above, or merely feigns looking away. In both instances, the other is reduced to a "seen absence", a "visible [...] invisibility" – an act that replaces individuality with anonymity (Yancy, 2025: 72). Returning to our metaphor of the migration background, we could say that bringing it into the foreground is, simultaneously, an act of invisibilization, for the now-visible foreground renders the rest of the person unseen, reducing them to a being-(for)-nothing.

To summarize, I have argued in this section that the objectifying gaze, particularly towards people with a migration background, intensifies alienation by foregrounding migration identity and overshadowing the whole self. This gaze enforces social hierarchies, reduces bodies to fixed objects, and produces disorientation and invisibility. Although those objectified may respond, power imbalances hinder the reclaiming of full subjecthood. The purported objectivity of vision conceals its role in control and dehumanization, revealing how seeing can exclude rather than recognize.

3 Sea Rescue with Listener

By now, we were back on the train, sitting across from an elderly woman. Apparently, it was obvious how much the experience in the town had affected us, because she emphatically asked how we were doing. We didn't respond, at first, and remained silent. My friend even looked out the window. It took a while – a few returned smiles, a few hesitant sentences – then she began to speak. About her feelings, her thoughts, stories of her escape and other experiences she had never shared before, not even with me.

The woman had a special gift for listening. She leaned forward slightly, just enough for us to feel that she was coming towards us, without intruding. With an open posture, one ear subtly turned in our direction. Later, she told us that she was trying to take in our voices without letting them be drowned out by her own inner voice. And that she was listening to us without necessarily needing to understand.

She let us speak without interrupting. Even when my friend was silent for seconds, even minutes, the woman waited patiently until my friend began to speak again. It seemed as if new thoughts emerged precisely in those pauses. We felt a deep connection, as if the boundaries between us were becoming porous. The woman was listening not just to our words, but to our facial expressions, our gestures, our entire being. She was attuned to our emotions and to what remained unspoken, perhaps even what could not be said at all. As if she understood something that couldn't be grasped in any other way, something that could hardly be put into words. Not only about us, but also about herself.

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3.1 Recognition through Active Listening and Hearkening

In this scene, the encounter no longer unfolds primarily through seeing, but through hearkening.[15] Hearkening respectively listening is often assigned a subordinate role, partly because, in classical theories, speaking, much like seeing, is associated with action and agency. Hannah Arendt (1998: 176), for instance, describes a life in the absence of speaking and acting as "dead to the world". In her (Arendt, 1998: 178) view, this is closely tied to the question "Who are you?", which is asked of newcomers. They respond with their words and actions, thereby revealing their uniqueness.

Although this cannot be denied, all the speaking and acting of the newcomers remains in vain if they are not listened to and are not granted that first form of recognition through being heard. In this sense, recognition begins less with merely allowing someone to speak, and more with attentive hearkening. Life becomes dead to the world precisely when it offers no space for non-speaking, for silence and listening. This held true for us on the train just as it does for others, whether or not they have an apparent migration background.

Hence, the simplistic polarity between activity (speaking and seeing) and passivity (hearing) can no longer be maintained, especially since such hearkening can indeed be interpreted as a form of action (e.g. Jonas, 1973: 202-203). This is not, in Arendt's (1998: 179) sense, a matter of "complete silence" or "perfect passivity" that obscures the "who" of the other. Rather, it requires a conscious, appropriate silence, an active passivity that creates the very space in which the 'who' of the other can emerge. This 'who' is not defined by the (gaze of the) other, nor is their migration background dragged to the foreground. In this way, the woman on the train, despite her silence and attentiveness, was anything but inactive. It was this very attitude that allowed my friend to share something she had otherwise kept hidden.

Attentive listening or hearkening, thus, differs from mere hearing, as the former demands a higher degree of activity due to its intentional orientation towards the other (Waldenfels, 2016: 250). Initially, this activity may even require a level of engagement that effortless seeing often lacks. The ears are sharpened, stretched open. Phenomenologically speaking, through an auditive *epoché*, the woman deliberately directed her consciousness towards the experience of something, striving to reduce both external and internal noise, including prejudices and mental categories. She listened to what we said and made an effort not to overlay our words with the commentary of her own inner voice. This was the first step in not dragging the migration background into the foreground.

It was Burkhard Liebsch (2019: 168) who, as one of the few, emphasized listening in the context of migration. Listening, he argues, should be understood as a form of recognition

[15] In the following, I will not be able to precisely differentiate the terms such as listening, hearkening, eavesdropping, or hearing. I have chosen the term 'hearkening' (as opposed to merely 'hearing') in reference to Martin Heidegger and the metaphysical dimension of the concept. Moreover, hearkening implies a form of expectant listening, an attunement to something whose meaning has yet to be revealed (Espinet, 2017: 354). In German, I tend to place the prefix '*hin-*' before '*horchen'* (harkening), forming '*hinhorchen'*, to emphasize and highlight its active nature. While mere hearkening is often at odds with intentionality, this construction is meant to convey a sense of directedness: a turning-towards-the-Other that goes beyond what simple hearkening entails.

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of the social and (political) existence of the other – beyond propositional knowledge. Accordingly, the woman's hearkening said to us, 'You are here', and allowed us to become subjects.[16] Shortly thereafter, Liebsch writes that this is where hospitality lies, that it is a symbolic act of inviting someone in.[17] As he, however, does not further elaborate on this mode of listening, I will attempt to explore it in greater detail below.

First, it must be said that the 'who' of the other is not exhausted in what she or he says. The entirety of their existence cannot be captured through their speech. The 'I' always carries a surplus that cannot be contained by storytelling. This is, in part, because the 'I' is unable to account for how it has become the 'I' telling the story – a phenomenon that seems especially true in the context of migration. The 'I' always arrives too late to itself. With each act of telling about itself, the 'I' actualizes itself anew and is already different. With every act of recognition, indeed every encounter, it transforms. Not only for the woman who listened to us attentively, but also for us, who think we know ourselves, we are always more. Precisely for this reason, the reduction to the migration foreground is insufficient in a double sense (Butler, 2005: 27-28, 42-43, 66, 79).

Here, too, the non-propositional moment becomes apparent, especially since recognition must not be based (solely) on knowledge, but on the awareness of its limits. Even Arendt (1998: 181) acknowledges that the 'who' someone is cannot be fully captured in clear words, and that the essence of a person always remains elusive, though this does not diminish the significance of attempting to articulate this 'who'. Not only is the answer to 'Who are you?' inexhaustible, but so is the answer to 'Where do you come from?', which implicitly underlies the first question. Like the 'who', the 'where' contains a surplus and is actualized anew with every movement in the world. This also means not hearing people with migration backgrounds only as such, thereby ignoring their other subject positions and shifting the background back to the foreground. We are more than our migration history. And yet, it is precisely through hearkening that the story of the 'who' can be told, allowing the individual to step out from the image of the mass.

The first characteristic of hearkening ethics, both in the migration context and beyond, is that the act of attentive listening constitutes the primal step for recognizing the Other and, thereby, constituting them as a subject, in opposition to the objectifying gaze. This ethic is grounded in the refusal to define the Other by arbitrarily positioning foregrounds and backgrounds as fixed identities. It is enacted by allowing the Other to form their subjectivity through an (almost) ceaseless narrative, unencumbered by the listener's "internal noise". Concretely, it means giving the person with a (discernable) migration background as much space as possible through hearkening, whether in a bureaucratic or private context. This approach can help prevent reducing the other person to their migration foreground.

[16] This type of listening has also been described as modern, attuned to the 'who' behind the speech (Barthes, 1982: 217).

[17] If we were to answer Jacques Derrida's (Dufourmantelle et al., 1997: 31, 93.) query – whether hospitality consists in questioning the newcomers or in receiving them without – we would have to respond: True hospitality begins with listening to the newcomers. Listening is a form of receiving: *"Nous l'écoutons, l'aveugle, l'étranger sans regard"* (translated by the author: "We listen to him, the blind man, the stranger without a gaze").

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3.2 The Openness of Hearkening

Precisely because hearkening is aware that the 'I' is always more than its story, it does not turn away from the Other. It remains turned towards-the-Other, especially since it does not presume to have fully understood and thereby concluded the encounter. Like a Platonic dialogue, an aporia persists. Ideally, it consists of an inexhaustible surplus of attention that remains independent of what is said and heard (Lipari, 2014: 197). In the intercultural context, and based on the primacy of listening, Heinz Kimmerle (n.d.) described the interaction with the Other similarly as an "unfinishable movement" and an "infinite task", one that repeatedly leads back to the self, which, thereby, constantly mingles with the Other.

The incompleteness points to the openness of hearkening, even though it can be said to have a certain directionality and one can also choose not to listen. In Heidegger's (2006: 163) thought, this open ear even becomes something ontological: an "existential openness" that transforms *Dasein* into being-with (*Mitsein*). Unlike the eye, which can be closed with a lid, the ear remains receptive. It is less totalizing and thus less conclusive. This openness was already evident in the woman's posture and points to the embodied, physical dimension of hearkening, which received more attention in antiquity. The woman listened not only with her entire (lived) body but also attended to what was pre-linguistic – glances, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. In this way, she perceived the sad eyes of my friend and heard the initial trembling in her voice.

Here, too, we must not fall into the mistaken belief that openness is something purely passive. It is something active, at first even an effort, that, much like hearkening, must be cultivated. Nevertheless – or perhaps precisely because of this – it is accompanied by vulnerability, which is why it is often avoided. Guests whom one lets into the house can always come too close. Listening is sometimes even associated with a certain weakness: it is considered the most sensitive of all senses, the one that touches our emotions most directly. It is precisely this vulnerability that marks a central difference between conventional hearing and hearkening, or "listening otherwise", as Lisbeth Lipari (2014: 197) calls it. This vulnerability connects those engaged in dialogue through their shared humanness. All of this – directedness, openness, vulnerability – ultimately means that they cannot simply look away. Hearing a voice involves a kind of "non-indifference"[18] (Grüny, 2018: 261): I must respond to it.

This incompleteness and openness may likewise be attributed to the dynamic nature of hearing, its movement through time (Jonas, 1973: 200). While seeing captures everything and everyone at once within a visual field, our vocal sounds reached the woman gradually. In a certain sense, this dynamic mirrors the continual transformation of subjects. One could even argue that the weaker, more indirect object-relation inherent in this dynamic counters the objectification of the Other. In hearkening, the woman first perceived our voices and only then inferred us as persons. In contrast to the visual, whose presence is immediately given, the auditory presents itself more like those who arrive: in the process of arriving (Nancy, 2002: 34).

An ethics of hearkening is, as a consequence, further characterized by vulnerability and (active) openness, sustained through its surplus of attention towards-the-Other, allowing

[18] Grüny's thinking is grounded in Emmanuel Lévinas.

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them to reveal themselves rather than becoming a being-(for)-nothing. In practice, this could mean giving the person with a migrant background the opportunity to continue their narrative, even if it breaks off at times. An additional disclosure of vulnerability on the listener's part could enrich the encounter but appears particularly challenging in bureaucratic contexts.

3.3 "Listening Otherwise" and Non-understanding

Through all of this, we not only make space for otherness, but consciously listen for it, we practice "listening otherwise" (Lipari, 2014: 177-187). Rather than listening as an act of adaptation, listening to otherness means giving oneself the time, space, and opportunity to appreciate the Other's difference and to endure it (Schutte, 1998: 61). At this point, a problem becomes apparent, one that extends beyond questions of migration and reaches deep into philosophy itself, helping to explain why philosophy has historically privileged sight. Anglo-European philosophy has long tended to appropriate the Other (in the process of understanding).

This, too, can be linked to the sensual qualities involved: While seeing fixes and objectifies, hearing is belated, always arriving too late. As a result, the Other remains, to some extent, inaccessible and resists appropriation, which may further account to why the 'I' is necessarily more, as noted above. The woman perceived our words only after they had already left us, after our thoughts had long been translated into language. And each time she heard a new word, it had already faded, lingering only as a retention in the next sound.

Appropriation is known to be the most effective form of defense; it protects the self from being called into question. As soon as the Other is assimilated into the Self, alterity succumbs to identity: Otherness disappears, and the process of understanding is considered complete. Those who take possession of something need not open up or step outside of themselves, thereby avoiding vulnerability. Understanding certainly can be a shield. In the context of migration, hearkening might encourage integration without assimilating (like the eye does) and erasing otherness. For while opponents of immigration often recognize the otherness of Others and repudiate them precisely for that reason, supporters often advocate for acceptance only on the condition that this otherness be relinquished.

Unlike hearing understood as "*deciphering*" (Barthes, 1982: 217) or Cartesian seeing, which – in the spirit of science – strives for complete penetration and comprehension, hearkening does not seek to appropriate the Other through forced understanding. In fact, succumbing to the belief that one understands the Other can obstruct the very process of understanding. On the contrary, the ability of non-understanding may offer a path towards insight or to an awareness of the limits of understanding itself (Gurevitch, 1989). Through deliberate estrangement and the suspension of prior knowledge, the Other's otherness is restored, enabling a new beginning in the cycle of understanding. Perhaps the problem lies already in the *will* to understand. For this will to understand, emanating from the 'I', constrains the space for the unchosen, the pre-intentional. Derrida (1984: 57; cf. Kapsch, 2007: 133-134), referring to Heidegger, situates this will to understand within the "metaphysics of the will", a framework of a bygone era, characterized by self-interest and a will aligned with power, which ultimately undermines the process of understanding.

The act of becoming attentive or listening up carries particular significance here. These are pre-intentional moments that generate meaning without deliberately seeking it

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(Espinet, 2009: 127). Listening still moves towards the Other, but without knowing exactly where to, because the position of the 'who' or 'what' is continually redefined in the very act of hearkening. Such attentiveness creates space for the otherness of the Other, as it exceeds expected meaning and thus avoids appropriating the Other. It is precisely the previously mentioned surplus of attentiveness that prevents this process from reaching closure.[19] Closure would undermine the otherness, which is itself marked by constant transformation.

Understood in this way, hearkening is will-less and committed to a metaphysics of being. It seeks neither to dominate nor to categorize or understand. It simply is, it is all ear (Nancy, 2002 16-17). An ear attuned more to wonder than to curiosity, the kind of curiosity which is closely tied to the visual and seeks to comprehend (Heidegger, 2006: 170-173). Wonder, by contrast, is marked by the unknown, which transcends the limits of understanding. Accordingly, one might say: The woman may have wished to understand us as a whole, but only insofar as that understanding was not constrained by her own will. She made a conscious effort not to translate what she heard directly into what was already understood.[20] Only in this way could she marvel and remain open to the unexpected in what we shared. To that which lay behind the migration foreground.

The problem, nonetheless, lies in the fact that most listening is already a form of understanding, and it requires practice, even effort, to at least partially detach listening from this interpretive process (Heidegger 2006: 163-164).[21] The woman did not just hear a squeaking sound, she immediately associated it with the object that produced it, the train wheels and tracks. Similarly, she did not only perceive our voices and words but instantly linked them to us and interpreted the meaning of the sentences. Without doing this to some extent, communication likely would not have been possible. And yet, she tried to reduce interpretation to the necessary minimum.

In short, an ethics of hearkening must cultivate acceptance of non-understanding, thereby enabling and, at times, enduring, difference or strangeness. In some cases, this non-understanding may even serve as a prerequisite for genuine understanding. Practically speaking, this means finding a balance between understanding and non-understanding

[19] What is needed is an ethics of attention that specifically relates to the act of hearkening, though this cannot be elaborated further here. Simone Weil's (1980: 76) reflections – which, like those of Iris Murdoch later, tend to focus more on the visual – are particularly relevant in this context: "*L'attention consiste à suspendre sa pensée, à la laisser disponible, vide et pénétrable à l'objet, à maintenir en soi-même à proximité de la pensée, mais à un niveau inférieur et sans contact avec elle, les diverses connaissances acquises qu'on est forcé d'utiliser*" (translation by the author: "Attention consists in suspending one's thought, making it available, empty, and open to the object; in keeping within oneself, close to thought but at a lower level and without touching it, the various pieces of knowledge one is obliged to use").

[20] In the psychoanalytic context, it was Sigmund Freud (1912: 483) who further developed listening in this direction. This form of listening was not meant to judge or hierarchize, but rather to be "*gleichschwebend*" (evenly hovering) – that is, to give equal attention to everything that is said, in order to create space for the unexpected. The complex question of the role of the will – and the paradox of how it is possible to will not to will – cannot be explored in full here (cf. Heidegger, 1995).

[21] This attempt is made particularly in non-dualistic philosophies, which strive for the pure experience of sound, free from anticipation and presuppositions (Loy, 2019: 65). However, it is likely necessary here to distinguish between sounds and voices.

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that enables people with an (apparent) migration background to live together with 'locals', respectively those for whom this background has faded into oblivion. It implies shaping 'integration' policies in a way that ensures otherness does not vanish entirely but rather holds the potential to enrich society.

3.4 Hearkening to Silence

The will-lessness, coupled with its openness to the Other, also manifests in the silence already alluded to, a silence inseparably linked to hearkening, which will be addressed here only briefly. It was this silence that repeatedly settled between the woman and us. As with hearing and hearkening, different forms of silence or stillness can be distinguished (Fuchs, 2004: 151-156): the silence that surrounds words and sounds; the kind that is necessary to transform mere hearing into hearkening; and the silence that conveys the unsaid – often more meaningful than words themselves, as suggested by Socrates and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Like hearkening, this silence is neither passive nor weak. While in liberal traditions it is often associated with a deceptive kind of infallibility, it is not a merely withholding or obstructive silence, but a productive, transformative, and subversive one, a silence in which alternative ways of being, thinking, and acting can find space (Brunner, 2018: 51, 57).

Together with hearkening, we thus create space for the "twice unspoken": both for what power conceals and for what remains unarticulated in our interlocutor (Brunner, 2018: 53). Especially my friend, who often dared not speak due to epistemic injustices,[22] only found the courage to express herself through the woman's silence. But this silence does not merely serve to make room for the unspoken, it also accounts for the surplus of meaning (Ferrari, 2021: 247). It opens space for all that we have (not) been and cannot (yet) put into words. At the same time, as will be elaborated later, it creates a space where meaning can emerge. It allows for something other than the migration background to come to the forefront, something unexpected, even unheard, that speaks out against power structures.

Silence can be understood as a counterpart to the previously described stopping. While stopping makes the migration background visible, silence holds the possibility that it recedes or does not appear at all. In connection with seeing, this dynamic has been linked to the concept of hesitation: Hesitation means putting aside the immediacy of affective reactions while the affective experience continues (Al-Saji, 2014: 147). In this sense, one can say that silence is a form of hesitation that creates space – for reinterpretations, for corrections, for change.

In brief, an ethics of hearkening is closely tied to silence. It not only enables the listener to question the power structures they may be entangled in, but also provides the speaker with space for the unspoken, whether it emerges on its own or is transformed into articulation. In this way, it permits the migration foreground to recede or even remain absent from the forefront. Applied to encounters between 'locals' and those with a more pronounced migration background, this entails cultivating an acceptance, even an

[22] Even an accent is enough for native speakers to stop (truly) listening and to attribute linguistic or intellectual incompetence. This affects not only how we speak, but also what we feel able to say at all, illustrating how a migration background comes to the forefront not only through seeing but also through hearing (cf. Schutte, 1998: 60, 63.).

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appreciation, of silence, allowing others the time to find their words, if they choose to speak at all. It may even involve learning to listen to what the unsaid is saying.

3.5 The Resonance of Truth

What is suggested once again is that through hearkening we seek to attend to certain forms of surplus and provide them with space. Connected to this is a concept of truth – here only briefly indicated – that goes beyond the correspondence theory and other dominant notions of truth. Theories dealing with listening often point in a similar direction: We listen to what lies in unknown depths, beneath the surface, not what is immediately visible. This stands in contrast to a concept of truth understood (following René Descartes) in terms of the visual as representation (e.g., Heidegger, 1977: 91).

Jean-Luc Nancy (2002: 19), for instance, emphasizes in his discussion of listening that meaning not only has to make sense but also resounds from a depth of meaning or truth itself that can only be experienced through listening. This is linked to the idea that the self – in line with the ever-evading 'who' – is not available but rather a *"a resonance of a deferral"* (Nancy, 2002: 30). Heidegger, who increasingly turns to listening, similarly understands this as a truth not solely anchored in beings (*Seienden*) or in what is present visually, but pointing towards Being (*Sein*) itself. We are more than what the woman saw in us, even more than what we expressed. More than our migration background or foreground. If anything, the woman could do justice to this excess only through hearkening, either because she understood it or because she knew it did not need to be understood (entirely).

Many prevailing notions of truth fall short when it comes to hearkening because hearkening itself generates meaning. Rather than us conveying something to the woman that she then tried to decode as accurately as possible, her hearkening brought forth something that had not existed before. Much like Socratic maieutics or the Sphoṭa theory, meaning emerges within the dialogical space through the act of hearkening itself (Lipari, 2014). A simplified explanation for why this happens lies in the resonant space opened up by the accompanying silence. Within that space, what is said can unfold, shift, perhaps echo, creating the conditions for new thoughts to emerge. Put differently: hearkening expands the gap between pathos and response, the "site of *incubation*" from which something new can arise (Waldenfels, 2017: 36). This aligns with the idea that every encounter already shapes the 'who' and 'what' they express. The fact that the woman sat across from us and hearkened was already influencing the overall meaning. This momentary emergence of meaning – where resonance, openness, and truth converge – complicates the formation of stereotypes.

The concept of "truthful listening" (*Wahrhören*), as formulated by Waldenfels (2015: 422-421) in reference to Michel Foucault's notion of *parrhēsía* (truth-telling), can be fruitfully applied in this context. Although Waldenfels initially refers to the act of listening to one's own speaking, he also invokes Socrates' *daimonion* and emphasizes – much like in the previously discussed notion of a resonance space – that this is not a straightforward transmission of information from sender to receiver. Foucault's (2008: 43) term further highlights qualities that are especially relevant in the context of migration. For him, *parrhēsía* is, among other things, a *franc-parler*, a way of speaking the whole truth openly, regardless of evidence, rational discourse structures, rhetorical strategies, or possible consequences. It is speech as a risk, saying what the other does not want to hear. Applied

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to hearkening, this might mean, it is a form of hearing (and speaking) that resists the conventions shaped by power and habit, thereby making space for a 'whole' truth, one that might otherwise remain unspoken, as was the case with my friend, who often did not dare to voice what moved her. For such truth-speaking to become possible, it requires a mode of listening that, like that of the woman, becomes truthful listening precisely by suspending its own speaking and, therefore, not drowning out what is being said by others (Brunner, 2018: 59).

In essence, an ethics of hearkening is connected to a concept of truth that differs from the prevailing correspondence theory and similar frameworks. It acknowledges what is not immediately apparent, allowing meaning to emerge through dialogue and giving voice to truths that are often unheard (of). Again, this enables migration foregrounds to withdraw or remain merely in the background from the outset. When applied, this means refraining from judging people with an (obvious) migration background according to one's immediate, assumed truths. Instead, one should create conditions that encourage us to speak freely and without constraint.

3.6 Hearkening In-Between Subject and Object

The openness of hearkening can also be related to the relationship between subject and object, as well as to the accompanying question of distance. Unlike seeing, which often creates distance from 'migrants' and objectifies them, hearing is described as a sense that affects and moves us. The auditory penetrates our thoughts more directly than the visual (Ihde 2007: 212). This may be because the ear tends to lead inward, while the eye leads outward. Although hearkening focuses on something, it operates differently from the previously described mode of seeing:

> "What certainly does not exist in hearing is an equivalent of Sartre's gaze, which pins down and objectifies the other – speaking of a piercing, drilling, or dissecting kind of hearing makes no sense"[23] (Grüny, 2018: 262).

Moreover, this capacity to be affected is conditioned by the fact that light rays come to rest on our retina, whereas sound waves penetrate us and set our bodies in motion. We hear with skin and hair, we listen with flesh and bone. That our voices resonated within the woman illustrates how pronounced intercorporeality is in comparison to seeing. The boundaries between subject and object may never dissolve entirely, but the rigidity of this distinction is weakened in the process. As we spoke with the woman, our voices entered her and found expression within her. In the very moment they resounded in her, we had already become a part of her, just as our own voice speaks within ourselves.

It was only when the woman began to reflect that she estranged the voices once more, thereby making them, to some extent, ours again. And yet, the otherness remained and became a part of the Other within her. These qualities of hearkening result in a blending of the outer and inner, such that the woman was both herself and the Other, singular and plural at once (Nancy, 2002: 31, 33). She was herself and at the same time, she was my friend and me. To return once more to the concept of listening otherwise: Although we open ourselves and take in the Other – thereby challenging the boundaries between

[23] Translation by the author: "*Was es beim Hören sicher nicht gibt, ist ein Äquivalent des Satreschen Blicks, der den Anderen festnagelt und objektiviert – die Rede von einem stechenden, bohrenden oder sezierenden Hören hat keinen Sinn*."

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alterity and identity – the self never dissolves completely (Lipari, 2014; cf. Levin, 1989: 228).

It is not about fusion, but about entanglement. Fusion, in this context, would amount to dispossession rather than appropriation. Instead, the 'we' and the 'they' meet each other. The boundary between the 'locals' and the 'migrants' becomes as porous as the one between us and the woman, without either party losing their sense of self. Perhaps the synthetic quality of listening – beyond the assembling of sounds, tones, and noises – lies precisely in this capacity.

To summarize, the ethics of hearkening would enable and support overcoming the dichotomy between those involved in the encounter, without erasing differences. On the one hand, the migration foreground could recede through entanglement with the 'locals'. On the other hand, there would be no need to negate it entirely.

4 Conclusion – or the Boat in the Harbor

I was only able to outline hearkening, and the ethics thereof, in rough contours, leaving certain aspects aside. For instance, the fact that the present scopic regime, in accordance with its scientific influence, is committed to ratio, whereas hearkening possesses an emotional component. Nonetheless, I hope to have highlighted a central point: If we genuinely aim to shape migration policy and interactions with people who have an (apparent) migration background in ways that contribute to a more humane and just world – one where migration is perceived as an enrichment rather than a threat – then this lies in meeting newcomers and those with a migration background not primarily through the dominant logic of seeing but through cultivating the practice of hearkening. Doing so helps prevent the migrantification of the current scopic regime, which tends to foreground the migration background. Such ethics of hearkening was described as an active, open, vulnerable, and bridging practice of recognizing the other as a subject through attentive silence and (truth-)listening. Although we, at first, applied this to the 'local' residents, it equally applies to people with a (discernable) migration background themselves – and even beyond the migration debate.

It would, however, be not only impossible but also undesirable to close our eyes entirely. Rather, the goal is to establish a balance between the senses, and in doing so, to develop a way of seeing that is less shaped by the negative tendencies it currently exhibits in this context, such as objectification, fixation, distancing, and invisibilization. Recently, it was Alia Al-Saji (2024) who, drawing on Fanon, even brought the metaphor and sensory dimension of touch into the debate on colonialism and racialization. This might serve as a reminder that such interactions must ultimately be read through the lens of the *sensus communis*, or the interrelation of the senses, as we may indeed be 'touched' by what we see or hear.

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QRP

Emotional Labour in the Context of EU-Internal Immigration: A Qualitative Study on Immigrants' Emotional Adaptation at Work[1]

Clara Noa Stelljes[2]

Abstract

In 1983, Arlie Hochschild introduced the theory of emotional labour, framing the management and regulation of emotion in professional settings as an additional form of labour. While her theory has been widely adopted within sociology, its application to immigrant experiences remains limited. This article – based on the master thesis 'Emotional Labour Across Borders' written within the program 'International Migration and Ethnic Relations' at Malmö University, Sweden – explores how immigration shapes workers' perceptions and performances of emotional labour by focusing on the workplace experiences of immigrants from Southern EU countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece) living in Sweden. Drawing on seven semi-structured interviews, which were analysed through Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), the study examines how emotional labour is affected by cross-cultural transitions, workplace diversity, and structural inequalities related to gender and race. The findings suggest that while emotional labour remains a consistent part of service work, its perception and intensity are influenced by economic contrasts between home and host countries, the nature of collegial and managerial support, and intersecting experiences of marginalization. This research not only contributes to emotional labour theory by incorporating EU-internal immigrant perspectives but also opens avenues for further studies on integration and the emotional dynamics of migration more broadly.

Key Words:

Emotional labour, EU-internal immigration, southern EU, Sweden, qualitative content analysis

1 Introduction

In a globalized economy marked by increased labour mobility, the emotional dimensions of work take on new complexities. Migration often entails not just geographic relocation, but also cultural and emotional negotiation of norms, expectations, and social hierarchies. For immigrant workers, the transition into an unfamiliar labour market can involve the navigation of unfamiliar emotional expectation within both customer-facing roles and workplace hierarchies. These transitions are further shaped by factors such as language barriers, different cultures, and varying work environments.

This article – in line with the master thesis 'Emotional Labour across Borders', on which it is based – explores how immigration affects emotional perception and performance at

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work, using Hochschild's theory of *emotional labour*. The study presented here focuses on EU-internal immigration to Sweden and uses semi-structured interviews, later analysed with a Qualitative Content Analyses (QCA) to examine the intersection of economic conditions, workplace composition, and experiences of gendered and racialized emotional labour with immigrant workers' emotional experiences on the job. By centring voices of workers navigating transnational employment contexts, this research seeks to expand emotional labour theory beyond its traditional focus and contribute to broader debates within migration studies.

2 Theory

In her book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling (1983)*, sociologist Ariel Hochschild introduced the theory of *emotional labour*, a foundational idea in the field sociology of emotion. Her work shifted focus from private emotional management to the workplace, highlighting how emotions are shaped, regulated and commodified to meet organizational demands. This section outlines Hochschild's theory and reviews key research developments, which will also create the basis for the deductive categories used in this empirical study, a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA).

2.1 Core Ideas

Hochschild's theory of *emotional labour* describes the emotional management required of workers in order to adequately perform on their job. According to the author, this may entail either altering one's outward expression to convey the appropriate emotion without changing one's internal feeling – a process Hochschild calls *surface acting*. For example, a worker may smile to appear friendly despite feeling frustrated. Alternatively, workers may attempt to internally generate the required emotion by drawing on emotional memories or emphasising with the customer – a process Hochschild calls *deep acting*. A worker might, for instance, pretend that they are interacting with a child instead of a rude customer (Hochschild, 1983: 37-48).

Hochschild classifies emotional management as an additional form of labour, suggesting that the suppression and evocation of emotions in exchange for wages entails the commodification of workers' private emotions. This distinguishes emotional labour from previous understandings of *emotion work*, which refers to similar emotional regulation in people's personal life. Hochschild emphasizes the importance of commercialisation, suggesting that employers gain control over worker's emotional expression, turning emotional management into part of worker's professional responsibility, distinct from existing forms of physical or cognitive work (Hochschild, 1983: 20, 55).

She further specifies that the performance of emotional labour is guided by *feeling rules*, socially constructed norms that dictate the appropriate length and expression of emotion, reinforcing social hierarchies and workplace expectations. These rules are context specific and vary by institution and culture (Hochschild, 1983: 56-63).

Hochschild also highlights several risks tied to emotional labour. Mainly, she points out the gap created by performing emotions that are misaligned with the workers genuine feelings – which she calls *emotional dissonance* – can over time lead to identity confusion, stress and feelings of emotional detachment. Especially deep acting – the purposeful altering of genuine emotional reactions – can cause internalisation issues, negatively influencing the workers self-perception as untruthful or deceitful. Additionally, with the

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performance of emotional labour for unsympathetic audiences comes a loss of control for the worker performing it, which may heighten stress or defensiveness (Hochschild, 1983: 90, 132-134).

In essence, emotional labour is the regulation of emotions required to meet workplace expectations, shaped by social norms and employer demands.

2.2 Further Developments

Hochschild's foundational work has since inspired further research, refining and expanding this theory. Following, the different areas of theoretical focus that have emerged will be described.

2.2.1 Private and Public Sector

Hochschild – in her initial publication – focused solely on the emotional labour expected of workers in customer facing roles in the private sector. While this focus has since been researched further in an attempt to determine the importance of differing factors such as task variety (Morris & Feldman, 1996a), job satisfaction (Guy & Jin, 2009; Hsieh, 2012) and job autonomy (Wharton, 1993), her theory has since been applied to public sector work also.

Scholars have determined that emotional labour in public sector work, with research mainly focused on the fields education (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Meier et al., 2006) and healthcare (Riley & Weiss, 2016; Theodosius, 2008), differs from the private sector in some key aspects. In the private sector, emotional labour often aims to increase customer satisfaction with the goal of heightened profitability. In contrast, in public sector roles, emotional labour serves to build public trust and legitimacy, with a lessened focus on generating profit.

2.2.2 Internal Organizational Relations

The theory of emotional labour has been further expanded to include internal organizational relations – specifically workers' interactions with co-workers and managers – as oppose to solely focusing on face-to-face and voice-to-voice communication with customers. Kang and Jang (2022) examined emotional labour among colleagues, finding that high emotional demands can reduce engagement and increase turnover intentions. They also emphasized the importance of supervisor support to reduce the emotional strain caused by the performance of emotional labour. Gabriel et al. (2020) found that emotional labour between co-workers differs from that with clients due to the deeper and longer-lasting nature of these relationships. According to the authors, workers tend to deep act with colleagues, reducing the emotional dissonance and exhaustion they experience, while increasing the amount of emotional labour due to the increased intimacy and duration of these interactions. Shumski Thomas et al. (2018) investigated how emotional labour is perceived differently based on hierarchical position, with supervisors viewing meetings as less effectively if they themselves must surface act.

2.2.3 Gender and Race

Gender was a central focus of Hochschild's initial publication, as her research focused on flight attendants, a largely female-dominated profession. In her book, she outlines four gendered dimensions to emotional labour: Firstly, women have limited access to material resources, which increases pressure to commodify emotions. Secondly, women are

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overrepresented in emotionally demanding roles such as caregivers, in part due to the socially constructed understanding of women as nurturing and caring. Thirdly, women's perceived lack of authority makes them more vulnerable to customers' emotional outbursts. Lastly, gender norms dictate which emotions should be portrayed by whom, stipulating that women should be warm and giving while men are expected to show dominance through negative emotions like anger (Hochschild, 1983, pp. 162-184).

Later studies expand on the gendered dimension, showing that women are more often expected to perform emotional labour. Müller (2019) attributes this to women's socialization and subordinate position in the social hierarchy, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, while Meier et al. (2006) highlight the gendered division of work based on presumed emotional capabilities. Acker (1990) further argues that organizational structures are often built on gendered assumptions, disadvantaging women and reinforcing male dominance.

Although race was not a major focus in Hochschild's initial theory, recent research has developed the concept of racialized emotional labour, which examines the added burden of managing emotions under conditions of discrimination and microaggressions. In workplaces where positive emotional display is required, racialized workers must suppress genuine emotional responses to racism (Evans & Moore, 2015). They often perform additional emotional labour to be perceived similarly to their white colleagues, working against racial bias (Grandey et al., 2018; Humphrey, 2021). Wingfield (2010) argues that black women, in particular, must navigate both gendered and racialized stereotypes, requiring them to suppress negative emotions to appear approachable and counter prejudices. Similarly, Holgersson and Romani (2020) show how racialized women in male-dominated workplaces are simultaneously hyper-visible and constrained, resulting in added emotional strain as they manage both their organizational roles and broader social expectations. Schütze and Stelljes (2025) suggested that racialized emotional labour is a multi-dimensional process depending on the type of interaction, colour-blindness in the organizational culture and racialized processes, such as micro-aggressions and white normativity.

Overall, research shows that emotional labour is more burdensome for marginalized groups, who must navigate stereotypes and discrimination without space for authentic emotional expression.

2.2.4 Consequences of Emotional Labour

Hochschild's work primarily highlighted the negative impacts of emotional labour on workers. Subsequent research has reinforced these concerns. Hsieh (2012) found that emotional labour – particularly the suppression of negative emotions – is closely linked to emotional exhaustion, diminishing worker enthusiasm and contributing to burnout. Other studies have also connected emotional labour to burnout, especially in environments with low social support or inadequate training for emotionally demanding roles (Bartram et al., 2012; Näring et al., 2006; Shankar & Kumar, 2014). Additionally, emotional labour has been associated with depression, cynicism and alienation (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Wharton, 1993).

The concept of emotional dissonance, first introduced by Hochschild as the disconnect between genuine feelings and displayed emotion, has also been explored further. Van Dijk and Brown (2006) argue that this dissonance mediate the relationship between emotional

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labour and emotional exhaustion. Morris and Feldman (1996b) frame it as a form of role conflict, particularly evident in surface acting, where emotional mismatch can increase stress and lead to burnout.

While much of the literature emphasises the risks, some scholars have identified potential benefits. Wharton (1993) suggests that when emotional labour is performed successfully – especially under conditions of job autonomy and moderate workload – it can enhance job satisfaction. Similarly, Humphrey et al. (2015) introduce the idea of genuine emotional labour, in which workers naturally identify with their roles and rarely need to fake or suppress feelings. This form of emotional labour may improve self-esteem and reinforce positive sense of self.

2.2.5 Emotional Labour and Immigration

Research on emotional labour in relation to immigration has primarily focused on the care sector. This is largely because of Hochschild (2000) expanding her theory through the idea of global care chains – networks of transnational care work in which migrants exchange emotional and physical labour for wages, often shifting family responsibility back home. This globalized care work reshapes both emotional experience and family structures. Immigrant care workers are often vulnerable due to the isolated, informal and unprotected nature of in-house care (Bauer & Österle, 2013; Fu et al., 2018). Work visa dependence further restricts the immigrants freedom to leave exploitative environments (Dyer et al., 2008; Huang & Yeoh, 2007).

Additionally, racialized and gendered hierarchies in care professions intensify emotional strain and limit career advancement due to stereotyping and systemic barriers (Batnitzky & McDowell, 2011; Dyer et al., 2008). Cultural and social differences further complicate emotional labour for immigrant workers. Ho et al. (2019) note that 'morality and expression of emotion are socially conceptualized' (p. 6), which can lead to misunderstandings or stigmatization in cross-cultural care relationships. Dyer et al. (2008) similarly highlight the challenge of navigating culturally specific feeling rules in emotionally demanding roles. Bauer and Österle (2013) argue that the commodification of domestic care often aligns with culturally ingrained family and social values around caregiving, making immigrant workers particularly suited for these roles. Researchers also emphasise that gendered expectations in care roles increase emotional strain, particularly for women, who face added risks of exploitation and abuse (Fu et al., 2018; Huang & Yeoh, 2007).

Despite this focus on vulnerability, some studies highlight potential benefits. Tsujimoto (2014) suggests emotional labour can be used strategically to build trust and gain work advantages. Singkul et al. (2019) argue it offers immigrant sex workers a way to screen clients and maintain agency, while Sahraoui (2018) sees it as a source of pride and identity reinforcement.

3 Methodology

To explore how immigration shapes the experience of emotional labour, this study is based on interviews with seven immigrant workers from Southern Europe. This section outlines the research design and methodological approach, explaining the rationale behind the chosen focus and the criteria used to select participants. It also details the process of data handling and introduces the method of analysis employed – Qualitative Content Analysis as developed by (Kuckartz, 2014).

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3.1 Research Approach

This qualitative study is both case-based and problem oriented to investigate how immigration affects emotional management at work (Aghamanoukjan et al., 2009). Methodologically, this approach combines deductive and exploratory elements: deductive reasoning, grounded in Hochschild's theory and existing literature, guided the research approach focus and study design (6 & Bellamy, 2012). At the same time, the study remains open to theory-building by exploring under-researched areas and generating context-specific insights.

3.2 Data Collection

To explore the effect of immigration on the perception of emotional labour, this study employs semi-structured interviews, which allow the participants to share their personal experiences while guiding the conversation towards relevant themes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The interview guide uses open-ended, and narrative questions designed to elicit in-depth reflections without leading responses. Rather than asking directly about theoretical concepts, the guide encourages participants to narrate their experiences – starting with their previous workplaces in their home countries and then moving to their current place of employment in Sweden. This interview design aligns with both deductive theories used and explorative research, supporting a nuanced understanding of immigration's influence on emotional labour.

3.2.1 Area of Investigation

This study focuses on immigration from the Southern EU – specifically Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece – to Sweden. These countries were chosen due to their cultural and economic contrast with Sweden, offering a meaningful context to explore how immigration influences emotional labour. In 2024, approximately 58,000 individuals immigrated from Southern EU countries to Sweden (StatisticsSweden, 2023). This pattern, rooted in post-WWII dynamics and intensified by the 2008 financial crisis, reflects ongoing economic disparities between the Northern and Southern EU (Lafleur & Stanek, 2017). The four southern countries continue to face high unemployment and lower wages, with annual salaries ranging from 20,000€ - 30,000€, which is significantly below Sweden's average of 45,000€ (Eurostat, 2023; Yanatma, 2024). Beyond economics, the Southern EU cultures tend to emphasize close familial ties and informal social norms (Andreotti et al., 2001; Boltho, 2020). These differences shape emotional expectations and behaviours, making the transition to Sweden's work environment a particularly insightful case for studying emotional adaptation through migration. Furthermore, the focus on EU-internal immigration ensures that the participants did not experience visa-related barriers, which has been a focus in existing research on emotional labour and immigration.

3.2.2 Selection of the Participants

Based on the chosen area of investigation, participant selection was based on three main criteria: a background of immigration from Southern EU countries to Sweden, employment experience in both regions, and work within the same or similar fields before and after immigrating to isolate the effect of immigration on emotional labour. Recruitment followed a convenience sampling approach (Gill, 2020) through public Facebook, WhatsApp, and Discord groups targeting expats and international students in Malmö, Sweden. To broaden the pool, snowball sampling was also used, with participants helping to identify additional

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candidates through their social networks (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017). In total, seven interviews were conducted – five with participants in customer-facing roles and two in less public-facing fields: academia and engineering.

Table 1: Interview Participants

Alias	CO	Job in CO	Job in Sweden	Time in Sweden
Nicos	Greece	Waiter in a restaurant	Waiter in a restaurant	1.5 years
Pavlos	Greece	Engineer	Engineer	8 years
Sofia	Spain	Cashier in a supermarket	Assistant in student housing	1.5 years
Maria	Portugal	Barista in a pastry shop	Barista and waitress in a bar	1.5 years
Luna	Italy	Academia	Academia	7 years
Camilla	Italy	Waitress	Waitress	2 years
Elena	Italy	Seller in an ice cream shop	Worker in a museum	3 years

3.2.3 Processing of the Data

All interviews followed the interview guide and lasted between 24 and 56 minutes. They were conducted either in person or via Zoom, depending on participants' availability – one no longer lives in Sweden (Camilla), and another resides in Gothenburg (Elena). Informed consent was obtained in line with ethical guidelines (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Interviews were recorded and transcribed using the rules outlined by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2022), ensuring consistency for the analysis. To protect participants' anonymity, pseudonyms were used, and identifiable details – such as specific workplaces or job titles – were generalized.

3.3 Data Analysis

The collected material was analysed using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), following Kuckartz (2014) seven-step model. This approach combines a structured, rule-based method with flexibility to capture both theoretical and emergent insights. Rooted in Mayring (2010) original framework, QCA aims to ensure transparency and comparability in qualitative research by organizing data into thematic categories derived from theory.

First, transcripts were reviewed for relevance to the research question. Based on Hochschild's theory, four main categories were developed: Internal Organizational Relations', Gender and Race', Social Differences', and 'Economic Differences'. Interview excerpts were coded accordingly, with irrelevant content excluded. Subcategories were added where needed – further distinguishing between 'Co-Worker Relations' and 'Supervisor Relations'. The material was then re-coded for clarity, and findings were interpreted, beginning with social and economic differences to provide contextual grounding for the other themes.

The finalized categorical system looks as follows:

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Table 2: The Deductive-Inductive Category System

	Main Category	Subcategory	Section
1.	Social Differences in Emotional Labour		2.2.5
2.	The Influence of Economic Differences on Emotional Labour		2.2.5
3.	Internal Organizational Relations	1. Co-Worker Relations 2. Supervisor Relations	2.2.2
4.	Gender and Race		2.2.3

Section = section of theoretical derivation

4 Presentation of the Findings

This section presents the interview findings, structured according to the categories identified through QCA. Each category is explored in a separate section, with attention paid to how participants' experiences differ based on their occupational fields. Following the presentation of each theme, the findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework outlined earlier, expanding existing theory through the perspective of immigration.

4.1 Differences in Emotional Labor

4.1.1 Findings

This category examines how participants perceive emotional expectations at work in their respective country of origin compared to Sweden, especially in customer-facing roles. It is interesting to note that none of the interviewees received formal training in emotional conduct; instead, they were broadly encouraged to remain positive during customer interactions.

Sofia recalls being told:

> "So, it was basically just to learn to be always with a good attitude, always leave my problems outside the work and only focusing on the customer […]" (Sofia, 12/03/2025).

Elena was similarly advised:

> "Well, yes, we were encouraged to just smile all the time […] trying to not show any negative, just emotions. Just try to be nice and pretty like kind" (Elena, 20/03/2025).

Despite similar guidance across workplaces, participants noted cultural differences in customer interaction. In their home countries, encounters were perceived as being more familiar and emotionally expressive, whereas in Sweden, they experienced more reserved and formal interactions.

Nikos, a waiter from Greece, observed that:

> "[…] Swedish people are more shy […] while the Greeks will be more loud, more demanding, most of the time, they will be more mean" (Nikos, 07/03/2025).

Camilla, who worked as a barista, observed that Swedish customers seemed largely indifferent to service workers' emotional display, while in Italy, failing to smile or show friendliness would prompt immediate feedback from patrons:

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> "[in Sweden] if you were bringing that coffee with a smile or without it, it wouldn't be a problem to them, but in Italy […] they're gonna say to you 'why' in a – in an explicit or hidden way" (Camilla, 17.03.2025).

For many participants, adjusting to the Swedish style of emotional reserve required a period of adaptation. Maria, who works in a bar in Sweden, described having to tone down her natural expressiveness and recalibrate the energy she projected in interactions with customers. She describes this adjustment as creating a sense of dissonance, especially early on, as she struggled to understand and embody the unspoken emotional norms of the new environment. Nikos also struggled with the initial adaptation, reflecting that: "I had to let go of a lot of stuff that I have learned from Greece […] it was a bit difficult to start questioning my whole working experience up until now […]" (Nikos, 07/03/2025).

According to these participants, the transition was not just about suppressing emotional expression, but about developing new ways of interpreting and responding to social cues, many of which were seen as more subtle or ambiguous in Sweden.

Interestingly, while all participants found this cultural shift challenging at first, their response diverged over time. For four of them, the more reserved Swedish service culture eventually became preferable. They felt it required less emotional effort and thus became less draining over time.

> "[…] so there are differences, of course, like the type of – like, Spanish people are like the cliché, you know, like loud, like obnoxious, like really touchy, we are like this. So here it's more like introverted, more like polite reserve, which I like, honestly, I love it" (Sofia, 12/03/2025).

However, not all experiences are aligned with this view. Camilla offered a contrasting perspective, expressing a strong preference for the more familiar, emotionally engaging environment she experienced in Italy. She described service encounters as an opportunity for genuine connection, reflecting on how her emotional performance often led to real emotional improvement.

Ultimately, Camilla found the Swedish context emotionally unsatisfying. The lack of expressive, personal interactions made it difficult for her to adjust. Despite higher wages, she returned to Italy after two years, choosing authenticity and comfort over financial gain.

> "But honestly, also with that little money, I would rather live in a – in a place that is (..) very relaxing for your mentality and sanity, mentality, for your mental health. So, I felt like Sweden was not for me, was not a good fit" (Camilla, 17/03/2025).

Camilla's story highlights how emotional culture at work is not only nationally shaped but deeply personal. While some participant valued the emotional detachment of Swedish service work, others experienced it as alienating. These accounts suggest that emotional expectations in customer service – though often informal – have a significant effect on how workers experience their jobs and, in some cases, their broader sense of belonging in a new country.

4.1.2 Discussion

The interviews revealed that all seven participants found adapting to Sweden's emotional norms initially challenging, particularly those in customer-facing roles. They described a period of emotional strain as they adjusted to new social cues and unfamiliar feeling rules – supporting the idea that emotional expectations are culturally constructed and not universally shared (Andreotti et al., 2001; Boltho, 2020).

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Once adjusted, participants' experiences diverge. Some came to value Sweden's emotionally reserved climate. They noted that fewer expectations for overt friendliness reduced the emotional dissonance they experienced, making their work feel more manageable. These individuals viewed their emotionally intense past work experiences in their countries of origin as useful preparation, helping them remain composed and resilient in Sweden's more subdued customer service context.

For others, the shift to a less expressive culture felt unnatural. Camilla described missing the informal and emotionally rich interactions of her home country, finding Swedish customer exchanges more performative and less authentic. This echoes Humphrey et al. (2015) concept of genuine emotional labour, where workers feel aligned with their emotional performance. In this context, the emotional display expected in Sweden clashed with Camilla's self-perception, increasing emotional dissonance and reducing job satisfaction.

These findings suggest that not only are emotional expectations culturally shaped, but so too are notions of authenticity in emotional labour (Ho et al., 2019). For some, immigration reduced the emotional burden of work; for others, it intensified it. Ultimately, the effect depends on how closely the host country's emotional norms align with workers internalised feeling rules and concept of self.

4.2 The influence of Economic Differences on Emotional Labour

4.2.1 Findings

This category explores how economic disparities between the investigated four southern EU countries and Sweden shape participants' workplace experience and emotional performance. All seven participants touched on this topic, with the clearest examples emerging from those working in customer service roles.

Across the interviews, participants described work in their countries of origin as more emotionally and physically draining due to low pay, long hours, and chaotic environments. These poor conditions affected expression at work. Maria, who previously worked in a Portuguese pastry shop, emphasised how the low wages influenced her willingness to perform:

> "Your work depends on how valued you feel. And this, you know, be it money wise, be it like, you know, this kind of interactions and like, emotionally wise. Um, obviously I was doing the bare minimum in Portugal, you cannot expect me to do more. I'm paying- I'm getting paid 3.5 euros an hour, like I will not be doing more than a bare minimum" (Maria, 13/03/2025).

She recalls how the emotional strain of unfair conditions made it difficult to display positivity with customers, instead generating resentment towards her workplace.

> "You cannot live off of 3.5 euros an hour, right? And also, you don't want to work getting paid 3.5- it's like you'd rather be unemployed. Because the energy, the mental space, the time that you are wasting getting that little pay, obviously it doesn't compensate I think […] And here in Sweden, like, it's not- that's not what's bonding. You know, bonding is like, you don't hate our workplace" (Maria, 13/03/2025).

Maria's comparison illustrates how better pay and recognition in Sweden increased her emotional investment and made her more willing to engage positively with customers. Similarly, Elena, who formerly worked in Italy's hospitality sector, noted how the calmer, more balanced conditions in Sweden made emotional management easier:

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> "Well, since here, I'm more relaxed, I feel like I can deal with my emotions better, like they don't just pop off, but I have time to just calm down. […] I think that's the main differences, like feeling more like a human being than a machine" (Elena, 20/03/2025).

Pavlos and Nikos also linked emotional strain to economic hardship. Pavlos highlighted how economic instability shaped his workplace stress in Greece, impinging that "the economic circumstances are what makes people who they are […]" (Pavlos, 12/03/2025).

He describes experiencing burnout in Greece and a sense of relief upon starting work in Sweden, where his newfound job security and structure improved his overall well-being as well as attitude towards work and therein his ability to portray positive emotions. Nikos similarly noted that the conditions of his Swedish workplace left him with more time and mental space, leaving him less emotionally drained.

Despite the improved economic conditions experienced by all seven participants upon starting work in Sweden, some raised concerns about exploitation. Camilla recalls being denied pay for trial shifts and suspected she was being taken advantage of due to her unfamiliarity with local laws. Maria echoed this, noting that she and her peer later realized their wages were below average for the Swedish standard, voicing concern that her employers were abusing the knowledge that their workforce mostly consists of immigrants who are unaware of the local job market. Maria ultimately describes her move as beneficial, but also emotionally taxing – especially during the early period of job searching and instability:

> "[…] before that, you know, just getting so like rejected, and then having like, trial shifts in places that were so awful […] having to negotiate, in your mind, like, I either stay in Sweden with a really shitty job that makes me extremely unhappy, or I have to give up on this part of my life […] a tricky process (Maria, 13/03/2025).

Maria's experience highlights how the emotional burden of immigration often begins before stable employment is secured. After getting work, the improvement in economic conditions shapes the workers' ability and willingness to engage in emotional management and display positivity.

4.2.2 Discussion

The quotes gathered into this category made it apparent that the economic disparities between southern EU countries and Sweden influence the participants experience of emotional labour. In accordance with Morris and Feldman (1996a), the findings reflect that both frequency and duration of emotional labour – particularly when paired with low job autonomy – can heighten emotional strain. However, participants' accounts expand on these notions by showing how immigration and improved economic conditions also shape emotional management, job loyalty, and ultimately, willingness to perform emotional labour.

Four participants who viewed their immigration as overall positive mainly attributed this to improved financial and working conditions – such as higher wages, reduced hours, and greater job security. These improvements enhance their emotional state and made them more willing to engage in emotional labour, supporting Wharton's (1993) link between job security and emotional performance.

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Many participants described emotional detachment from previous workplaces due to poor economic conditions, which made positive emotional display feel forced. In contrast, Swedish workplaces, perceives as fairer and more supportive, reduced this burden, and allowed for more authentic emotional expression – aligning with (Hsieh, 2012) findings that positive workplaces reduce the risk of burnout linked to emotional labour.

These experiences suggest that emotional labour is not only shaped by its volume but also by workplace conditions. They support Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional transmutation, but further suggest that fair compensation can make this process feel more acceptable.

While prior studies on immigrant workers' emotional labour focus on their vulnerability – especially in underregulated sectors like in-home care (Bauer & Österle, 2013; Fu et al., 2018) – this study's participants, working in varied sectors and not dependent on employment for legal residency (Dyer et al., 2008; Huang & Yeoh, 2007), reported less long-term vulnerability and more agency within their work. They noted the freedom to leave Sweden or change jobs, which reduced work related pressure.

However, two participants described a period of vulnerability upon arriving, including unpaid trial shifts and low wages. These early challenges affected emotional well-being but were seemingly not directly tied to emotional labour. Over time, increased familiarity with Swedish norms and labour laws reduced these risks.

Overall, the participants' experiences suggest that while emotional labour is shaped by workload and job autonomy (Morris & Feldman, 1996a), broader structural and economic factors also play a crucial role in how it is experienced and performed – making the context of immigration particularly unique.

4.3 Internal Organizational Relations

This category explores how immigration influences internal organizational relationships and, consequently, affects how workers perform emotional labour. It examines two key sub-categories: first, the relationship and interactions between immigrant workers and their co-workers; second, the dynamics between immigrant workers and their supervisors or managers.

4.3.1 Co-Worker Relations

- *Findings*

This section highlights key differences in emotional labour experiences between immigrants working in predominantly international workplaces (in the case of this study predominantly participants working in customer service) and those in mostly Swedish environments.

Before immigrating to Sweden, many participants describe strong bonds with their colleagues in their countries of origin, rooted in shared dissatisfaction with their jobs. These relationships allowed for mutual emotional support, often expressed through shared frustration. For example, Elena and Maria recall managing difficult customer interactions with the help of their co-workers, often venting together to cope with stress. This camaraderie seemed to ease the burden of emotional management by aligning internal feelings with shared external reactions.

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After moving to Sweden, some participants found similar support in international teams. Maria, for instance, now works in a diverse workplace where emotional openness is encouraged. She describes how team solidarity allows them to adjust responsibility based on each other's emotional states, helping reduce the strain of pretending to be cheerful in customer-facing roles.

> "I do have to – to pretend sometimes emotions. But I also feel like the team closeness allows us, for example, if I come, it has happened and I go and I'm like 'Guys, I'm so sad today. I feel so awful today.' And they were like 'Okay, you can just go work in glasses. You don't have to interact with anyone.' Perfect. And we do this to each other, you know. So, it's like, I do have to pretend, but I also, if I really, really have to pretend that I don't have to do that work because of my colleagues being so cool" (Maria, 13/03/2025).

This positive and supportive environment reduces the emotional dissonance perceived between felt and displayed emotions; by allowing workers to reduce customer interactions on days their internal feelings differ significantly from those they are expected to perform.

However, participants working in a predominantly Swedish workplace reported a different experience.

Firstly, they described instances in which they struggled to accurately interpret their co-worker's intentions and actions. Sofia and Pavlos struggled to understand Swedish colleagues, who they perceived as more reserved and difficult to read. To them, this made it harder to build trust, increasing emotional uncertainty.

> "Here, I can't here, I don't know, I don't know what they think about me. It's more like, I don't – I don't (…) they are so well reserved and so introvert sometimes that it's difficult for me to read their minds, like how – you know? It's really difficult to know" (Sofia, 12/03/2025).

Secondly, they recall experiencing linguistic isolation deepening their loneliness. Elena shared how Swedish-language conversation excluded her, making it hard to participate in workplace culture or express herself fully.

> "Sometimes they speak only Swedish, so sometimes I'm cut out from this group. […] I just let them be and just be by myself or speak with someone else. […] Kind of like, maybe on the short run, it was okay. Now it's the long run sometimes, yeah, I feel a bit lonely, maybe. Not being able to build real connection at work" (Elena, 20/03/2025).

This linguistic divide limited social bonding and added emotional strain, especially in customer-facing roles.

Thirdly, they describe that due to cultural differences, the workplace norms they were familiar with from their countries of origin did not properly translate into the Swedish context. Luna, for instance, found that what was considered professional in Italy (e.g., wearing heals and makeup) felt out of place in Sweden. When colleagues commented on her appearance, she felt jugged but suppressed her reaction to maintain a professional façade, reflecting the emotional effort required to adapt to unfamiliar norm as recalled by Luna, "[…] because obviously you can't show that you are being affected by the – by the comment, even though it's weird […]" (Luna, 14/03/2025).

Overall, participants who reported more negative experiences after immigration linked them to the social, linguistic and cultural disconnects. Elena, who felt open and friendly at work in Italy, now feels increasingly reserved in Sweden. This emotional distancing, driven by loneliness and cultural mismatch, increased the gap between her genuine feelings and

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expected emotional display – amplifying the amount of emotional management necessary. More international teams on the other hand can seemingly offer emotional support and reduce strain.

- *Discussion*

The participants' experiences of emotional labour after immigration appear to be closely tied to the collegial composition of their new workplace. In their countries of origin, many recalled bonding with co-workers over shared dissatisfaction with their jobs – an experience consistent with Hochschild's (1983: 115) observation that collective negativity can ease emotional strain through shared understanding but may also lower workplace loyalty and reduce the willingness to perform emotional labour. This negativity seemed to intensify emotional dissonance and decrease motivation to display positive emotions.

After immigrating to Sweden, these dynamics shifted depending on the workplace's cultural makeup. Participants working in international teams reported a smoother transition. Shared immigrant backgrounds and mutual unfamiliarity with Swedish norms helped foster understanding and reduce emotional strain. These environments were described as more supportive, enhancing workers' sense of loyalty and aligning emotional performance more closely with genuine feelings.

In contrast, those in predominantly Swedish workplaces faced additional challenges. Language barriers and unfamiliar display norms made it harder to connect, leading to prolonged adaptation and increased emotional labour. As Kang and Jang (2022) suggested, greater emotional effort in co-worker interactions can negatively affect organizational engagement. For these participants, managing emotional expression in both customer and co-worker interactions contributes to feelings of isolation and emotional fatigue.

These findings align with broader research showing that low workplace social support increases the risk of burnout and depression (Bartram et al., 2012; Näring et al., 2006; Shankar & Kumar, 2014). While Gabriel et al. (2020) argue that deep acting is typical in long-term co-worker relationships, this study suggests that immigration may shift interactions toward surface acting – particularly in Swedish-majority settings – due to linguistic and cultural disconnects that hinder emotional resonance.

4.3.2 Supervisor Relations

- *Findings*

This category explores how participants' relationships with their superiors influence their workplace attitudes, behaviours and emotional management skills. Across different professions, participants highlighted the effect of hierarchical structures on emotional expression and workplace dynamics, often comparing experiences between their countries of origin and Sweden. Luna and Pavlos reflected on the rigid hierarchies of their home countries – Italy and Greece – where power imbalances discouraged open communication and required additional emotional suppression to maintain professionalism.

Luna noted that while Swedish workplaces portray themselves as egalitarian, similar power dynamics persist, albeit less acknowledged. She believes her awareness of

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hierarchy, shaped by her experiences in Italy, gives her an advantage in navigating these structures, even if it requires more emotional management.

> "And I feel that despite the fact that, again, Sweden tends to portray itself as being a land beyond power differentials, my experience of Italian power differentials made me understand these dynamics better in the Swedish context and be able to respond to them in a more – (...) in a smoother way, essentially" (Luna, 14/03/2025).

Pavlos, working in engineering, echoed this view. He contracted the strict vertical hierarchy in Greece with Sweden's more open work culture, observing that, despite ultimate decision-making still being top-down, Swedish workplaces encourage employee input. This perceived openness positively affected his willingness to express himself and made emotional labour feel more authentic.

> "And there is a much more vertical hierarchy in – in Greece compared to Sweden. If I'm honest (...), I think here is also vertical the hierarchy in the sense that the actual decision making happens at a really high level, and as an employee [...] you can make your voice be heard, you can share your opinion, what you think about it, but at the end of the day, you're not the one making it, etc. But regardless, you know, at least – especially in [company] your opinion – you're actually encouraged to share your opinion, even if you disagree, or whatever you know, stuff like that" (Pavlos, 12/03/2025).

Maria, employed in customer service, described a similar shift. In contrast to the inaccessible leadership she experienced in the Southern EU, her Swedish workplace offered more direct interactions with higher management. This accessibility made her feel valued and increased her workplace loyalty and emotional investment.

> "[...] even like, the structures of the company are very different. So, like, I have talked to the CEO many times. I have talked to the upper manager [...]. And like, the fact that they all know us, and they all appreciate us, and like they talk to us directly and like, this kind of stuff. This, like break, breaking of [...] hierarchy. I think it's, I think obviously changes a lot my own position in work, and I feel like I kind of, I'm a bit more bound to the work in that sense" (Maria, 13/03/2025).

Elena's experience stands out. Working in a museum, she initially struggled with self-doubt and cultural disconnection. However, having a superior who was also an Italian immigrant helped her feel understood.

> "So, I was lucky enough to have my (...) supervisor, she's also from Italy, so she actually took me under her protective wig- wing, and so I could talk to her about anything. So, after a while, I – I told her how I felt, and kind of told me, 'you don't need to feel like that. You know, it's, it's very different', and she knew how it worked, how is the work environment in Italy" (Elena, 20/03/2025).

This shared background provided emotional support and reduced the pressure to perform according to culturally unfamiliar emotional norms, highlighting the importance of empathetic leadership in easing emotional burdens.

Together, these accounts suggest that participants from hierarchical cultural backgrounds initially experienced emotional burdens, having to supress their feelings. In Sweden, some found greater openness that aligned emotional performance with genuine engagement. Others, like Luna, retained their hierarchical awareness, seeing it as a strategic tool. Meanwhile, shared cultural experiences, as Elena's case, proved valuable in fostering trust and reducing emotional strain.

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- *Discussion*

Participants emphasized that their relationship with management significantly shaped their experience of emotional labour. Supportive and empathetic supervisors – especially those who understood the emotional challenges of immigration – helped ease the emotional strain, fostering more sustainable and affirming work environments. This aligns with Kang and Jang (2022) that managerial support can reduce the burden of emotional labour.

However, immigration seemingly complicates how managerial support is perceived. Participants describe more positive experiences when managers acknowledged their migratory challenges or shared a similar background. In contrast, a perceived lack of understanding from superiors increased emotional strain and reinforced participants' reliance on the hierarchical understandings they developed in their countries of origin. Coming from southern EU contexts where workplace hierarchies are more explicit, many continued to interact with Swedish superiors using those same frameworks, even when Swedish workplaces were expected to be more egalitarian,

While co-workers sometimes misread this as emotional distance, participants viewed their hierarchical awareness as an asset, helping them navigate unclear power structures. This expands on Shumski Thomas et al. (2018) findings that emotional labour is shaped by organizational standing, and supports Hochschild's argument that feeling rules uphold workplace hierarchies (1983: 56-63). Importantly, participants' emotional expressions were not only shaped by formal hierarchy, but also by culturally informed understandings of power – suggesting that rather than discarding their old feeling rules, they adapted them to their new context.

4.4 Gender and Race

4.4.1 Findings

This section explores how marginalized groups, known to experience heightened emotional labour (Humphrey, 2021; Meier et al., 2006; Müller, 2019; Wingfield, 2010), navigate immigration, focusing on gender and race.

Of the five female interviewees, four reported experiencing gender-based discrimination, particularly during customer interactions. These incidents were not limited to one country but occurred across the four southern EU countries and Sweden. The women described situations where male customers flirted or acted overly friendly, despite feeling uncomfortable, they supressed their emotions and maintained a friendly demeanour, as they felt unable to express dissatisfaction while at work. Elena, in Sweden, recalled an instance with a male art customer who acted too familiar. She didn't report it, fearing her supervisor's response and instead managed the situation by distancing herself and guiding the conversation in a more professional direction.

> "So, there are some clients like (…) I'm noticing in the art world, when it specifically is men like with money that wants to buy art, they feel like entitled to kind of be too friendly with me, sometimes, kind of too flirty, sometimes, and maybe they are big customers, so I cannot go to my director and say 'that man did that'. […] I just try to be like kind but not let them be too flirty with me, so just like going somewhere else, like have a different conversation" (Elena, 20/03/2025).

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Similarly, Maria working in Portugal faced inappropriate customer behaviour but felt her comfort was viewed secondary to the customers experience in the eyes of management. In contrast, in Sweden, when a group of men harassed her, her co-workers and managers swiftly intervened, surprising Maria, as such a response seemed unlikely in her previous workplace.

> "[…] a few episodes happen [in Sweden] in which, like, my comfort was put – was jeopardized because of customers, and I felt like the team, like everyone, and, you know, the manager and everything, it was very clear from moment like one, that the customers had to go and that I had to take a break and go home, possibly with the rest of the day being paid, yeah, you know, and that was something that was really hard for me to kind of adapt my mind to, because in Portugal, if a customer was fighting me, I'd be fired, you know" (Maria, 13/03/2025).

While gendered emotional burdens were experienced in all countries, its effect was influenced more by workplace dynamics than by immigration. Elena suppressed her feelings due to fear of backlash, while Maria felt her emotional strain was alleviated through support from colleagues and management.

Racialized experiences, however, appeared to change more significantly with immigration. Luna, a woman of colour, recalls how in her home country, she had to overperform to combat racial bias, striving to be seen as competent to avoid stereotypes.

> "But it's also because I am aware that as a woman from racialized background, from a working-class background (…) I can't afford to not be competent, and I can't afford to not be seen as competent. […] I still feel like I need to prove myself and work much better than anybody else to have that kind of stability" (Luna, 14/03/2025).

She expected Sweden, a multicultural society, to offer a more inclusive environment, but was instead confronted with racialized structures and racist encounters. This disillusionment left Luna emotionally drained and attempts to voice her frustration didn't yield the results she was hoping for. Over time, Luna learned to suppress her emotions instead of expressing her authentic feelings.

> "So (…) like my, my current serenity in dealing with some of these frustrations, or at least, at least not showing how they frustrate me, derives from my experience of having shown how to frustrate me earlier and then still not being able to solve it" (Luna, 14/03/2025).

Lunas experience of racialization intensified after her immigration, as she navigated being both racialized and an immigrant, leading her to question whether the challenges she faced were due to her gender, race, or immigrant status. This multifaceted marginalization caused insecurity, as she felt others were less likely to face similar obstacles.

> "But it's just – you know, it's always a question like, are they questioning me because I'm a woman? Are they question me because I'm an immigrant? When I feel like other people wouldn't necessarily feel or experience the same pushback" (Luna, 14/03/2025).

Over time, Luna developed a more strategic approach to managing her emotional energy. Her improved socio-economic position allowed her more emotional distance, and she began applying a personal framework, influenced by the serenity prayer, to decide when to engage in struggles and when to conserve her emotional resources. According to Luna, her careful control over her emotions, which emphasised calmness and self-control, was crucial to her success in Sweden. Despite this, she acknowledges that she could not fully express her authentic emotions in a racialized environment where her struggles were often ignored.

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4.4.2 Discussion

The participants' experience of gendered emotional labour – particularly during interactions with male customers – appeared largely unaffected by their immigration to Sweden. These gendered dynamics transcended into national contexts, but the emotional toll varied depending on the level of support participants received from colleagues and management. In more inclusive and diverse workplaces, often shaped by immigrant backgrounds, such support helped alleviate the emotional burden of gender-based harassment. Conversely, in environments where participants felt socially or linguistically isolated, the stress of these encounters intensified. Across the board, female participants described suppressing frustration during uncomfortable interactions, confirming earlier findings that women perform emotional labour due to gendered expectations (Müller, 2019).

Racialized emotional labour, too, showed cross-national consistency in structure, but immigration introduced new complexities. Although racial bias persisted post-migration, what changed was the participant's response. Expecting less race-based discrimination in Sweden, Luna encountered disappointment and frustration when faced with systemic indifference, resulting in a slow process of disillusionment and eventual resignation. Her reluctance to express anger or challenge injustice echoed concerns form Wingfield (2010) about the risk of being stereotyped, as well as Evans and Moore (2015) findings on workplace feeling rules that prioritize positive emotional displays.

Luna also felt compelled to overperform emotionally to be perceived as professional and competent, reinforcing research that shows racialized workers often must work harder to counteract racial bias (Grandey et al., 2018; Humphrey, 2021). She deliberately managed her emotions to gain professional traction, aligning with Tsujimoto (2014) argument that immigration may use emotional labour strategically to secure economic advancement. However, immigration appears to exacerbate racialized emotional labour, not only by defying hopeful expectations but also by adding the burden of navigating dual discrimination – both racial and immigration-based. Over time, this emotional toll contributes to a sense of cynicism, consistent with outcomes outlined by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993). In accordance with Schütze and Stelljes (2025) proposition, Luna's narrative underscores how marginalized individuals often bear the weight of compounded emotional labour; not just to meet professional expectations, but also to mask the emotional effect of unacknowledged structural discrimination.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

This study explored how the theory of emotional labour by Hochschild (1983), applied to the context of EU-internal immigration. Despite participant diversity, several common patterns emerged.

A central finding is that the participants' perceptions of emotional labour were shaped more by their workplace environment and cultural expectations than by the immigration process itself. Those employed in diverse, international workplaces reported greater emotional well-being and smoother adaptation, often attributing this to shaped immigration experiences that foster a sense of solidarity and support. In contrast, participants in predominantly Swedish workplaces described longer adjustment periods, greater emotional strain, and feelings of isolation.

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Gendered emotional labour was also mediated by workplace context. Supportive and diverse environments helped mitigate the stress caused by harassment, whereas participants in more homogenous settings were less likely to disclose such experiences due to fear of being misunderstood or dismissed. Racialized emotional labour on the other hand, was seemingly amplified by factors surrounding immigration, such as prior expectations, unfamiliarity with cultural norms and feeling rules and the added stress of being perceived not only as racialized, but also as an immigrant.

Despite the emotional challenges, all the participants viewed their economic transition positively. Higher wages and reduced working hours in Sweden were seen as benefits that eased emotional dissonance and increased job satisfaction. Some participants also felt that their familiarity with more rigid hierarchical structures in their countries of origin gave them an advantage in adapting to Swedish workplace norms, which they perceived as more flexible and respectful.

Interestingly, the length of time spent in Sweden appeared to influence participants' outlook. Those who had lived in Sweden for longer expressed greater calm and acceptance of workplace challenges, suggesting that emotional adaptation occurs over time – though this may also be linked to age and personal development rather than immigration alone.

These findings suggest that emotional labour is deeply intertwined with the experience of immigration, shaped by workplace dynamics, cultural expectations, and the evolving perceptions of the immigrants themselves. While this study focused on EU-internal immigration, its findings might have broader implications relevant for migration studies at large. Future research could explore voluntary and forced international migration, broadening the scope of emotional labour research to include theories of displacement, identity reconstruction, and social mobility and shedding light on emotional challenges related to the workplace that immigration might cause. Especially studies focusing on the experiences of refugees would highlight compounded emotional challenges – such as heightened vulnerability and frustrations when confronted with systemic barriers – that amplify the emotional labour required in integration and employment contexts.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches combining sociology, migration studies, and psychology could deepen the understanding of emotional labour in transnational contexts.

In conclusion, this study supports the idea that Hochschild's theory of emotional labour, though critiqued for its narrow focus, can be fruitfully expanded to capture the complex realities of immigrant workers. By shifting the narrative from one of vulnerability to one that also acknowledges agency, this research attempts to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of emotional labour and opens new avenues for interdisciplinary explorations within migration studies.

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QRP

Humanitarian Response and Dynamics of Community Security: Perspective from Rohingya Refugee Camps and Host Communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf, Bangladesh[1]

Moammad Shajan Siraj[2]

Abstract

This study evaluated the humanitarian response and community security circumstances of Rohingya refugees and host communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf, Bangladesh. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with purposive sampling, along with qualitative approaches, such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews, this study examines assistance distribution dynamics, security issues, environmental degradation, and cultural friction in the region. The objectives were to examine the differing perceptions of aid distribution between refugees and host communities, analyze the situation of crime and gender-based violence, and evaluate the impact of economic strain and resource competitiveness on community security. Key findings demonstrate that while refugees often perceive minimum support, host populations feel excluded and suffer heightened insecurity. The study also identified increasing petty crime, rising incidences of gender-based violence, and environmental challenges such as deforestation, all of which lead to social stress and decreasing community trust. These implications call for a holistic and sustainable approach that ensures fair resource allocation, stronger security measures, and attempts to create social cohesion between refugee and host populations. Although this study relied on purposive sampling and selected participants, these insights provide evidence-based directions for policymakers and humanitarian groups to design more effective solutions to the complex issues faced by the Rohingya refugee crisis and its impact on community security in Cox's Bazar.

Key Words:

Rohingya refugees, host communities, Ukhiya and Teknaf, human security, community security, protection, GBV

1 Introduction

Persecution of the Rohingya population has a long and tragic history that spans many decades. They have long been subject to discrimination, human rights violations, and violence. From the 1990s onwards, their situation worsened again as the Burmese government relentlessly persecuted the Rohingya population, a Muslim minority in the country. There have been reports of land expropriation, forced evictions, and banning the Rohingya from obtaining passports or living in certain regions. In 1991, hundreds of

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thousands of Rohingya fled to neighboring countries, such as Bangladesh, to escape repeated military action. A turning point in the persecution of the Rohingya was the outbreak of massive violence in Rakhine in 2012 when ethnic tensions between the Rohingya and the Buddhist majority escalated. Reports of massacres, fires, rapes, and other atrocities have increased and were described as genocide by the United Nations and international human rights organizations. As a result, more than two million people fled their country and sought refuge, mainly in neighboring countries, with the highest concentration of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. 2016 and 2017 saw a further wave of violence; thus, from August 2017, the largest exodus in the region took place, which led to 976,000 Rohingya refugees staying in Bangladesh at the end of February 2024 (Rohingya Refugee Response, Bangladesh 2024).

The large number of people who have fled the country is not just a number but a factor that has resulted in enormous human suffering, loss of livelihood, and tearing apart from communities. On the other hand, the large number of Rohingyas has put immense pressure on the structures of the host society, particularly in the Upazilas[3] (administrative regions) Ukhiya and Teknaf, where most of them have found refuge. In the Cox's Bazar region of southeastern Bangladesh, the Palongkhali and Rajapalong refugee camps are located near the Myanmar border. They are part of a larger network of camps in Ukhiya's Upazila**.** The area is characterized by hilly terrain and zones that are prone to monsoons and natural disasters. Initially, the camps were not clearly demarcated and often merged into neighboring settlements, making it difficult to monitor them. There are no fixed border walls or checkpoints, which makes it easier for refugees to move outside, at least in the short term, but also limits police and military controls. Later, under the leadership of the inter-sector coordination group (ISCG), 33 camps were demarcated, and the government also provided fencing around all the camps (ISCG, 2023). Teknaf, situated at the southeastern tip of Bangladesh near the Myanmar border, is a prominent location for refugee settlement because of its strategic geographical position and proximity to the Naf River marking part of the border between the two countries.

The camps are densely populated and consist of temporary huts that often need to be replaced because the region is prone to cyclones, monsoon rains, and landslides, which further complicate living conditions. These structures offer little protection and privacy. Due to overcrowding, there are still gaps in access to sanitation, education, and healthcare. People are almost entirely dependent on humanitarian aid because work permits are not granted outside of the camps. Children have little access to formal education, and their future prospects are poor, as neither a return to Myanmar nor integration into Bangladesh appears realistic. Currently, access to humanitarian aid, security in communities, sustainability of aid offers, and social and cultural integration are increasingly complex problems in many places.

Despite increasing research on many different aspects of humanitarian response, protection, health care, education, and basic service provision, the interplay of issues related to humanitarian aid distribution, security provision, socio-environmental impacts, and cultural tensions between the Rohingyas, and host communities has not been

[3] Bangladesh is divided into 64 districts (zila), which in turn are divided into 495 sub-districts (upazilas).

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systematically studied. Previous studies have often considered the aspects of crises as a whole but have not looked at how many parts interact with their overall impact on security in communities.

This challenge requires an integrated strategy that goes beyond humanitarian needs and addresses the issues of community cohesion, resources, and development. This study fills this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the numerous difficulties faced by refugees and the host communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf.

The makeshift camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf developed into comparatively better settlements but still temporary structures. These camps have become the norm for many Rohingyas, who now live in conditions that are better than the initial time of displacement but far from providing safe, dignified, and sustainable living conditions. Owing to rapid and large population growth, local resources such as land, water, and forests are under severe strains. Based on field observations, host communities, largely made up of local residents, are struggling to sustain their livelihoods under the pressure of a rapidly expanding population due to the presence of Rohingya people. With few economic opportunities available, competition for resources has become more intense, contributing to rising tensions.

The world has responded to displacement with extensive aid from the UN, international organizations, NGOs, and governments, yet no lasting solution has emerged. Roßkopf (2022) notes that in 2022 over 100 million people were forcibly displaced due to crises created by human choices and those which humans have the power to change (Roßkopf, 2022). The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh reflect this global challenge: despite ongoing humanitarian support, durable solutions remain out of reach. However, since 2020, funding has been restricted owing to changing global priorities (ISCG, 2023). This funding gap limits urgent relief efforts and affects the sustainability of long-term development plans. Sufficient funding is crucial for food, water, shelter, healthcare, education, and security, as well as for rebuilding infrastructure and strengthening the resilience of refugees and host communities. This supply gap clearly demonstrates the need for sustainable financing and funding systems to enable a nationally coordinated, long-term intervention approach that can overcome the complications of the crisis (Siraj, 2025a).

The fact that people live in a legally opaque area further complicates this problem. Bangladesh is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and is under no legal obligation to recognize the Rohingya as refugees and grant them the associated rights, such as permanent settlement, work permits, or freedom of movement.

They are often referred to as “Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN)” who are temporarily admitted on a humanitarian basis and receive protection and assistance, as Bangladesh’s strategy is for them to return to their country of origin, Myanmar, as soon as conditions there are safe for them. By not recognizing the Rohingya as refugees but rather as citizens of Myanmar, the government is putting pressure on Myanmar to take responsibility for their return and rights. As they have no legal status in Bangladesh, they face numerous restrictions (Dempster & Sakib, 2021, Haque & Siddique, 2022, Hossain, 2022, Sejan & Siddiq, 2025) including:

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- Officially, they were not allowed to leave camps without permission.
- They have no legal access to the labor market outside the camps, which makes them dependent on informal and often exploitative work,
- Access to formal education is severely restricted, although some NGOs offer informal programs, and the education sector, under the ISCG, supports the educational needs of Rohingya refugees and affected host communities in the Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts while also focusing on disaster preparedness and response,
- Without refugee status, Rohingyas usually only receive temporary registration cards issued in cooperation with the UNHCR and the Bangladeshi government

The high number of Rohingya refugees without legal status in Bangladesh hinders access to essential services, limits job opportunities, and increases the risk of discrimination, abuse, and violence. This legal invisibility implies that they are dependent on humanitarian aid. Refugees' precarious legal status hinders social and economic integration, which also leads to hostility towards host communities that are already struggling with their own financial and social problems (Dempster & Sakib, 2021, Haque & Siddique, 2022, Hossain, 2022, Sejan & Siddiq, 2025). This study focuses on how decreasing humanitarian aid, the lack of legal protection for refugees, political and security risks, environmental degradation, and cultural friction impact the lives of Rohingya refugees and host communities. The various types of obstacles do not occur just by themselves in isolation but reinforce each other, hindering community safety, the efficient delivery of aid, and having negative effects on refugee-host relations. The objectives of this study were threefold as follows:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of humanitarian aid distribution and understand the differing perceptions of aid adequacy among Rohingya refugees and host communities.
- To assess the primary security challenges, such as rising crime rates, gender-based violence, and resource conflicts, affecting community stability in Ukhiya and Teknaf.
- To propose sustainable strategies that can enhance community security, promote fair resource allocation, and foster social cohesion between refugees and their host population.

This study presents a comprehensive investigation that focuses on both the immediate and underlying issues contributing to insecurity and tensions in refugee-hosting areas to provide evidence-based recommendations for more effective interventions.

This research was guided by the following key research questions:

- How do Rohingya refugees and host communities perceive the distribution of humanitarian aid in Ukhiya and the Teknaf, and how do they experience this?
- What specific security challenges – from petty crimes to gender-based violence and resource conflicts – are the most pressing issues in these communities?
- How do economic pressures, resource scarcity, environmental degradation, and cultural conflicts exacerbate the existing tensions between refugees and host populations?

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– What integrated sustainable strategies can policymakers and humanitarian actors use to mitigate these challenges and promote long-term coexistence and resilience in the region?

Recognizing the interconnectedness of the Rohingya situation will help to develop different policy approaches. This study draws on the literature on forced migration, human security, and relative deprivation. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the theory of human security concerns protecting people from multiple risks, including economic, social, and environmental hazards (Jolly & Basu Ray, 2006). The ongoing refugee crisis is an important issue for which human security is applicable. This research can be linked to the concept of development, as articulated by Sen (1999), who posits that freedom serves both as a means and the end of development. Sen (1999) contends that genuine development is realized when individuals possess the freedom to pursue lives that they value, encompassing not only economic opportunities but also political freedom, social inclusion, access to education, and protective security. Deprivation extends beyond mere income poverty to include the lack of essential freedoms such as the ability to work, express one's identity, and engage in societal participation.

The theory of relative deprivation states that the perception of the unequal distribution of material resources can lead to social unrest (Gurr, 2011). This hypothesis highlights the conflicts arising from differences in support and economic prospects between refugees and host communities.

In addition, a social cohesion framework (Chan et al., 2006) highlights the value of building relationships and understanding between people from different cultures and backgrounds. This approach was used to examine how social cohesion (or lack thereof) affected community safety and perceptions of fairness and justice in the context of the Rohingya crisis.

The relevance of this study is its comprehensiveness. Considering humanitarian assistance, security, and environmental and cultural challenges can help create a holistic vision and plan an integrated strategy. We expect that these strategies when implemented will provide immediate relief while working towards long-term solutions to address people's fears and build resilience.

This study focuses on the Upazilas of Ukhiya and Teknaf in the Cox's Bazar region, where most Rohingya refugee settlements are located. It specifically includes Palongkhali Union (a key local administrative area hosting multiple refugee camps) and the nearby host communities. The research looks at patterns in humanitarian funding, legal and security challenges, environmental pressures, socioeconomic effects, and cultural tensions. Although Ukhiya and Teknaf have their own unique circumstances, the insights from this study could be useful for other areas that host refugees and face similar issues.

Data were collected from the proposed areas of the Rohingya refugee settlements and the surrounding host communities to understand local perceptions of aid distribution, security, and socioeconomic conditions. Methods such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews provide insights into personal and community experiences as well as cultural issues. This mix of methods allows for the capture of broad patterns and nuanced lived experiences allowing for a thorough analysis of the complex interplay of numerous factors influencing the security of Ukhiya and Teknaf communities.

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2 Literature Review

The Rohingya refugee crisis, one of the largest and most protracted displacement situations in recent history, has generated extensive scholarly discussions across disciplines. This literature review highlights the pivotal issues associated with humanitarian response, community security, environmental and socioeconomic impacts, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), as well as the theories used. The goal is to situate the current study in existing research, identify gaps, and lay the groundwork for the assessment of the interlinked relations between humanitarian aid and community security in Ukhiya and Teknaf.

The Rohingya crisis resulted in the largest coordinated international humanitarian response after the 2017 mass influx. However, the challenges posed by the situation are serious and involve the state's denial of the Rohingya community's right to citizenship and their right to return. Nonetheless, after a strong upsurge in money and international unity in the early stages, studies have shown a continued decline in humanitarian funding since 2020 due to changes in donor priorities (ISCG, 2023). Pratisti et al. (2019), state that despite international solidarity mobilizing significant resources, the politicization of aid and identity politics often prevents financial resources from being allocated to the early, strategic stages of humanitarian and development programming. This has tangible effects on service delivery, infrastructure, and long-term planning, which in turn can exacerbate insecurity affecting both refugees and host communities.

Moreover, the literature demonstrates that although the efforts assist in offering better accommodation, the aid has not resolved structural issues such as legal limbo and the permanent socioeconomic integration of many displaced individuals. These problems, combined with the continuity of funding and the absence of long-range strategies, require sustainable measures that go beyond simply providing emergency relief to build resilience and capacities.

The Rohingya crisis's community security is associated with physical, economic, and social cohesion. According to studies by Islam et al. (2022) and Ahmad and Naeem (2020), crime rates, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities in and around Rohingya refugee camps indicate a deteriorating security environment. Owing to weak security arrangements and poverty, petty crimes, abductions, and armed violence on a high scale are increasing. The Rohingya refugees and hosts are also involved in these crimes.

Research indicates that the refugee context worsens gender-based violence (GBV) situations. According to Green et al. (2022), Rohingya refugees experience high levels of sexual violence which highlights the need for comprehensive interventions to respond to the physical, psychological, and social harm associated with such violence. Tripura (2022) and Stoken (2020) further highlight the specific threats and limitations faced by Rohingya women and girls during displacement and in camps, where hesitance surrounding cultural stigma and underreporting creates challenges to a response. Efforts must be made not only to protect but also to empower survivors, modify cultural attitudes, and adopt a gender-sensitive strategy in humanitarian assistance.

As observed by Quader et al. (2020) and Hassan et al. (2018), environmental hazards have emerged due to the rapid establishment of refugee camps as the sudden increase in population from displacement led to tree felling, land degradation, and ecological strain. Environmental deterioration is not merely an ecological concern but also has

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socioeconomic and security ramifications. The scarcity of resources can foster conflict between refugees and host communities. According to Ahmed et al. (2020), deformation and the loss of natural buffers increase vulnerability to natural catastrophes such as landslides, eventually putting vulnerable populations at greater risk.

Pressure on the environment creates competition for precious resources, including water and agricultural land, which heightens tensions and hampers security efforts.

According to the literature, humanitarian initiatives must be anchored by sustainability- and nature-based solutions to avert immediate and long-term hazards while addressing conflicts (International Union for Conservation of Nature et al., 2023).

Refugee and host communities in economic competition and cultural friction commonly emerge in literature. Milton et al. (2017) and Ahmad and Naeem (2020) explored the impact of growing refugees on local job markets and communication of increasing marginalization by host countries. It was observed that host communities in Cox's Bazar district including Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas faced economic pressures and perceived refugees' involvement in tourism-related activities as a threat to local livelihoods. These pressures appeared to generate frustration, tension, and a decline in social cohesion.

Evidence indicates that encouraging mutual understanding, sharing talent or resources, and cultural interchange might lessen tensions. To organize economic empowerment initiatives for refugees and the host community so that they do not compete for a few resources, will also aid in laying the foundation for harmonious coexistence (HEKS/EPER Uganda, 2022–2024).

As for the UNDP, human security covers seven interconnected areas: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political. Today, community security places particular emphasis on preserving culture, promoting inclusion, and strengthening social cohesion. According to the 2009 UNDP report, it also involves protecting both individuals and groups – especially vulnerable populations like women and children – ensuring freedom from fear, addressing social needs, and connecting personal safety with accountable, inclusive governance. The Rohingya situation is linked to several elements, such as economics, the environment, and security. Therefore, it jeopardizes personal safety, economic well-being, and environmental safety (Caballero-Anthony, 2015; UNDP. 2009; Uddin & Nesa, 2021; Siraj, 2025a).

The Relative Deprivation Theory states that a person's behavior is influenced by their impressions of relative inequity. Introduced by Gurr (2011), this theory posits that unmet expectations and disparities contribute to crime and dispute (Gurr, 2011). A similar pattern is observed in the Rohingya refugee context in Ukhiya and Teknaf, Rohingya refugees and host communities receive relief, economic opportunities, and access to resources for various and unequal outcomes, which leads to a sense of deprivation and resentment, which in turn can lead to tension and insecurity.

Chan et al. (2006) proposed that social cohesiveness refers to the relationships that bring diverse groups in society together. They also stated that social cohesion is founded on trust and security. Importantly, the social cohesiveness framework attempts to reduce violence and conflicts. Refugees often find themselves isolated leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. People work together, talk, and implement community

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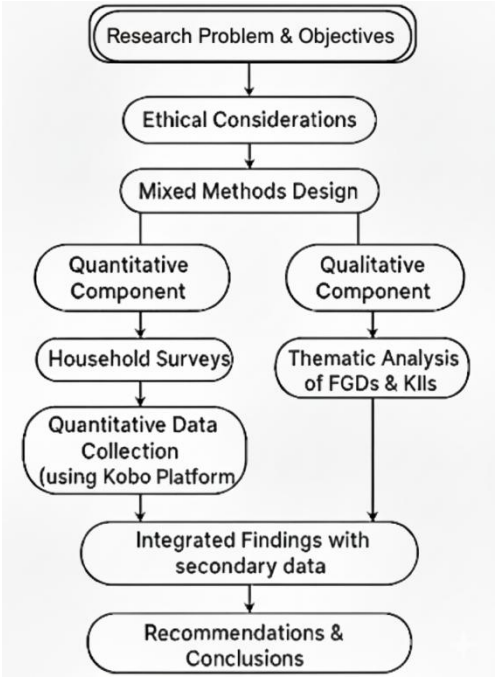
projects to ensure that their communities thrive and a bridge is established between refugees and hosts.

While much has been discussed about the Rohingya situation in existing literature, key elements have not been covered. Few studies have found that the Rohingya influx in Bangladesh affects security, livelihoods, social cohesion, and environmental and socioeconomic conditions, highlighting the need for integrated, multi-dimensional policy responses (Minar, 2021; Mohiuddin & Molderez, 2023; Khan, 2024; Ullah & Khatun, 2025; Siraj 2025). Most studies look at one issue or another but do not usually consider how they affect the overall stability of refugee-hosting areas.

3 Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to capture both statistical trends and lived experiences. Purposive sampling was used to select 106 respondents, ensuring representation from both the refugee and host communities. Given the complex nature of the study area, the findings should be interpreted with caution and not assumed to be fully representative of the entire population, ensuring representation from both refugee and host communities, which are often generalizable and provide the demographics of the community along with their perceptions. Qualitative methods are more nuanced and provide a grasp of the complexities, issues of security, and things being implemented by humanitarian organizations. By utilizing these methodologies together, they can accurately comprehend the various components of long-term refugee problems. An overview of the research design as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Research design



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Field data were collected for five months, from November 2023 to March 2024. The project's secondary data were analyzed for context up to September 2024. This study focused on refugee camps and neighboring host communities in Hnila and Whykong (Teknaf) as well as Palongkhali and Rajapalong (Ukhiya), particularly Camps 1E, 1W, 11, 4 and 8E, but for secondary data, this study considered all camps in the Rohingya refugee response. The rationale for choosing these places was the large presence of Rohingya people and the most obvious local impact of the Rohingya influx, creating a fruitful setting to investigate community security and aid efficacy.

Individuals from the host community and refugees aged 18 years and above constituted the study population participants who provided important information for the study engaged in purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, or judgmental sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling design whereby researchers utilize non-randomized sampling, but rather intentional and purposeful sampling, ensuring that the selected subjects will supply valuable data that are relevant to their studies (Nikolopoulou, 2023, Bullard, 2024). Using this technique, a target sample size of 106 at a 95% confidence level was determined with a 10% margin of error. The computation of the sample size in this study was based on the formula given in Table 1. The population size, variability, precision, and confidence level were the criteria considered. The initial computation yielded a sample size of 96, which was later modified to 106 for non-responses.

$$n = \frac{p \times (1-p)}{\frac{e^2}{t^2} + \frac{p \times (1-p)}{N}}$$

Table 1: Sample size calculation formula (Raosoft, Inc., 2011).

Parameter	Value
N (population)	367,171
p (variability)	0.5
e (precision)	0.1
t (confidence)	1.96
Calculated n	96
Adjusted n	106

3.1 Quantitative Methods

The quantitative elements of this study included structured household surveys using the Kobo platform (KoBoToolbox) an open-source platform widely used for field data collection in humanitarian and development contexts (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2005). Purposive sampling was used to select 106 participants. Demographic statistics and perceptions of assisted areas were related to humanitarian relief, security, and economic conditions. Demographic information indicated that 31% of the respondents were from the Palongkhali Union, which contributed to a better geographic representation. In addition, 72% of the respondents were male and 28% were female. In terms of

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educational qualifications, there was a large discrepancy between camp residents and the people of the host community, as 78% of camp residents did not have any formal schooling. However, the host community had people with higher educational levels. Camp occupants showed that 52% were active in physical and manual jobs. Employment in host towns is comparatively diverse.

3.2 Qualitative Methods

In Palongkhali, Rajapalong, and Hnila, 40 respondents engaged in five focus group discussions (FGDs) to complement the surveys. The purpose of these conversations was to obtain community views on security, aid, and relationships. Moreover, ten key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with local, knowledgeable individuals, key officials, members of NGOs, UN agencies, and local leaders. The interviews revealed greater contextual awareness of the issues experienced by both refugees and host communities, as well as responses from organizations. We performed the FGDs and KIIs according to ethical principles, taking precautions to gain informed permission and protecting the confidentiality of participants who were vulnerable populations. Moreover, following ethical guidelines, we ensured the integrity of the data collection method.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Household surveys were digitally collected through the KoboToolbox which facilitated data collection. Quantitative analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel to obtain descriptive data and detect trends and patterns linked to community security and perception of humanitarian help. We transcribed, categorized, and thematically analyzed qualitative materials from FGDs and KIIs to uncover the underlying concerns, attitudes, and suggestions. To complement the findings from primary sources, secondary data on protection, gender-based violence (GBV), food security, health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) were reviewed.

3.4 Justification

The research topics of this study were too complicated for a single method of data collection; hence, a mixed-methods approach was utilized. Quantitative surveys permitted the collection of statistically significant data concerning perceptions and experiences from a broad section of the community. In contrast, the qualitative methodologies using FGD and KIIs formed concerns in a more in-depth and contextual manner, enabling a more thorough investigation of the many subtleties of community insecurity, competition for resources, and cultural tensions. By employing numerous data sources and methods, researchers can be more confident in the validity of their conclusions because one source may confirm or dispute another.

The study used a carefully designed methodology with rigorous data collection while maintaining strict ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality to explore humanitarian assistance and community security in Ukhiya and Teknaf. The use of quantitative and qualitative approaches sets the foundation for the presentation and discussion of the research outcomes.

4 Study Results: Community Security

Both Rohingya refugees and the host population encounter security issues. There are escalating concerns regarding security, surges in minor criminal activities, and the

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occurrence of gender-based violence (GBV). The significance of resolving this issue has been demonstrated through qualitative and quantitative evidence.

4.1 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Table 2 shows that the data on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) collected from January 2023 to September 2024 revealed significant patterns across various categories at the camp level.

Table 2: Safety and security monitoring data by protection sector for camps (Gender-Based Violence Sub-Sector, 2024).

Gender-Based Violence	Jan-Mar-2023	Apr-June-2023	July-Sept-2023	Oct-Dec-2023	Jan-Mar 2024	Apr-June 2024	July-Sept 2024
Rape	4.4%	3.7%	4%	3.3%	5.30%	5.80%	6%
Sexual assault	3.7%	3.9%	4.4%	4.4%	4.60%	4.60%	4.9%
Psychosocial/emotional abuse	20.6%	20.8%	22.7%	22.6%	22.70%	22.50%	21.3%
Denial of resources	18.4%	17.9%	19.4%	19.1%	17.20%	16.20%	15.5%
Forced marriage	0.4%	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%	0.40%	0.30%	0.60%
Physical assault	52.4%	53.1%	49.1%	50.1%	49.50%	50.6	51.5%

Physical assault and psychosocial/emotional abuse consistently had the highest incidence rates, with only minor fluctuations over time. Physical assault has consistently exceeded 49%, with a slight increase to 51.5% in the most recent quarter, while psychosocial and emotional abuse remained stable at approximately 20-22%. These statistics underscore the persistent need to address domestic violence and emotional distress in Rohingya refugee communities. Rape cases show an upward trend, rising from 3.3% in late 2023 to 6% by mid-2024, indicating a growing need for stronger legal measures and increased community awareness.

Similarly, sexual assault cases have gradually increased from 3.7% in early 2023 to 4.9% in 2024, highlighting the ongoing risks for women and girls. The denial of resources, including food, shelter, and livelihood opportunities, slightly decreased from 19.4% to 15.5%, suggesting that efforts to improve access to resources and support may have had a positive impact. Despite these challenges, forced marriage remains relatively low, fluctuating between 0.3% and 0.6%, indicating that ongoing awareness initiatives and community involvement have contributed to maintaining minimal rates.

Several factors contribute to the persistence of GBV risks, such as limited income-generating opportunities, which may exacerbate financial stress and domestic tensions; food ration cuts that could intensify household disputes and increase vulnerability; and a perceived decline in security within the camps, affecting the psychosocial well-being and safety of women, girls, men, and boys.

In response to these challenges, humanitarian actors have actively engaged in GBV awareness programs and preventive strategies. The data in Table 3 confirm that a significant proportion of GBV incidents occurred within the survivor's home, with a consistently high percentage ranging from 90.3% to 91.7% across different quarters, emphasizing domestic violence as a major concern. Incidents at the perpetrator's residence varied between 2.6% and 3.7%, whereas cases reported in public spaces

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(streets, pathways, water points, and public toilets) remained relatively low, mostly below 2%.

Table 3: Locations of the reported GBV incidents in GBVIMS for camps (Gender-Based Violence Sub-Sector, 2024).

Location	Q4 (Oct-Dec-2023)	Q1 (Jan-Mar-2024)	Q2 (Apr-Jun-2024)	Q3 (Jul-Sep-2024)
Survivor's residence	91.6%	90.30%	90.70%	91.7%
Perpetrator's residence	3.1%	3.70%	3.10%	2.6%
Street/pathway	1.8%	2.20%	2.00%	2.1%
Friend or relative's residence	0.9%	0.90%	0.90%	0.7%
Water point	0.6%	0.60%	0.70%	0.4%
Hotel	0.0%	0.60%	0.50%	0.4%
Bathing facilities	0.5%	0.40%	0.20%	0.4%
Public toilets/latrines	0.4%	0.30%	0.30%	0.2%
Bush	0.1%	0.20%	0.20%	0.4%

The high rate of domestic violence underscores the urgent need for enhanced interventions such as improved mental health and psychosocial support services for survivors, community-based programs focusing on conflict resolution and healthy family dynamics, and stronger legal frameworks and protection services to encourage survivors to report cases without fear of stigma or retaliation. Although GBV remains a pressing issue (particularly domestic violence), positive efforts are underway to mitigate its risks through awareness campaigns, legal interventions, and improved security measures. Strengthening multi-sectorial collaboration, increasing access to economic opportunities, and promoting gender-equitable roles within households can contribute to long-term improvements in GBV prevention and response. Continued monitoring, reporting, and community engagement are essential for addressing the root causes of GBV and ensuring a safer environment for vulnerable populations (Gender-Based Violence Sub-Sector, 2024).

4.2 Security/Protection Incidents

Qualitative data indicate that local communities blame refugees for theft and increased petty crime, whereas refugees point to desperation from insufficient aid as the cause of criminal behavior. This highlights how structural issues such as the absence of legal work permits intensify mutual suspicion. Most cases remain unreported under law enforcement. The factors contributing to this surge include theft and occasional kidnapping, often linked to families struggling to meet their basic needs following reductions in humanitarian support. For instance, Whykong's key informant indicated that *"In my village, residents are returning to their homes early in the evening owing to the fear of potential kidnappings."* One Majhi (camp leader) voiced concern that criminals had been stealing solar panels from the new shelters and stated, *"It's the thieves that keep us awake at night."* In other words, increased concern over being robbed results in restless nights. Meanwhile, the incidence of theft is increasing amidst growing economic uncertainty.

The data in Figure 2 indicate notable changes in security incidents at the camp level from 2022 to September 2024, with abductions emerging as the most critical threat. Abduction

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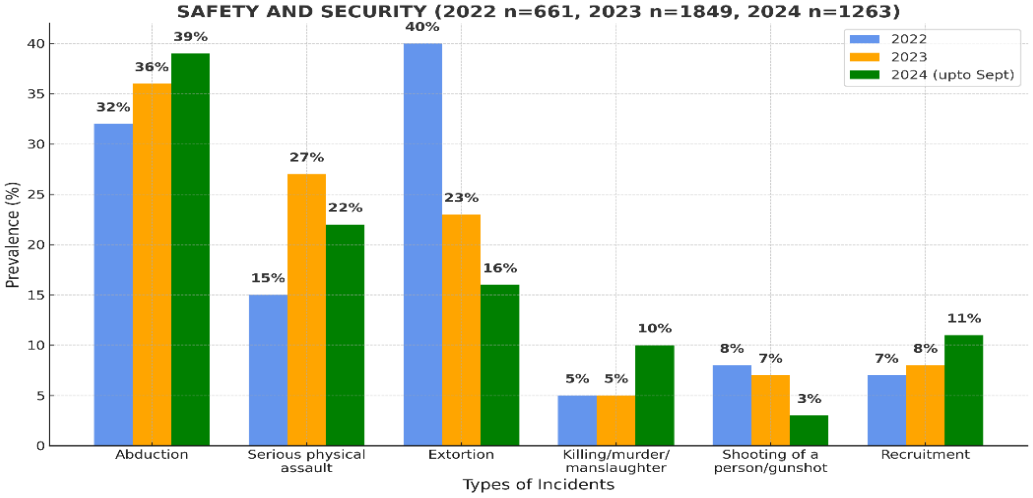
rates have markedly increased from 32% in 2022 to 39% in 2024, signifying a worsening trend that necessitates immediate attention. This increase suggests either a decline in law enforcement effectiveness or increased activity by criminal or terrorist groups potentially driven by ransom economies or political instability. Serious physical assaults also exhibited a steady increase, from 15% to over 20%, during the same period. This upward trend may reflect broader societal issues such as gang violence, domestic conflicts, and economic stressors such as unemployment. By contrast, extortion rates, which peaked at 40% in 2022, declined to 16% by 2024.

Figure 2: Security and safety incidents camp level as per the current reporting process (Protection Sector Cox's Bazar Bangladesh, 2024).



This improvement could result from stronger anti-extortion measures, reduced criminal capacity, or advocacy/awareness intervention by the exiting humanitarian actor including International non-government organization (INGO), Non-government organization (NGO) and the United Nation (UN) agency, although earlier volatility suggests a need for sustained vigilance. Gun violence, although relatively low in prevalence, remains a high-risk concern owing to its lethal nature. Incidents fluctuated between 3% and 8%, indicating persistent challenges, such as illegal arms trafficking or localized conflicts. Meanwhile, killing and murder rates showed no clear trend, remaining stable but persistent and likely linked to targeted violence rather than random acts. Targeted interventions are essential for addressing these trends. Abduction hotspots require intelligence-led policing and community awareness programs to reduce vulnerability. Combating physical assaults calls for enhanced surveillance and efforts to tackle root causes such as economic hardship and ration cuts. Addressing gun violence necessitates the implementation of more stringent firearm regulations and the imposition of harsher penalties to mitigate extortion further, and it is imperative to sustain ongoing investigations into financial crimes and ensure that the availability of secure channels for reporting such activities diminishes its impact.

Furthermore, a concerning trend has emerged wherein organized groups are increasingly recruiting refugees, particularly young males, and adolescents, with the potential aim of involving them in armed conflict in Myanmar. This issue has been identified as a growing

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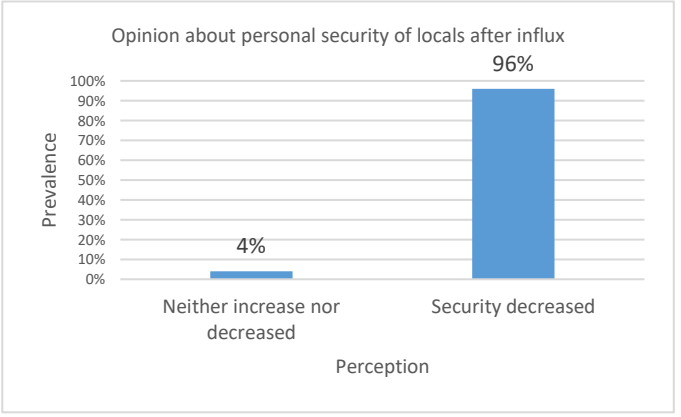
concern for the protection of camps. For instance, a teacher from Palong Khali said, “It’s scary hearing guns every day. We worry most about our kids. They hear it and are terrified." The findings indicate a significant decline in personal security among the host community following the Rohingya influx.

Overall, the data underscores a shifting security landscape at the campus level, with abduction and physical assaults posing growing threats. Proactive data-driven strategies are critical to mitigate these risks and ensure public safety. Further analyses, such as regional or demographic breakdowns, could provide deeper insights into the tailored responses.

According to quarterly data from January 2024 to September 2024, alleged perpetrators per category by incident-camp-level criminal organizations and networks are heavily involved in various violent crimes, especially murder, gun-related violence, and recruitment for criminal activities. This indicates a well-entrenched system of coercion and violence. Law enforcement agencies, while maintaining order, were also reported to be involved in extortions (Protection Sector Cox’s Bazar Bangladesh, 2024). They also monitored camps, conducted drug-related arrests, and conducted operations against criminal groups to enhance safety. Sometimes, this issue raises concerns from the perspective of human rights and refugee protection despite national security priorities. Strengthening mechanisms of oversight and promoting adherence to national and international legal standards can enhance trust and accountability in law enforcement. Refugees are not the primary perpetrators of violent crime; however, their involvement in criminal activities often reflects the necessity for survival in the face of aid reduction and the absence of legal employment opportunities. This involvement is potentially driven by economic hardships, funding cuts, reduced ratio allocations, marginalization, and internal disputes. A similar situation is observed in some host communities, where economic difficulties, resource scarcity, and job competition tensions occasionally escalate to retaliatory violence.

According to Figure 3, the majority of the study population respondents felt that their security had decreased, while very few reported no change. As per the host community’s perception, there is a strong correlation between the arrival of the Rohingya population and perceived insecurity.

Figure 3: Host community perception of insecurity situations



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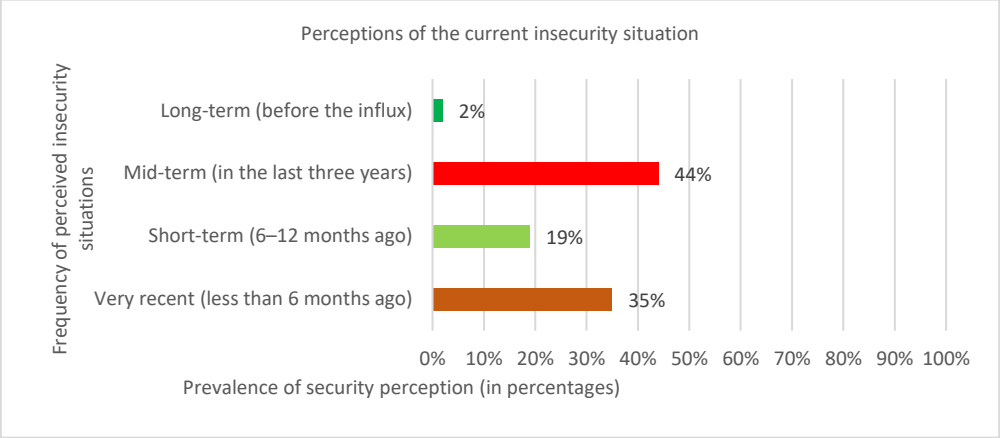
In Figure 4, 44% of respondents stated that insecurity had worsened over the last three years (mid-term), while 54% noted increased insecurity within the past year (35% in the last six months and 19% in the previous 6-12 months) reflecting both ongoing concern and a recent surge in perceived insecurity. However, a low percentage (2%) of those who felt insecure before the influx indicated that the previous conditions were relatively stable.

Figure 4: Host community opinion on personal insecurity



Perceived insecurity can be linked to increased competition for resources, economic challenges, and social tensions arising from sudden demographic shifts. However, it is important to recognize that law enforcement agencies and humanitarian actors have been actively working to enhance security through surveillance, crime prevention measures, and community engagement. While the perception of insecurity is high, the fact that law enforcement interventions are ongoing suggests that conditions can improve with sustained cooperation among authorities, local communities, and humanitarian organizations.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for strengthening social cohesion, economic collaboration, and dialogue between hosts and refugee communities. Addressing the root causes of insecurity through livelihood programs, improved governance, and inclusive development strategies can foster long-term stability.

4.3 Perception of Support and Aid Distribution

The quantitative findings from Table 4 and Figure 5 reveal a significant disparity in perceptions between Rohingya refugees and the host community in Cox's Bazar, especially in terms of community support, aid satisfaction, and feelings of inclusion.

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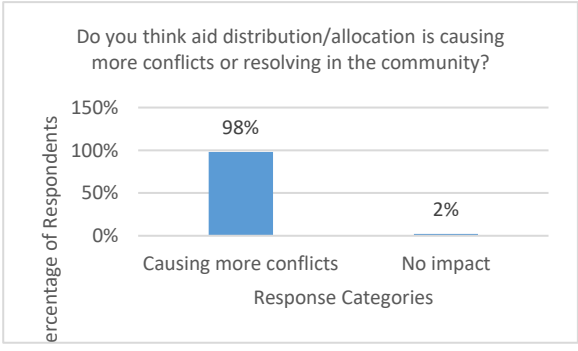
Table 4: Household data regarding community feelings and satisfaction

Expression of Feelings and Satisfaction	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree
The local community is supportive of Rohingya refugees (vice versa).					
Camp	57%	15%	28%	0%	0%
Host	9%	67%	22%	2%	0%
I am satisfied with the humanitarian aid we receive.					
Camp	74%	9%	2%	15%	0%
Host	2%	79%	0%	0%	19%
There are good initiatives to bring the host and refugee communities together.					
Camp	63%	13%	22%	2%	0%
Host	7%	78%	7%	7%	0%
I feel safe in my community.					
Camp	69%	13%	9%	0%	9%
Host	2%	94%	0%	0%	4%
Relations between Rohingya refugees and the host community have improved.					
Camp	46%	20%	30%	4%	0%
Host	4%	87%	6%	0%	2%
Conflicts between the communities are being effectively resolved.					
Camp	19%	31%	41%	0%	9%
Host	0%	89%	6%	0%	6%

One of the most notable findings is the host community's predominant belief that aid distribution serves as a source of conflict, and the majority of host respondents indicated that aid allocation (funding allocation) exacerbates tensions rather than resolving issues (Figure 5). This suggests a profound sense of inequality and perceived marginalization among the host population, who may feel that humanitarian efforts disproportionately favor refugees, thereby neglecting the needs of local individuals who also experience poverty and hardship.

Figure 5: Host community perception regarding the source of conflict



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Disparity in the perceptions of mutual support is another critical issue. While 57% of refugees believe that the host community is supportive of them (Table 4), only 9% of the host population shares this sentiment regarding refugees. This discrepancy indicated a lack of mutual understanding and trust. Refugees may interpret symbolic or occasional gestures of kindness as signs of support, whereas hosts potentially burdened by prolonged economic pressure, overcrowding, and social disruption do not perceive refugees as contributing positively to their lives. These divergent perceptions hinder the development of social cohesion and cooperation between the two communities.

Satisfaction with humanitarian aid further underscores inequalities in experience. While 74% of the refugee population expressed satisfaction with the aid they received, only 2% of host community members reported similar satisfaction, with 79% actively expressing dissatisfaction. This disparity reflects a significant imbalance in the distribution and perception of humanitarian resources, possibly engendering a sense of exclusion and resentment among families. Many host respondents also conveyed strong feelings of being ignored or treated unfairly, which may exacerbate frustration and further fuel intercommunity tensions.

Feelings of safety and perceptions of conflict resolution also exhibited considerable variations. The majority (69%) of refugees felt safe in their communities, likely because of the protective presence of humanitarian agencies and services. Conversely, 94% of the host population reported feeling unsafe, which could be attributed to economic stress, fear of losing access to resources, and social unrest. Furthermore, 89% of the host respondents believed that conflicts between communities were not being effectively resolved, compared to only 19% of refugees, who held a contrary view. This again reflects a communication and trust gap as well as the absence of visible conflict mediation mechanisms that address host grievances.

Although these results are based on selected sample sizes and participants, they may not be applicable to a broader population. Despite the generally negative sentiments of the host community, positive elements can be built upon. For instance, 46% of Rohingya refugees felt that relations between the two groups had improved, and a small portion (4%) of the host community members also acknowledged this improvement. Additionally, the majority of refugees (63%) agreed that there were initiatives to bring both communities together. These responses indicate that while challenges persist, there is a foundation for goodwill and recognition of positive efforts that can be scaled up.

4.4 Economic and Cultural Tensions

The extended presence of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar has markedly impacted the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of the host communities.

While humanitarian aid has been crucial in supporting refugees, the perceived disparity in aid distribution has led to increased frustration among the local population. As indicated in Table 5 below, most of the host respondents felt deprived of foreign assistance, and 96% reported feeling neglected by the government. These statistics underscore the strong sentiment that both international actors and national authorities overlook the host community's needs.

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Table 5: Host community perceptions regarding security and tension

Community perception	Yes	No
Deprivation of foreign assistance for the host community	98%	2%
Sense of being a minority in the local community	98%	2%
Feeling neglected by the government	96%	4%
Refugee labor increase in the community	98%	2%
Marginalization of local in the job sector.	69%	31%
There is a supportive project for the host community	44%	56%

Economically, 98% of the study respondents noted an increase in refugee labor, while 69% believed that locals were marginalized in the job market. Host communities feel marginalized primarily because of insufficient programs, such as the absence of livelihood programs and a decrease in aid for locals caused by donor fatigue. Refugees unable to engage in formal employment resort to informal economies, perpetuating a cycle of competition driven by systemic neglect.

This situation exacerbates economic insecurity, particularly among vulnerable families in the host community. Locals perceive their livelihood opportunities as diminishing, contributing to resentment and a sense of exclusion.

Culturally, the majority of host community respondents expressed concerns about becoming a minority in their own community. Fear of losing cultural identity, values, and language was prevalent. Key informants noted an increasing “mixing of cultures”, which they believe is influencing youth behavior. One local leader stated,

> “It’s frightening to see our children developing behaviors that go against our values. It is not only because of the refugees, but also due to employees who come from other districts of Bangladesh. It really concerns me.”

This highlights the emotional impact of cultural change on traditional norms and community identity. Language is another area of concern, with the local dialect reportedly blending with the Rohingya language, raising fear of long-term linguistic erosion. These cultural tensions, combined with economic pressure, have fueled a profound sense of frustration.

A local journalist shared,

> "Sometimes I feel like this is not my country. Why do I confront many challenges in my village? Moving around is difficult; every time we travel, our vehicle stops in lineups while others (not the local community) pass without pausing. Where is the urgency for our needs?"

Such sentiments capture the feelings of symbolic and practical marginalization experienced by many hosts.

However, there were positive signs and opportunities for further improvement. 44% of host respondents acknowledged the existence of supportive projects, indicating that efforts are being made to include the host population in development initiatives, although gaps remain. Moreover, some local businesses have indirectly benefited from the humanitarian response through increased demand for goods, services, transport, and housing. Economic linkages offer opportunities for both collaboration and shared growth.

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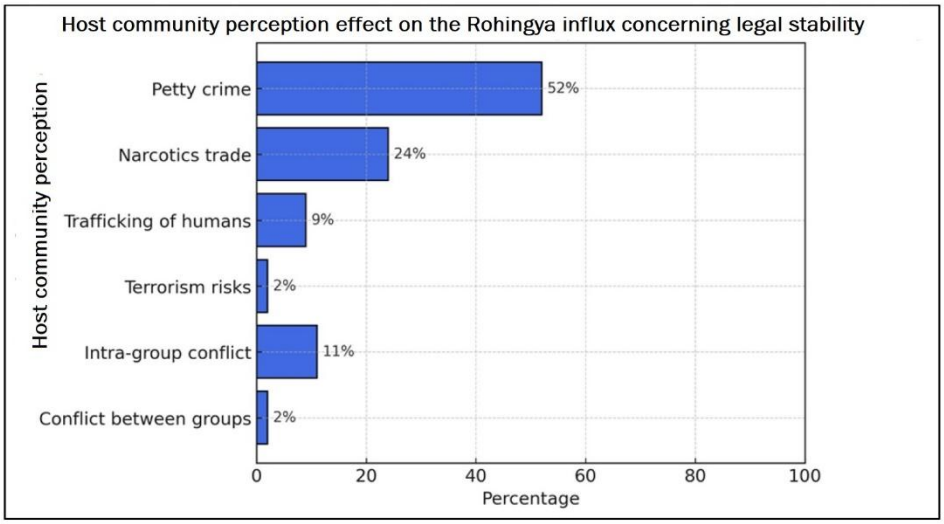
From the Rohingya perspective, their involvement in informal labor is driven by survival needs rather than intentional competition. They experienced trauma, uncertainty, and restricted mobility. When managed inclusively, their participation in the local economy can foster skills-sharing and peaceful coexistence and safeguard host livelihoods. Building mutual understanding and developing equitable policies will be key to transforming current tensions into a foundation for sustainable, community-based development for both the Rohingya and host populations.

4.5 Crime and Security Issues

Figure 6 delineates the concerns of the host community regarding the impact of the Rohingya influx on law and order.

Figure 6: Host community perception effect on the Rohingya influx concerning legal stability



Host communities perceived a 52% increase in petty crimes, followed by narcotic trade at 24%. Other issues, such as intra-group conflict (11%), human trafficking (9%), and both terrorism and inter-group violence (2% each), were mentioned less frequently, although official records were unavailable.

Although these figures are based on community perceptions and lack verification by security authorities, they provide valuable insight into local concerns. These apprehensions are likely to be influenced by factors such as poverty, unemployment, and limited law enforcement. Notably, serious threats such as terrorism are not widely perceived, suggesting that peaceful coexistence is achievable. Many Rohingyas are also at risk of exploitation, and their involvement in informal activities is often driven by survival needs rather than malicious intent. The data suggests that these issues can be effectively managed through enhanced policing, inclusive livelihood support, and community-based initiatives. Despite these challenges, this situation presents opportunities for collaboration. Joint efforts between host and refugee communities, particularly those involving young people, can help alleviate tensions, prevent crimes, and promote mutual understanding, leading to a more peaceful and cooperative environment.

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4.6 Environmental and Resource Issues

This study also identifies environmental degradation as a key source of tension. The rapid influx of refugees has strained local resources, especially water and forests, intensifying competition and potential conflict. According to UNDP assessments, water table depletion has been reported in the region, which could lead to water scarcity and heightened disputes between refugees and their host communities (UNDP, Bangladesh 2019). Efforts such as water and sanitation projects as well as livelihood initiatives have been initiated but remain insufficient, particularly as funding cuts threaten these interventions. These environmental pressures not only exacerbate community insecurity but also pose long-term risks to sustainability (Siraj, 2025b).

The results quantitatively and qualitatively illustrate the environment of increasing insecurity and tension in Cox's Bazar. Rising petty crimes, persistent GBV, perceptions of unequal aid distribution, economic marginalization, and environmental strain collectively contribute to a deteriorating sense of community security among both Rohingya refugees and host populations. These findings underscore the urgent need for integrated, equitable, and sustainable interventions to address multifaceted challenges in the region.

5 Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the security of communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf is deeply influenced by the interactions between Rohingya refugees and local populations, where economic hardship, cultural disconnection, and political exclusion are intertwined. Consistent with the tripartite deprivation model, this study indicates that community insecurity stems not only from economic difficulties but also from more profound cultural and political exclusions. Drawing on Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom (1999), which views deprivation as the denial of essential freedoms ranging from basic needs to economic participation, Rohingya refugees, who lack formal economic opportunities and host communities, face resource constraints and economic stagnation and express concerns about insecurity. The data shows that these conditions lead to material desperation and political grievances. This supports Gurr's (2011) theory of relative deprivation, which suggests that conflict arises from the disparity between expected and actual conditions and not merely from poverty itself. Refugees, systematically barred from legal employment, resent their marginalization, while hosts, perceiving aid disparities as unfair, direct their frustration toward refugees.

This cycle of resentment fuels crime, resource conflicts, and the breakdown of trust, illustrating Sen's warning that economic, social, and political unfreedoms undermine collective stability. Sen's framework proposes that solutions should expand real freedoms (e.g., work rights for refugees), whereas Gurr's model highlights the importance of equity perceptions, emphasizing the need for proper aid allocation and compensation programs for host communities.

Culturally, the study finds that the Rohingya experience systemic erasure and stigmatization, further deepening their marginalization. The denial of their cultural identity by the Myanmar state has extended into refugee camps, where there may be some limitations to artistic expression, movement, and access to education. Cultural exclusion is a form of structural violence that perpetuates long-term insecurity that originated in its own country (Myanmar). In turn, host communities fear the erosion of their cultural values

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and traditions due to the demographic and social pressures brought about by the influx of refugees.

The political aspects of the crisis were deeply rooted. Statelessness serves not just as a legal gap but also as a political instrument that deprives the Rohingya of protection, representation, and autonomy. Refugees find themselves stuck in a legally gray area, lacking rights in both their homeland due to the denial of citizenship in Myanmar and the countries where they seek refuge due to legal issues and not being signatories to the refugee convention. This state of uncertainty leaves them open to exploitation, trafficking, and marginalization.

Governance in humanitarian settings is better understood as a dynamic interaction among state authorities, implementing agencies, and affected communities rather than a single top-down approach (Hilhorst et al., 2019). Similar patterns are observed in other prolonged refugee situations, such as the Syrian crisis in Jordan and Lebanon and the Somali displacement in Kenya. In these scenarios, relative deprivation, marginalization, cultural misunderstandings, and political neglect have led to ongoing insecurity and dependency (Al-Masri, 2017; Crisp, 2003). However, the Rohingya situation is distinguished by an exceptional degree of statelessness and cultural exclusion in their homeland, which makes the crisis particularly difficult to resolve.

Despite these obstacles, this study highlights the areas of resilience and positive engagement. The increase in petty crime and gender-based violence reported by refugee respondents indicates gaps in protective institutions and economic desperation. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that displacement contexts often heighten vulnerabilities owing to weakened legal systems and disrupted community norms (Milton et al. 2017; Green et al. 2022).

Nonetheless, this research advocates solutions that transcend punitive policing, endorsing community-driven policing and gender-responsive measures, as well as include legal frameworks that foster trust and address underlying issues. The Protection Sector in Cox's Bazar is committed to addressing the root causes of insecurity, violence, and crime in the Rohingya refugee camps by championing child protection, gender inclusion, access to justice, and legal rights. By leveraging community-based systems and collaborating with the government, it seeks to establish a safe, inclusive environment. The sector employs key strategies, including both legal and non-legal mediation, such as peacebuilding, legal counseling, and housing, land, and property (HLP) mediation through UNHCR partners. Focusing on over one million refugees and 346,000 host community members, the sector emphasizes conflict resolution, transparency, and coordination to enhance security, resilience, and peaceful coexistence (Protection Sector Cox's Bazar Bangladesh, 2024).

Environmental degradation is a significant source of societal tension. Deforestation, land disputes, and water scarcity in certain areas directly affect the livelihoods of refugees and hosts. The integration of environmental governance into community security frameworks, as suggested in this study, is a novel contribution that highlights the inseparability of environmental and human security in refugee hosting contexts.

This study sheds light on the sociocultural dynamics of coexistence. While host communities express concerns about cultural erosion, this study identifies the potential for shared cultural spaces and dialogue. Initiatives that encourage cross-cultural

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interaction build social cohesion not merely through proximity but through shared narratives, mutual respect, and participatory governance.

Despite these challenges, both the communities exhibited signs of resilience. Host community members express willingness to support Rohingya neighbors when they are included in aid programs and decision-making. Refugees demonstrate agency through informal educational initiatives, small-scale entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation. These findings resonate with the concept of "resilient coexistence" (Hilhorst et al., 2019), where peacebuilding arises from grassroots cooperation, rather than an external imposition.

Thus, this study advocates integrated, multi-sectoral policies that simultaneously address the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of insecurity. Such policies should promote inclusive economic development, recognize cultural identities, and empower both refugees and host communities through participatory governance. Enhancing community security in Ukhiya and Teknaf is not only a humanitarian necessity but also a pathway to sustainable peace and regional stability.

Future research should explore long-term governance models that include both refugees and hosts, investigate the role of memory politics and cultural resilience in the Rohingya, and assess the efficacy of community-driven development in reducing conflicts and fostering solidarity.

Future studies should leverage longitudinal approaches to examine shifts in community security and social dynamics for a more widespread understanding of how Rohingya refugees and host communities are affected. Extending the geographical reach beyond Ukhiya and Teknaf may allow for a comparative analysis, pointing to regional variations in obstacles and successes. A deeper understanding of locally relevant solutions could emerge from increased investigation of community-driven interventions and resilience methods. Furthermore, using modern data-gathering tools, such as mobile-based surveys or satellite images for environmental evaluation, may boost the accuracy and scope of conclusions. Applying participatory research methodologies that involve the community in data collection and analysis will empower stakeholders and improve the relevance of their suggestions. Ultimately, future work should analyze the long-term implications of holistic solutions that can cope with security, economic development, gender protection, and environmental protection.

6 Conclusions

This study reveals the different components that erode community security in Ukhiya and Teknaf, where Rohingya refugees and the host community live together. This study suggests an increase in petty crime, gender-based violence, economic marginalization, and environmental devastation, which are interacting drivers of insecurity and stress. Quantitative and qualitative statistics demonstrate that there are deep-seated grievances about the unfair funding allocation and distribution of aid, competition for resources, and perception of cultural loss that have led to the erosion of trust between refugees and hosts. The results demonstrate the necessity for comprehensive sustainable policies that deal with security, economics, society, and the environment simultaneously.

Through equal aid distribution or respecting the government's request for fund allocation (minimum 20-30% for the host community) between the host community and refugees,

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community policing, women's empowerment, and environmental stewardship, stakeholders can work on the circumstances rather than the root of the conflict. The research shows the need to work together, sharing local, national, and international policies trying to work together to focus on community needs.

The issues faced by the host community were based on the perceptions of local residents and selected respondents, which have not been verified by legal authorities. However, the data from the camps were derived from secondary reports. While this study provides an idea of the existing situation, it also reveals a gap in future research. By continuing to fine-tune the methodology, broadening the geographical scope of studies, and using longitudinal data to monitor changes, we will grasp what is happening in refugee-hosting countries over time. In the end, learning from this study can aid in establishing better policies and programs for safe and stable coexistence, respecting the dignity and rights of Rohingya refugees and the host community.

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The Impact of the War in Gaza on Children's Right to Education: A Qualitative Study of Local and International Social Work Interventions[1]

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the ongoing war in Gaza on children's right to education and the role of social work in addressing these challenges. Drawing on a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with educators and social workers in Gaza and the West Bank, alongside document analysis of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and institutional reports, this study highlights the widespread destruction of educational infrastructure, forced displacement, and severe psychosocial distress among both children and professionals. Schools have been repurposed as shelters, repeatedly targeted in attacks, and have thus become unsuitable as safe learning environments. Educational needs extend beyond academic instruction to include trauma-informed interventions, psychosocial support, inclusive facilities, and curricula adapted to post-conflict realities. Social workers, often operating under life-threatening conditions, combine community-based initiatives with advocacy, integrating psychosocial care into emergency education and documenting rights violations. Yet these efforts are hindered by the blockade, limited resources, bombardments, repeated evacuation orders, and insufficient international solidarity, including global social work institutions. The study argues for decolonizing social work practice, centering Palestinian voices, and embedding education protection within humanitarian, legal, and political frameworks. Recommendations for social work include strengthening community-led responses, advocating for structural change to safeguard education as a fundamental right during and after conflict, and rethinking the role of social work as a human rights profession in the Gaza context.

Key Words:

Gaza, right to education, social work, armed conflict, children's rights

1 Introduction

Human Rights Watch (2024a) has raised serious concerns about the global rise in attacks on education. In 2023 alone, 475 attacks on schools in Palestine were reported, many involving airstrikes or ground offensives with explosive weapons. These actions not only destroyed educational infrastructure but also caused injuries and the killing of students

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and educators. Moreover, the use of school buildings by armed or non-state armed groups increased the risk of them being targeted (Human Rights Watch, 2024a).

The current war in Gaza began after Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack on Israel. In response, the Israeli government launched a large-scale military operation in Gaza, one that has disproportionately affected civilians, especially women, children, and persons with disabilities (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2025). The demographic structure of the Palestinian population must be taken into account in this context. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2023), around 40% of the population is under the age of 14, and nearly half of Gaza's 2.23 million residents are under 18. These children fall under the full protection of international law, particularly the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (adopted 20/11/1989, entered into force 2/9/1990, 1577 UNTS 3, 1989 CRC). However, these rights remain largely theoretical in the current context.

As in many armed conflicts, children are among the first to suffer from hostilities between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Yet the current war in Gaza is not the only factor contributing to their vulnerability. Long before October 2023, children in Gaza lived under siege conditions. The 17-year blockade had already severely restricted access to basic rights, including education (Bashir, 2024). The war has now turned this crisis into a humanitarian catastrophe.

The IDF has repeatedly justified airstrikes on schools in Gaza by claiming they were being used as command centres by Hamas (Davies, 2025). However, the extent of the destruction, the high number of civilian deaths, and the consistent targeting of educational facilities raise serious legal and moral concerns.

While the war in Gaza has triggered extensive social, political, legal, and international debates, the direct impact on civil society, particularly children, remains underexplored. Children's specific vulnerabilities, whose development and well-being are deeply affected by war, require urgent attention. Against this background, it is essential to examine both the violations of their right to education and the measures taken to protect it. This requires an understanding of the legal framework and the educational needs of children in the current context and the role and limitations of social work in addressing these challenges. Based on this context, the research is guided by the following research question:

- How has the current war in Gaza impacted children's right to education, and what role has social work played in addressing these challenges?

Sub-questions:

- What are the immediate and long-term educational needs of children affected by the war in Gaza?
- How have local and international social work interventions adapted their approaches to address educational challenges during the war?
- What key constraints limit social work interventions in protecting children's right to education?

This study not only provides a critical analysis of violations but also develops recommendations for social work research and practice, aimed at strengthening its role in protecting educational rights during and after conflict.

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The article first establishes the theoretical framework by examining international legal protections for children in armed conflicts, then contextualizes the Gaza context through key historical events and the state of the educational system before the war. It proceeds with education and social work in conflict settings, followed by the methodology, findings and a critical discussion. Finally, it presents practice-oriented recommendations and concludes with key insights and implications for future research.

2 Legal Frameworks

2.1 International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law

Children's rights are specifically protected under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) in conflict-affected areas. Relevant legal instruments include the 1989 CRC, the *Geneva Conventions* (adopted 12/8/1949, entered into force 21/10/1950, 75 UNTS 287, 1949 GC), and their *Additional Protocols* (AP). The term "child" is defined in Art. 1 of the 1989 CRC as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless the law applicable to the child establishes the age of majority earlier."

The *Hague Conventions*, which contain rules to regulate warfare, provide general rules on occupation (ICRC, n.d.). The Hague Law is internationally binding on all states, regardless of formal acceptance, as it is considered customary international law (Crawford & Pert, 2015). Art. 42 of the *Hague Regulations* (adopted 18/10/1907, entered into force 26/1/1910, 36 Stat. 2277, 187 CTS 227, 1907 HC IV) states that "[t]erritory is considered to be occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army." Since the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) has been under Israeli occupation since 1967, the occupying power is required to comply with specific obligations under IHL (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Israel claims to have withdrawn from Gaza in 2005 and argues that Gaza is therefore not occupied and not subject to the law of occupation (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and various non-governmental human rights organizations contradict Israel's claims (Coop, 2024). Even though Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, as governing bodies, bear responsibility for protecting the rights of their populations, Israel still has obligations as the occupying power (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

IHL emphasizes the special protection of children due to their unique vulnerability (Bolborici, 2024). It regulates the conduct of both state and non-state actors in armed conflict by setting legal boundaries on the use of force and establishing obligations to protect civilians and other non-combatants (Crawford & Pert, 2015). IHRL, unlike IHL, applies in all situations, both in peacetime and during armed conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Children's rights are enshrined in the 1989 CRC, which emphasizes special measures to ensure children's development and protection.

In 2024, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) criticized the impunity, arguing that the absence of consequences sends a dangerous message regarding the acceptance of multilateral systems. Independent human rights experts documented crimes against humanity and war crimes, including indiscriminate attacks on educational institutions and the targeting of humanitarian workers (OHCHR, 2024). The unlawfulness and disregard for binding measures are further supported by the political protection Israel receives from its allies, who often question the legitimacy of international institutions, mandate holders (OHCHR, 2024), or the jurisdiction of the International

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Criminal Court (ICC). Consequently, the success of international criminal justice and accountability for crimes against children depends heavily on the support of other states, civil society organizations, and communities (Amann, 2019).

2.2 Education as a Fundamental Right

While IHL does not provide a specific right to education, it offers provisions aimed at protecting educational institutions and students during armed conflicts. In contrast, IHRL explicitly affirms the right to education (Akbariavaz & Tehrani, 2020). Art. 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (adopted 10/12/1948, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III), 1948 UDHR) declares education as a universal right, essential for the full development of human personality.

Art. 28 of the 1989 CRC explicitly recognizes every child's right to education, emphasizing the need for accessible, inclusive, and quality learning opportunities. This right is reinforced by Art. 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (adopted 16/12/1966, entered into force 3/1/1976, 993 UNTS 3, 1966 ICESCR), which obligates states and the international community to secure access to education even during emergencies. Additionally, Art. 24 of the 1949 GC IV clarifies that occupying powers must ensure the provision of facilities necessary to protect and educate children.

The right to education is also underscored by intergovernmental commitments like the Safe Schools Declaration (GCPEA, 2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (UN, n.d.a).

However, as demonstrated in the previous section, these legal and policy frameworks remain severely limited. The current conflict exemplifies this violation, affecting both educational infrastructure and access to learning opportunities. Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, highlighted in her country report *A/79/384 Genocide as Colonial Erasure,* that the widespread destruction in Gaza points to allegations of "scholasticide", defined as the systematic destruction of educational institutions and the denial of education as a means of erasing cultural and national identity (United Nations General Assembly, 2024).

3. The Gaza Context

3.1 Historical Context and Impact on Civilians

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalated significantly with the establishment of the State of Israel and the first Israeli-Arab war in 1948 (Center for Preventive Action, 2025). UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (II) (adopted 29/11/1947, 1947 UNGA Res. 181 [II]) had proposed partition into two independent states but instead triggered war, displacement, and the division of the territory into Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip (UN, n.d.b).

Further key events include the 1967 Six-Day War, which resulted in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, followed by the First and Second Intifadas (1987 and 2000–2005) and the Oslo Accords (1993 and 1995), which established the Palestinian Authority (Center for Preventive Action, 2025).

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The 2006 Palestinian legislative elections led to Hamas, a militant Islamist movement, gaining control over the Gaza Strip. The situation worsened due to an Israeli-imposed blockade and internal conflicts between Hamas and the previous ruling party, Fatah (Center for Preventive Action, 2025). In the following years, Israel launched multiple military operations in Gaza, including Operation *Cast Lead* (2008), clashes in 2014, and further conflicts in 2018. These events were accompanied by ongoing peace negotiations, UN Security Council Resolutions 1860 (adopted 8/1/2009, 2009 UNSC Res. 1860) and 2334 (adopted 23/12/2016, 2016 UNSC Res. 2334), and continued international mediation (Amnesty International, 2022).

On October 7, 2023, Hamas fighters and other Palestinian armed groups entered southern Israel by breaking down the fence, killing at least 1,200 Israelis, including children, and taking 250 hostages into the Gaza Strip (Human Rights Watch, 2024b). This marked the beginning of a catastrophic escalation of the conflict.

By January 2025, South Africa had brought a case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. While the process remains ongoing, the ICJ has issued provisional measures ordering Israel to prevent acts of genocide by allowing humanitarian aid access and ensuring the provision of basic services (UN, n.d.b).

Israel's evacuation orders displaced over one million people initially, with repeated evacuation orders creating continuous forced movement. Multiple reports from several international organizations documented the targeting of journalists, schools, hospitals, and areas claimed to be safe zones for evacuees (Center for Preventive Action, 2025). During the war, many organizations providing humanitarian aid had to suspend their operations due to Israel's ban and blockade, as well as to ensure their employees' safety after Israel repeatedly killed humanitarian workers (Center for Preventive Action, 2025).

The conflict has displaced nearly 1.9 million people internally. Israel's military use of 2,000-lb bombs and white phosphorus has caused massive civilian casualties, while the destruction of infrastructure has created severe shortages of food, water, and healthcare (Boukari et al., 2024). Already in 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that indirect effects, such as communicable diseases, could kill more people than the armed conflict itself (WHO, 2023). Children suffer particularly from malnutrition and psychological trauma (Boukari et al., 2024). Already in 2023, UNRWA reported a poor situation among school-aged children, with more than half having contemplated suicide and three out of five engaging in self-harming behaviors even before the current war began. Furthermore, over 26,000 children have been orphaned since the war began, placing them at risk of further psychosocial harm (ACAPS, 2024).

Save the Children (2024) estimated, after the first three months of war, that more than ten children a day lost one or both legs due to bombings, being trapped under rubble, and necessary amputations, which often had to be performed without anaesthesia due to shortages of medical supplies. Furthermore, children are seven times more likely to die from blast injuries. The Ministry of Health in Gaza reported that since October 7, 2023, at least 63,746 Palestinians have been killed and 161,245 others injured as of 4 September 2025 (OCHA, 2025).

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3.2 Education before the Latest Escalation

Even before the current war, Gaza's education system was severely damaged by the 17-year blockade and previous conflicts, with 63% of schools operating under a double-shift system (Bashir, 2024). All children faced vulnerability, with risks for those living near the border fence, in refugee camps, and adolescent boys exposed to child labor and normalized violence (UNRWA, 2020).

Amnesty International (2022) has criticized the suppression of Palestinian human development, including in the education sector. Systematic socio-economic disadvantages create barriers to accessing and improving education. The denial of freedom of movement for Palestinians in Gaza further restricts opportunities for higher education abroad. Additionally, since 2007, Israel has refused to allow the entry of materials needed to rebuild civilian infrastructure, including schools. Even before the most recent escalation, the 2014 Israeli offensive destroyed seven schools, of which only one has been rebuilt, contributing to an estimated shortage of 200 schools in Gaza (Amnesty International, 2022). This pattern of destruction and reconstruction has prevented educational stability (Milton et al., 2023).

4 Education in Conflict Zones

Education in Emergencies (EiE) is conceptualized as encompassing quality learning opportunities across all age groups that provide physical, psychological, and cognitive protection (UNESCO, 2025). In crisis settings, education is both a fundamental right and a protective mechanism, offering life-saving information, such as hygiene practices and mine awareness, providing stability, and fostering long-term recovery through skill development and social cohesion. It also promotes inclusion, tolerance, human rights awareness, and conflict resolution, which are essential for post-conflict rebuilding, conciliation, and peacebuilding (INEE, 2018).

Armed conflicts affect education through both direct and indirect pathways (Muthanna et al., 2022). Direct impacts include the physical destruction of schools, targeted attacks on educational facilities, and militarization of learning spaces. Indirect impacts arise from psychosocial trauma among students and teachers, forced displacement, and systemic collapse of educational structures (Muthanna et al., 2022). These interruptions increase vulnerability to child labor, early marriage, and recruitment by armed groups (UNICEF, 2024), while the psychological burden of war further impairs cognitive functioning and learning capacity (Budnyk & Sajdak-Burska, 2023). Moreover, school closures cut off access to health and nutrition services, thereby further increasing children's vulnerability (UNESCO, 2025).

A study by the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge (Educ), the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS), and UNRWA (2024) warns that a whole generation may be lost in Gaza, with cumulative effects of trauma, malnutrition, and displacement undermining children's belief in human rights and equality (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024). Similar patterns are observed in Syria, where prioritizing temporary emergency education over sustainable solutions led to poor learning outcomes, high dropout rates, a surge in child labor, and 71% of communities reporting increased child marriages (Qaddour & Husain, 2022).

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One example of an approach is the Education Development Centre's Somali Interactive Radio Instruction Program, which delivers literacy, numeracy, life skills, health, and conflict prevention content amid insecurity, and Syria's use of temporary learning spaces in safer villages (GCPEA, n.d.). In Ukraine, after brief school closures, 95% of districts implemented online classes and later returned to in-person learning with bomb shelters and safety measures (GCPEA, 2023).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) illustrates why education becomes secondary in survival situations, since educational needs are situated above basic psychological and safety needs. In Gaza, the siege and war have compromised all levels of this hierarchy (Alah, 2024), forcing children to prioritize immediate needs like food, water, and safety over schooling.

The critical role of education is formally recognized in humanitarian standards. The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2019) emphasizes education's function in providing safe environments, facilitating coordinated evacuations, and disseminating safety information to prevent further injuries among children. Its Minimum Standards for Child Protection (Standard 23) address the intersection of education and child protection, noting that the denial of education heightens vulnerability and recommending integrated approaches between protection and education actors.

5 Social Work and Armed Conflicts

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) defines social work as "a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people" (IFSW, 2014). This definition emphasizes the profession's commitment to social justice, human rights, and collective responsibility. Seifert (2024) argues that the human rights dimension of social work remains essential in armed conflicts, although such concepts expose structural contradictions between professional ideals and the realities of humanitarian practice.

Social work, as conceptualized by Staub-Bernasconi, operates within a triple mandate: (1) providing support to individuals in need, (2) exercising control within institutional structures, and (3) advocating for human rights (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). In Gaza, children's rights to education represent both a humanitarian and a political concern. Applying these methods enables social workers to bridge emergency relief with long-term strategies that protect vulnerable populations and advocate for systemic change. Basic (2022) highlights the necessity of social work in "changing structures and institutions that prevent the realization of citizens' rights and the promotion of emancipation and social justice" (p. 71).

Rogers (2008) argues that social work in conflict zones must align with IHL, which protects children and education. Integrating IHL into practice can not only strengthen humanitarian responses but also position social workers as witnesses to violations, with a role in documenting and addressing them (Rogers, 2008).

However, human rights-based approaches have faced criticism for their Western-centric origins. Sewpaul (2016) emphasizes that such frameworks often neglect the historical and political realities of colonized nations. This critique is particularly relevant in Gaza, where injustices and occupation continue to shape the struggle for rights.

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Empirical studies from other contexts highlight practical pathways. In Ukraine, institutionalized responses showed limits, while community-based interventions foster resilience, agency, and recovery (Suhel & Kumar, 2023). Research in Syria similarly found that effective social work does not aim to replace but to reactivate family and community support networks. Effective interventions included peer group activities, awareness-raising, livelihood programs, and case management. Practitioners also emphasized the importance of culturally embedded approaches (Paul et al., 2025).

The Gaza case reflects both parallels and differences. As in Syria or Ukraine, children face multiple forms of vulnerability, but intervention opportunities are constrained by the blockade, recurring displacement, and destruction of infrastructure. While social workers attempt to intervene and strengthen community resilience, their efforts are restricted by scarce resources and security risks. The UNRWA's social work teams in Gaza provide psychosocial first aid, case management, and family as well as individual activities. However, since October 2024, no international UNRWA staff have been permitted to enter the OPT (UNRWA, 2025).

6 Methodology

6.1 Research Design and Sampling

This qualitative study combines semi-structured interviews with educators and social workers in Gaza and the West Bank with content analysis of relevant documents and reports from international organizations. The integration of qualitative interviews and document analysis enables a holistic understanding of the educational realities and the role of social work, thereby facilitating the identification of both immediate and long-term needs of children, the strategies applied to address them, and the structural limitations of such interventions.

The research followed an interpretivist epistemological paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed, subjective, and context-dependent (Bryman, 2016). Triangulation through qualitative interviews and document analysis was employed to enhance the validity of the findings by incorporating multiple sources (Noble & Heale, 2019). This approach captures both individual perspectives and institutional, legal, and political frameworks, applying within-method triangulation (Casey & Murphy, 2009) and data triangulation (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021) to validate and extend findings.

A purposive sampling strategy was applied to identify professionals with direct experience in social work or education in the Gaza context. Given the on-the-ground conditions and access constraints, participants were chosen based on willingness, availability, and relevant expertise (Bryman, 2016).

The final sample consisted of four participants: two located in Gaza during data collection (an English teacher and a social worker) and two based in the West Bank (a representative of the Teacher Creativity Centre Association in Ramallah and a member of the Palestinian Union of Social Workers and Psychologists Palestine in Bethlehem). To facilitate recruitment in Gaza, organizations working directly with educators and social workers were contacted and asked to inform potential participants about the research.

This indirect recruitment process allowed interested individuals to make decisions with minimized pressure, respecting their autonomy, and safeguarded voluntary participation

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(Irvine, 2013). Initial contact with those who agreed was established via secure messaging platforms.

To complement the interviews, a systematic qualitative document analysis was conducted, using reports from NGOs, UNRWA, humanitarian assessments, and academic publications. Document analysis provided macro-level and institutional perspectives, contributing to data triangulation and bias reduction (Bowen, 2009). As Morgan (2022) notes, the use of preexisting data is a common strategy to "increase the trustworthiness of a study" (p. 65), while also enabling research on contexts that are difficult to access (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following Flick (2018), documents were assessed according to authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. The combination of document and interview data strengthens both the credibility and representativeness of the findings by incorporating multiple sources and viewpoints while also addressing potential gaps arising from ethical constraints or interview limitations in Gaza. Document selection followed purposive and theoretical sampling (Flick, 2018) to complement and deepen interview-derived insights.

6.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The interview guide (17-19 questions, approx. 45 minutes) was adapted to local and international contexts, following Flick's (2011) principles of context-specific interviewing. Due to limited electricity, internet access, and safety concerns, interviews with Gaza-based participants were conducted via text-based synchronous messaging on secure platforms, which constitutes a valid adaptation in crisis contexts (Desai et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews were chosen to enable participants to elaborate on their experiences in their own words while maintaining comparability across interviews. Open-ended questions encouraged rich, detailed responses, and the flexibility to pose follow-up questions enhanced the depth of the data (Bryman, 2008). The interviews in the West Bank took place via Zoom. Arabic translations were provided, and informed consent was obtained in advance. A native Arabic-speaking translator facilitated the interviews. The translator was briefed on research ethics and confidentiality obligations. Transcripts were produced using the intelligent verbatim method (McMullen, 2023), following Kuckartz et al. (2008), and were double-checked for accuracy and contextual correctness.

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun et al., 2019). This method was chosen for its flexibility and capacity to work across different material types while remaining grounded in participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Interview transcripts and documents were imported into MAXQDA and coded through repeated readings. Initial codes were inductively generated, refined, and grouped into broader themes based on recurring patterns. Selected quotations illustrate key themes and concepts. To ensure triangulation, codes were systematically compared across three data sources: Gaza interviews, West Bank interviews, and documents, using MAXQDA's Code Matrix Browser. This process validated and refined core themes across sources, enhancing the credibility of findings.

6.3 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

All participants received an informed consent form that outlined the aim of the study, ensured confidentiality, and clarified the voluntary nature of their participation. Anonymity was ensured by removing identifiable data and deleting transcripts after secure storage.

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Questions were designed to avoid trauma-related or politically sensitive content, and participants could skip any question.

The researcher's positionality as an external observer was continuously reflected upon. In line with Schulz (2020), ethical challenges arising from socio-economic, political, and cultural asymmetries in research relationships were acknowledged. Such asymmetries can reinforce power imbalances by positioning participants as requiring protection from the researcher (Schulz, 2020). To mitigate these dynamics, reflexivity was applied throughout, and questions were designed to minimize harm. The study adopted an advocacy-oriented stance (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wa-Mbaleka, 2020), aiming to raise awareness of structural injustices and ethical dilemmas in social work, while acknowledging the ethical tension of benefiting from participants' experiences.

Several limitations must be noted. Ongoing escalations during data collection altered local realities and limited the validity of the documents. Remote, text-based interviews in Gaza restricted access to non-verbal reactions and reduced the depth of the data. The sample size, while providing in-depth insights, is limited and affects the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the reliance on NGO reports may reflect editorial and political bias (Bowen, 2009). The scope, covering both the impact on education and the role of social work, was broad relative to the length and depth possible.

7 Findings

The following findings are presented using data from both the documents included in the document analysis and the conducted interviews. Examples from both sources are used to illustrate the results.

7.1 Impact on Education

The war in Gaza has profoundly disrupted education at multiple levels, including infrastructure, accessibility, and psychosocial well-being. The triangulation of documents and interviews consistently highlights displacement, destruction, and insecurity as key barriers.

Since the beginning of the war, approximately 90% of the population has been displaced multiple times (ACAPS, 2024), which significantly limits access to schooling. Many schools have been repurposed as emergency shelters, with 1.4 million people housed in 264 schools by late 2024 (OPT Education Cluster, 2024a). A participant from Gaza described, "Evacuating from one place to another for safety purposes also does not give us the chance to think about our kids' teaching" (personal communication, February 2, 2025).

By the end of 2024, about 95.2% of school buildings in Gaza had suffered damage, and 88% required substantial reconstruction before reopening (OPT Education Cluster, 2025). Between November 2023 and July 2024, 378 schools were directly attacked, many while being used as civilian shelters (ACAPS, 2024). Northern Gaza was particularly affected, with 97.7% of schools damaged, while UNRWA-operated schools were hit or damaged in 83.4% of cases (OPT Education Cluster, 2024b). Interviews confirm this pattern: one participant noted that Northern Gaza was disproportionately affected since tanks remained, and bombardment hindered any educational intervention (personal communication, February 2, 2025). Both documents and participants interpreted this destruction as a deliberate attack on collective knowledge and culture. As one document

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stated, such destruction "jeopardizes Palestinian identity" (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024, p. 18), undermining long-term prospects for self-determination and national development.

Displacement and insecurity further exclude children from formal and informal education. In 2024, Tawjihi national secondary exams were cancelled for 39,000 students (OPT Education Cluster, 2024c) and 58,000 children could not start first grade (ACAPS, 2024). Vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, were disproportionately affected (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024) due to lack of transportation, accessible shelters, and the absence of inclusive facilities. A social worker explained, "They certainly did not receive any services – both because of their disabilities and because services were unavailable" (personal communication, April 26, 2025). Parents also restricted mobility for safety reasons, as one teacher described, "Many parents try to keep their kids beside them for safety purposes and to be all together. So, if Israel bomb[s] them, they all die together" (personal communication, February 2, 2025).

Educators, social workers, and volunteers who attempted to create educational activities sometimes lost their lives or were separated from their families (personal communication, April 3, 2025). Data also indicate that children increasingly assume adult responsibilities such as queuing for water and food, caring for siblings, and contributing to household income: "Every day, children are responsible for bringing food from charity kitchens, where they stand in line for more than four hours just to get a meal or to fetch water" (personal communication, April 3, 2025). Another participant observed that Gaza's children are "losing language, emotional capacity" (personal communication, April 11, 2025). This source underlines that the collapse of educational structures also erodes childhood itself, forcing children into adult roles while undermining their psychosocial development.

Material deprivation and the lack of digital infrastructure further limit access to education. Unreliable electricity, scarce devices, and limited internet connectivity hinder digital learning options (OPT Education Cluster, 2025). This was confirmed in interviews:

> "Online learning doesn't work because there's no stable internet. The Ministry of Education tried to relaunch some platforms for children, but you're talking about 700,000 children in Gaza, including high school students. You'll never be able to reach them all. And with the war back, people are afraid of gathering in one place…and that carries a high level of danger" (personal communication, April 3, 2025).

Attempts to create new learning spaces are also undermined by insecurity and political restrictions. As one participant stated,

> "When we talk about security and politics in Gaza, we're talking about the occupation. The occupation rejects every form of life in Gaza, including the rebuilding of education. Any attempt at rebuilding is regularly sabotaged by the occupation. Border crossings are closed… No books get in, no educational materials, nothing. The constant bombardment is also critical… Some attempts can succeed partially, but they often fail because of the war" (personal communication, April 11, 2025).

This is underlined by reports noting that repeated evacuation orders forced the closure of Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS), undermining even emergency interventions (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024).

The data show that systematic destruction of schools, mass displacement, and prolonged denial of education directly violate children's right to education. The collapse of

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infrastructure, displacement, insecurity, and material deprivation intersect to restrict both formal and alternative learning opportunities.

7.2 Educational Needs

Both interviews and documents point to an acute lack of psychosocial support for children, educators, and social workers. A social worker in Gaza stated, "When it comes to psychosocial well-being, it is almost non-existent" (personal communication, April 26, 2025). Reports stress the need for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programs (OPT Education Cluster, 2024d) and resilience-building, including play-based learning (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024). Participants equally emphasized life skills and psychosocial competencies (personal communications, February-April 26, 2025).

There is also a severe shortage of qualified teachers, counselors, and professional support teams. As one report stated, "Every school and learning space needs a school counselor and MHPSS focal point…" (OPT Education Cluster, 2024d).

Immediate measures must respond not only to learning needs but also to vulnerabilities such as disability, malnutrition, homelessness, and exposure to landmines. Teachers, themselves traumatized and displaced, also require support. One participant stressed, "When the right to life is secured, we can talk about the right to education" (personal communication, April 3, 2025).

Applying Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, survival has become the overriding priority, pushing education into the background. The triangulation of interviews and documents highlights that without a ceasefire, safe learning environments, and access to basic needs, education remains secondary.

One participant emphasized the broader meaning of schools:

> Schools here don't just teach math – they're the last bulwark against total societal collapse… Gaza's trauma exceeds clinical measurement… Our sumoud [resilience] concept helps somewhat, but when a child witnesses their teacher's dismemberment, no philosophy comforts" (personal communication, April 11, 2025).

Interviews and documents highlight that education must be addressed as both an immediate humanitarian priority and a long-term measure. Post-war educational restoration requires a multidimensional and trauma-informed approach beyond physical reconstruction. The estimated cost of rebuilding schools is USD 855 million (OPT Education Cluster, 2024a). Importantly, facilities must be designed for accessibility, especially for the high number of children with physical disabilities, many resulting from war-related injuries (OPT Education Cluster, 2025), and include safety measures against military threats such as unexploded ordnance.

Reports also note that schools themselves are linked to traumatic experiences, as children and teachers lived through bombardments while using schools as shelters (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024). Curricula must therefore adapt to post-war realities, addressing learning gaps and trauma, and altered perceptions, including children's questioning of values such as human rights (ACAPS, 2024). Training for educators should include child protection, disability inclusion, and mental health skills (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024).

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Altogether, the findings underscore that addressing educational needs in Gaza requires not only rebuilding schools but also ensuring safe spaces, psychosocial care, inclusive curricula, and sustained support for teachers and learners.

7.3 Role of Social Work

Social workers in Gaza operate under extreme conditions, supporting children and families despite bombardment, displacement, and destruction. They provide psychosocial first aid, group counselling, awareness sessions, and educational support. As one explained, "My work shifted to providing psychosocial first aid to displaced people from all categories" (personal communication, April 26, 2025).

The interviews show that community-based resilience is central. Despite their personal conditions, social workers adapt to support education through improvised learning spaces such as kindergartens, tents, or damaged buildings, serving both educational and psychosocial purposes (personal communications, February 2 & April 26, 2025). As a participant described,

> "[i]n dealing with crises, some managed to work with teachers to establish tents or spaces for children's education… Social workers were crucial in these teams… All this work is completely voluntary… Everything is volunteer-based to maintain children's education and resist forced displacement as much as possible" (personal communication, April 11, 2025).

This community-oriented approach reflects social work's dual role in protecting the right to education and providing stability.

It is important to note that social work in Gaza often does not fit neatly into professional categories. Their work overlaps with emergency response, volunteer initiatives, and informal community-led activities. At times, their role is visible only through specific interview accounts.

Findings also highlight the ethical dilemmas faced by social workers, who work under life-threatening conditions without safe spaces, psychosocial care, or resources. As one stated, "we work knowing that we could be killed at any moment… Despite this, I was leaving my kids with my mom to go to these educational tents…" (personal communication, February 2, 2025)

7.4 International Responses and Gaps

Despite these life-threatening conditions, international responses remain limited. Documents point to ongoing advocacy efforts, alarming warnings, and awareness-raising initiatives by NGOs in the West Bank, as well as UNRWA (2025) acting as the main social work provider in Gaza. However, these responses lack effective protection mechanisms and do not lead to accountability for perpetrators, leaving a critical gap between advocacy and enforceable action.

A further structural gap concerns international funding. Participants pointed to the collapse of educational funding and stressed that support must be delivered "unconditionally, because right now, almost everything in Gaza comes with conditions… Organizations have shifted their priorities… it's all about emergency relief now, not structural development" (personal communication, April 3, 2025).

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The analyzed documents likewise highlight underfunding, leading to the closure of TLSs. Despite binding norms recognizing education as a life-saving intervention, less than half of the requested funding had been delivered by August 2024 (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024).

While Gaza's social workers are supported by colleagues in the West Bank through remote solidarity, such as training and guidance during pauses in bombardment, advocacy, monitoring, and documentation of legal violations, global solidarity remains weak (personal communication, April 3, 2025). One participant reported,

> "[w]e have social workers who were martyred. We have social workers who were arrested… the social work associations in Jordan, Egypt, Yemen, and some European countries… directed sharp criticism at the international federation" (personal communication, April 11, 2025).

This gap between local resilience and weak global solidarity challenges the human rights mandate of the profession.

8 Discussion

The systematic destruction of schools, mass displacement, and prolonged denial of education in Gaza constitute direct violations of both IHL and IHRL. Children's right to education is compromised through the collapse of educational infrastructure, repeated displacement, and safety concerns that prevent attendance. Limited access to electricity and internet blocks alternative learning opportunities, while the prioritization of daily survival over schooling further undermines the continuity of education. Together, these conditions illustrate how the war in Gaza has restricted the realization of children's right to education.

The collected data highlight key patterns: Political barriers, lack of resources, and psychosocial consequences emerged as dominant themes. Local actors emphasized the immediate educational needs, including safe learning environments and psychosocial support, while participants from the West Bank also discussed long-term strategies, reflecting differences in lived experiences and capacities between actors within and outside Gaza. Visualizations from MAXQDA's Code Matrix Browser reinforce these insights: structural inequality, political barriers, and resource scarcity were consistently coded across interviews, particularly in Gaza. Psychosocial effects and urgent educational needs dominate the data, underscoring the immediate and long-term implications of the war on children's well-being and learning outcomes.

Compared to Syria, where school destruction and displacement are also widespread, Gaza is uniquely constrained by a strict blockade that limits digital learning and external support. The geographic situation further exacerbates the crisis, as there is almost no space for safe evacuation within Gaza, making all areas highly vulnerable. Additionally, Gaza has witnessed the highest number of humanitarian actors being killed during a conflict (United Nations, 2025). In contrast, in Syria, social work could be more systematically established during the war through external actors (Paul et al., 2025). Nevertheless, Syria experienced similar challenges, including delayed early recovery interventions, limited standardized education responses, and chronic funding shortages (Qaddour & Husain, 2022).

Social work has played a crucial role in mitigating these impacts. Locally, social workers operate as first responders, linking educational activities with trauma care, providing psychosocial support, and maintaining minimal educational continuity under extreme

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conditions. Internationally, organizations focus on advocacy and institutional frameworks. The study's findings illustrate discrepancies in international responses: participants criticized the IFSW for perceived inaction and double standards when comparing support in Gaza to responses in Ukraine, highlighting geopolitical biases that affect professional accountability and global advocacy.

Ethical considerations emerged during the research, particularly regarding reciprocity and the use of participants' experiences for academic purposes. Following Creswell & Poth (2018) and Wa-Mbaleka (2020), the study aimed to foster advocacy and awareness of systemic inequalities, emphasizing reflective practice and the human rights-based approach of social work. By translating experiences into actionable recommendations, this study seeks to contribute to both professional practice and policy discourse.

In summary, the war in Gaza has created multifaceted barriers to children's education. Social work at both local and international levels can mitigate some immediate consequences, but broader structural, political, and ethical challenges remain. Gaza's unique conditions highlight the need for sustained global advocacy and context-specific, human rights-based interventions.

9 Recommendations

9.1 Decolonizing Social Work and International Engagement

Decolonizing social work requires amplifying local voices not only during implementation but also in political framing and advocacy (Boryczko et al., 2023). Silence or neutral claims of professional bodies, such as the IFSW, in the face of war crimes represent a political stance (personal communication, April 11, 2025). In Gaza, a decolonial and human rights-based approach must therefore center Palestinian knowledge and lived experiences rather than replicating Western-centric frameworks. UN agencies, NGOs, and funding bodies should actively support Palestinian-led initiatives at all stages, including program design, monitoring, and advocacy, ensuring that local expertise shapes decision-making. Funding mechanisms should be flexible and unconditional, allowing local actors to address both immediate humanitarian needs and structural barriers. International social work associations must move beyond symbolic statements and provide tangible support, including resources, capacity-building, and legal protection for practitioners operating under life-threatening conditions.

9.2 Strengthening Community-Based and Trauma-Informed Responses

Local social workers in Gaza demonstrate adaptability, maintaining educational continuity through improvised learning spaces while providing psychosocial support (personal communications, February-April 2025). Trauma-informed interventions, including play-based learning, MHPSS, and teacher support, are essential for children's psychosocial and educational well-being. Funding bodies should provide resources that integrate education and psychosocial care, recognizing that addressing trauma is inseparable from learning. NGOs must support teacher training in psychosocial first aid (Educ, CLS & UNRWA, 2024), child protection, and disability inclusion, while ensuring emergency learning spaces are provided and maintained. International development programs should link micro-level interventions to broader structural advocacy, ensuring short-term support contributes to long-term, rights-based outcomes.

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9.3 Political Engagement and Human Rights Advocacy

Social work practice cannot be separated from political realities when fundamental rights are systematically violated. Social workers and allied international actors must engage in advocacy to uphold IHL and human rights treaties, hold perpetrators accountable, and pressure decision-makers at local, regional, and global levels. Interviews made clear that Palestinian social workers depend on international solidarity. As a participant said, "Social work, and this is essential, is a form of soft power" (personal communication, April 11, 2025). The international social work community must therefore move from symbolic statements to concrete actions, supporting Palestinian-led initiatives, cutting ties with complicit institutions, and refusing to normalize oppression. The IFSW's (2025) censure of the Israeli Union of Social Workers for failing to advocate for peace is a step in the right direction. However, as a participant noted, many Israeli social workers actively support military operations in Gaza without questioning state policy (personal communication, April 11, 2025). Social work must therefore not look away.

Such protection and advocacy must be embedded in legal frameworks, humanitarian action, and sustained international advocacy. This requires coordination between UN agencies, funding bodies, and international NGOs to ensure that interventions support rights-based education, document violations, and pressure decision-making. The participant's description illustrates the practical implication of this approach:

> "Our role is to talk about responsibility, Israel's responsibility, and the rights involved. We participate in the Global Campaign for Education and the Arab Education Coalition. Our coalition includes around eighty local organizations, plus Arab coalitions. For example, we hold the Global Action Week for Education. We run campaigns to pressure decision-makers and advocate in schools, political forums, and international spaces to raise awareness about children's suffering. We also work with funders and present the situation on social media and to international institutions to show both the achievements and the hardships children face. Through UNICEF and UNESCO, we try to deliver education and portray the hardships children endure. Everyone tries to make their voice heard within their specialty" (personal communication, April 3, 2025).

Building on this, international organizations should use their mandates to amplify advocacy for safe learning environments and accountability. Funding bodies should link financial support to upholding international human rights standards, ensuring the resources do not reinforce systemic oppression or selective neutrality. International social work associations should coordinate advocacy campaigns, highlight violations of children's rights and support Palestinian-led initiatives.

9.4 Rebuilding Education

Education in Gaza is not only physically destroyed but also politicized. Post-war reconstruction requires acknowledging the blockade, structural violence, and trauma experienced by children and educators. UN agencies and donors should fund crisis-sensitive curricula that reflect local realities, incorporate Palestinian history, address collective trauma, and promote human rights education. International stakeholders should support inclusive rebuilding, ensuring schools are accessible to children with disabilities, safe from military threats, and equipped to provide psychosocial support. Lessons from comparable contexts, such as Papua New Guinea, demonstrate that negotiations with all parties to allow education in designated safe zones can be effective and should be supported by international actors (UNICEF, 2025).

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10 Conclusion

Without an urgent ceasefire, reconstruction, and accountability, an entire generation in Gaza faces irreversible harm. The systematic attacks on schools, mass displacement, and denial of education amount to violations of international law and affect the long-term prospects of children's development and self-determination.

In this context, social workers in Gaza assume a crucial role. Despite their own displacement and trauma, they act as first responders, integrating psychosocial care into improvised learning spaces and sustaining community resilience under siege conditions. These practices reveal both the strengths and the limits of local coping strategies in the absence of effective international protection.

As a human rights profession, social work cannot remain neutral in the face of systemic violations. It must critically rethink its professional foundations, moving beyond service delivery to political advocacy. This includes supporting Palestinian-led initiatives, calling for sanctions on states that violate IHL, and ensuring that protection is embedded in legal frameworks, humanitarian action, and global advocacy. Without such engagement, the ethical foundations of social work risk becoming empty rhetoric. Strengthening global networks and adopting decolonized approaches are therefore necessary to challenge structural injustice and address the root causes of crises.

Finally, the study acknowledges that its focus is intentionally on the rights of the children in Gaza and the systems and realities they inhabit. While Israeli responsibilities are central, Hamas also bears responsibility. Yet Hamas cannot be regarded as a functioning government, and the population remains dependent on international aid and the conditions attached to it. Any meaningful recovery must therefore combine material reconstruction with psychosocial rehabilitation, supported by structural change in international policy and funding frameworks. Only then can the right to education for Gaza's children be restored and protected.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Gaza:

Question 1: Can you briefly introduce yourself and describe your role in supporting education in Gaza?

Question 2: How has your work changed since the start of the current war?

Question 3: What are the most urgent needs and biggest challenges currently facing in the education sector?

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Question 4: Are there specific groups of children facing greater barriers to education?

Question 5: What do you think are the lasting consequences for children's learning and well-being?

Question 6: What educational programs are currently available? Which subjects and materials are being used? Are there any digital learning options?

Question 7: What resources are currently most lacking?

Question 8: Is there any support for teachers/ social workers themselves?

Question 9: How are teachers /social workers prepared to work with traumatised children?

Question 10: What role does social work currently play in the education context? Are there collaborations between schools, social workers, and local NGOs? How do these partnerships function in practice?

Question 11: How is social work being practiced in your current context, especially in relation to education and child well-being?

Question 12: How effective have these efforts been? What are the biggest challenges you face in your daily work?

Question 13: How do resource shortages limit your ability to respond to children's needs?

Question 14: What would strengthen your intervention possibilities on the ground?

Question 15: In your experience, how are human rights violations addressed in your work? Is this discussed with your teams or the children? If so, how?

Question 16: What strategies could international actors adopt to better support education in emergencies in Gaza?

Question 17: What actions have you seen from international or humanitarian organizations on the ground?

West Bank:

Question 1: Can you briefly introduce yourself? Can you describe your organizations current work in Gaza? How or does it intersect with education?

Question 2: Have you already worked in Gaza before the current war? How has your focus evolved?

Question 3: What are the main barriers to education in Gaza that your organization has identified? Has your organization addressed these challenges? If so, how?

Question 4: Based on your experience in other conflict zones, what strategies have helped maintain access to education during crisis?

Question 5: How does your approach in Gaza differ from your work in other conflict settings?

Question 6: How do prolonged school interruptions impact children's futures, based on your research/experience?

Question 7: Based on your experience in other conflict zones, what long-term effects have school interruptions had on children's futures, and do you expect similar risks for children in Gaza?

Question 8: How do you assess long-term risks to children's learning, psychosocial well-being and development?

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Question 9: Have the program you supported included informal education such as trauma care or psychosocial support?

Question 10: What would be helpful for you to support education in Gaza or why you don't?

Question 11: Is psychosocial support available for your staff working in Gaza?

Question 12: How does your organization engage with social work in Gaza? Do you collaborate with local social workers?

Question 13: Are your efforts visible and effective on the ground? How do local partners perceive them?

Question 14: How does your organization handle human rights violations? Do you advocate around these issues?

Question 15: Where do you see the biggest gaps in protecting children's right to education in Gaza?

Question 16: What structural changes are needed to strengthen education in conflict zones?

Question 17: How do political/security constraints impact your education related work in Gaza?

Question 18: How can international social work better collaborate with local actors in Gaza?

Question 19: What should international organizations do to better advocate for children's right to education in Gaza?

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QRP

BOOK REVIEW

Kluth, W., & Heusch, A. (2025). Ausländerrecht (3rd ed.). Beck: A Reliable Commentary of German Migration Law[1]

Ralf Roßkopf[2]

With just under 3,000 pages, Kluth and Heusch's commentary (ISBN 978-3-406-82879-9; 219,00 €) provides guidance on German migration law. The legal materials covered include the Residence Act, the Employment Regulation, the Asylum Act, the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act, the Freedom of Movement Act/EU, the Association Council Decision 1/80, the Nationality Act, and excerpts from the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Basic Law (Constitution). The status is as of October 2024.

The composition of the 34-member group of authors, consisting mainly of judges, lawyers, and administrative staff, embodies the focus of the commentary: Its strength lies in its practical orientation and the inclusion of current case law. The reviewer has tested its relevance and accuracy in several legal cases. Lawyers will be grateful for the comprehensible, reliable up-to-date commentary on the amended skilled labour immigration law. In the area of humanitarian migration law, the new edition now offers a complete commentary on the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act in almost 100 pages.

The individual provisions are introduced with an overview, which is usually followed by a table of contents and structured commentary. In some cases, passages are highlighted in the text, especially those relating to details and examples, and occasionally also to checklists or tables, which helps readers to find their way around more quickly.

The commentary has been published by Beck since 2013 as an online commentary in the Foreigners and Migration Law PLUS and PREMIUM modules and has established itself. Since 2016, and now in its third edition, the publisher has made the work available in a print version for users who do not want to pay for an even comprehensive online subscription including several other publications or prefer to work with books rather than on a screen. Of course, this means that the advantages of the digital version, such as mobility, links, frequency of updates, and clarity, are not available. The latter could be partially remedied by a table of contents to the somewhat cluttered twelve-page table of contents.

In the preface, the editors claim that the third edition represented the final stage of development and covered all legal regulations relevant to practical work in migration law. They have essentially succeeded in this. This makes the absence of commentary on the Dublin III Regulation, the fundamental right to asylum in the section on the Basic Law, and

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the explanations on the right to life (Art. 2 ECHR) and the prohibition of torture (Art. 3 ECHR) in the section on the ECHR all the more striking. The material requirements for asylum, refugee status, and subsidiary protection are only introduced very briefly in commentaries on the Residence Act, Asylum Act, or TFEU, which do not do justice to the relevance of these matters.

This is partly due to the nature of the commentary technique, which focuses on individual legal matters rather than to shed light on the complexity migration law being divided horizontally into several pillars (residence law, freedom of movement law, asylum law, nationality law, status law) and vertically into several levels (international law, European law, national law, state law) while yet being still closely intertwined. Keeping the structure of a legal commentary on individual provisions, this would require a more detailed consideration of matters of international and European law. The separate sections on the ECHR and the TFEU are welcome approaches that should be further expanded.

The opportunity and necessity for this will arise as early as 2026, when the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum comes into force. It will prompt the necessity for extensive revision of the commentary in terms of content and structure. This is precisely where the advantage of the online version over the book version of the commentary comes into play, as it will naturally be able to reflect the relevant amended legal status much more quickly while still allowing access to older editions covering the past cases.

The any of the two versions, the work is a reliable aid and reference for practitioners and legal scholars who are already familiar with the complexity of migration law described above. An overview introduction could extend its usefulness to other target groups who first need to familiarize themselves with the subject.

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v. Harbou, F., & Weizsäcker E. (Eds.) (2025). Einwanderungsrecht (3rd ed.). Beck: A Unique Perspective on the Law Governing Labour and Education Migration[1]

Ralf Roßkopf[2]

The title of the book "Einwanderungsrecht" (Immigration Law) by editors Frederik von Harbou and Esther Weizsäcker signals a clear focus within the broader field of migration law. This focus is further intensified by the content's emphasis on the law governing labour and education migration. This deliberately selective perspective presents both a risk and an appeal: the risk of not being able to present the limited legal material in all its contextual complexity; and the appeal of providing pre-trained legal seekers, and legal practitioners in particular, with unique and in-depth access to the tailored material in this form. The authorship, which is dominated by lawyers and professors of applied sciences, appropriately underscores this orientation. The third edition, which has now been published, proves the editors and publishers right and justifies the success of the work, which has grown since the last edition by 150 pages to a total of 511 pages (€99.00). The legal material is presented systematically and with the expected reliability, based on the legislative status at the end of 2024 and beginning of 2025.

Of course, the book cannot do without references to other areas of migration law. General chapters on labour and education migration are specified for specific groups of refugees, EU citizens and their family members, and Turkish nationals with association rights, and supplemented by related legal issues concerning the recognition of educational and professional qualifications, access to social benefits, as well as permanent residence and naturalization. Compared to the previous edition, employer obligations and the new digitization of the visa procedure have been included, while the previous sections on the European legal framework and the prospects for an immigration law have been omitted. The latter does not detract from the book's claim. On the contrary, it now appears more stringent, avoids duplication, and takes into account the fact that immigration law has since been consolidated.

With some justification, author Marius Tollenaere concludes the chapter on migration for the purpose of gainful employment by stating that it is questionable whether calls for further simplification would justify the legislative and political energy required to achieve this. However, the specific perspective of the book would have offered an opportunity to provide even more insight and clarity regarding the current legal situation. The necessarily columnar presentation of the various residence permits would benefit from an introductory overview and a concluding comparison to make it easier for the reader to

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understand which residence permits are now available to whom, in which situations, for what reasons, and to what benefits.

Christopher von Harbou and Marius Tollenaere successfully pursue a further perspective in the new chapter on employer obligations when employing third-country nationals. Chronologically following the employee's biography, initiation, implementation, and termination of employment are examined from the perspective of both labour and migration law and supplemented by further aspects.

The much-discussed and, in many cases, existentially important “Spurwechsel” (change of track) is presented by Frederik von Harbou and Christian Scheibenhof in a separate section of the chapter on labour market and education access for displaced. This is done separately for residence permit regulations and toleration regulations. The authors also point out the need and alternatives for amendment in this regard.

The chapter on the digitization of the visa process by the responsible head of department at the Foreign Ministry Katharina Bonnenfant is topical and therefore as unique as it is open to further development. Following the successful, ongoing expansion of the digitization process, a future new edition would benefit from a presentation that is less conceptual and more application-oriented, aimed at the target group of legal practitioners.

Overall, the new edition is a very successful continuation of the book's concept, from which lawyers and human resources managers in particular will benefit.