Closing Doors or Building Bridges

– Organizations as gatekeepers of volunteering for asylum seekers in Wallonia

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“Il volontariato ha una funzione sociale importante per ciò che realizza, per i servizi che rende alla società, per il «che cosa» del suo impegno. Ma è altrettanto significativo il modo in cui opera, il «come» del servizio”.

Maurizio Ambrosini

1 "Volunteering has an important social function because of what it achieves, the services it renders to society, the 'what' of its commitment. But equally significant is the way in which it operates, the "how" of its service" (Ambrosini, 2020, p. 340, translated)
Abstract

This thesis aims at exploring the role of organizations in asylum seekers’ access to volunteering in Wallonia, Belgium. In Belgium, volunteering has been allowed for asylum seekers since 2014. Studies made after 2014 in Wallonia have shown that volunteering can benefit asylum seekers. However, research on volunteering in other contexts has found that, while volunteering is often depicted as an inclusive practice, valuable for volunteers and society, inequalities restrict access to volunteering. Research on volunteering tended to focus on the individual characteristics and resources that make certain groups less likely to volunteer, but at the meso level, organizations also have a role in determining who can access volunteering.

Based on semi-structured interviews with members of organizations, the analysis examines the management of volunteering for asylum seekers in Wallonia to understand how the organizations’ practices facilitate or restrict access to volunteering. Findings show that a network of sending and receiving organizations, reception centers and volunteering organizations, shapes access to volunteering for asylum seekers. This network aims at creating links between asylum seekers and other parts of the population through volunteering. Throughout the promotion of volunteering and the selection of volunteers and volunteering opportunities, organizations adopt strategies to enhance asylum seekers’ participation in volunteering and to lift obstacles restricting access to volunteering. However, some organizational practices, including this selection, lead to the exclusion of asylum seekers from volunteering.
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1. Introduction

In the last years, volunteering has been encouraged by governments as an activity with positive effects. Different measures, including policies or changes in legislation, have been implemented to encourage volunteering in the population in general but also to “activate” (De Waele and Hustinx, 2019, p. 73) specific groups judged as passive, such as unemployed, retired people and migrants. Concerning migration, in Europe, the Common Agenda for Integration of 2005 mentions volunteering (Ambrosini and Erminio, 2020, p. 16). It suggests measures at the national level to improve volunteering programs for third-country nationals. One case of legislative change to encourage volunteering is the Belgian law of 2014 which authorizes asylum seekers to volunteer. More recently, on the 8th of May 2023, Nicole de Moor, Belgium’s State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, stated that the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) has the intention to develop volunteering for asylum seekers across the country by collaborating with a youth volunteering organization (RTBF, 2023).

In the literature on volunteering, the promotion of volunteering has been a subject of debate. While some point out the positive aspects of volunteering for groups that could be at risk of social exclusion, others emphasize that volunteering can be a site for inequalities and power imbalances (Hustinx et al., 2022). One approach of this “critical research” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 2) defines volunteering as a technique of subjectivation used by the state (De Waele and Hustinx, 2019). In the case of immigrant volunteering, some researchers see immigrant volunteering as a positive integration tool that helps migrants to acquire skills and social capital (Ambrosini and Artero, 2022a, p. 253). On the other hand, others criticized migrants volunteering as a way to push migrants to prove their deservingness of citizenship and belonging (Ambrosini and Artero, 2022a, p. 254).

A second approach consists of studying inequalities at play in volunteering (Hustinx et al., 2022). To approach volunteering, research has been focusing on the motivations to volunteer, the profiles of volunteers and what it brings to volunteers: it has addressed the questions of “who will volunteer and why” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 2). However, the role that organizations can play in access to volunteering has often been left aside (Bonnesen, 2019, p. 54). To address inequalities in access to volunteering, the tendency has been to look at what potential volunteers might have or lack to volunteer in terms of capital rather than analyzing the inclusionary or “exclusionary
mechanisms at the gate to volunteering” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 3). Some researchers (Bonnesen, 2019; van Overbeeke et al., 2022) explain that organizations can have the role of “gatekeepers”, by controlling who is included or excluded from volunteering. In migration research, some authors have also pointed out that the role of organizations in inclusion and exclusion is overlooked and should be further studied (Lang et al., 2021). Studies on migrant volunteering mention the role of organizations in access to volunteering for migrant volunteers, who are confronted with specific barriers such as language (Handy and Greenspan, 2009; Lai, 2021; Greenspan and Walk, 2023).

In my thesis, I explore the role of organizations as gatekeepers of volunteering for asylum seekers in Wallonia. Like research made in other settings (Handy and Greenspan, 2009; Ambrosini and Erminio, 2020), research made by Manço and Arara (2018) in Wallonia shows that volunteering could benefit migrant volunteers, by enabling them to practice the language or develop some skills. In 2014, Manço and Arara interviewed 16 migrant volunteers, most of whom had been asylum seekers (p. 6). The authors state that some individual or organizational obstacles complicate access to volunteering. They explain that associations and the government should “create an environment enabling volunteering and the involvement of migrants and refugees in society” (p. 10, translated). They emphasize the importance of actions “as inclusive as possible” (p. 10, translated). My goal is to analyze the inclusionary or exclusionary practices that take place in volunteering regarding asylum seekers volunteers and more specifically the role of organizations. Manço and Arara identified some obstacles from the perspective of the volunteers, but the thesis focuses on the role and perception of the organizations. My goal is to address the following questions:

❖ How do organizations influence asylum seekers’ access to volunteering in Wallonia?
❖ Which organizations’ practices facilitate or restrict access to volunteering for asylum seekers in Wallonia?

To address those questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of organizations involved in asylum seekers volunteering in Wallonia. The analysis of the data is based on the two-step method suggested by Paillé and Mucchielli (2021), phenomenological rephrasing and conceptualizing categories analysis, which enables to identify the practices of the organization while taking the voice, the perception of the members of the organizations into
account. To analyze how the organizations’ practices influence the asylum seekers access to volunteering, the thesis draws on concepts that highlight the influence of organizations at the meso level: concepts from the third-party model of Haski-Leventhal et al. (2010), which shed light on how organizations influence the individual ability to volunteer, and the concept of bridging capital (Putnam, 2000) which refers to networks that connect individuals across social boundaries, and, in this case, might be created by organizations.

The thesis is divided into different chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter goes back to the volunteering literature, including the research on inequalities in volunteering, and the literature on migrant volunteering. The third chapter describes the concepts used in the analysis. The fourth chapter presents the contextual background and the legal framework for volunteering and asylum in Belgium. In the methodology chapter, I explain the different steps of the qualitative research and reflect on the ethical aspects. Finally, the sixth chapter presents the results of the analysis.
2. Literature

2.1 Volunteering

A complex phenomenon

Volunteering is “a complex phenomenon” (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 2) that involves different actors, occupations and settings. According to Hustinx et al. (2010), this complexity is due to different factors. First, there is no agreement on a definition of volunteering. The term “volunteering” is used to refer to very different practices (p. 3). It is a phenomenon that is socially constructed and whose “boundaries” (p. 3) are blurred and subject to change. Secondly, there is not just one approach or one theory for this topic. For the authors, the dominant approach aiming at determining “the laws of volunteering” (p. 4), who will or will not volunteer, does not capture the complexity of the phenomenon. They argue for an approach that captures the multiple dimensions of volunteering (p. 5).

Volunteering has been defined in different ways in the literature (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018, p. 1140). Cnaan et al. have analyzed the various definitions of volunteering and concluded that they vary in four aspects: “free choice; remuneration; structure; and intended beneficiaries” (Whittaker et al., 2015, p. 360). Volunteering is defined in different ways along this “continuum” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018, p. 1140). The most restrictive definitions consider that volunteers must be under no form of “coercion” (Whittaker et al., 2015, p. 360) or “contract” (Whittaker et al., 2015, p. 360); must have no personal motives and cannot receive any type of remuneration; must volunteer in an organization; have no link with the “beneficiaries” (Whittaker et al., 2015, p. 360). Less restrictive definitions accept coercion or remuneration to different extents and include informal forms of volunteering, or volunteering where volunteers share similarities with the beneficiaries, for example in terms of ethnic backgrounds (Whittaker et al., 2015, p. 360).

While the definitions vary, Whittaker et al. (2015) state that the term volunteering has most often been used restrictively “to refer to activities that are non-obligatory […] undertaken for the benefit of others, society as a whole or a specific organisation; unpaid; and undertaken in an organised context” (p. 360). However, this definition of volunteering as a form of “pure […] unremunerated work” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 13) has been criticized for not reflecting the variety of volunteering activities. First, some elements of the definition are unclear: the degree of
free choice and compensation might depend on the volunteer’s perception (Whittaker et al., 2015, p. 360). For example, a person might volunteer based on a sense of duty and not feel obligated but rewarded. Volunteering can also involve the reimbursement of some costs, which could be considered as remuneration (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 7). Secondly, many voluntary activities are undertaken outside of organizations (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 7). Finally, some activities that are voluntary and not remunerated might not be considered as volunteering by the people themselves or in the context in which they live (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 7). Whittaker et al. (2015) explain how “in some cultures, western concepts of volunteering may be alien” (p. 360). Some researchers thus call for a more open definition of volunteering that reflects the different facets of the phenomenon (Whittaker et al. 2015; Hustinx et al., 2022).

A site for inequalities?

According to Hustinx et al. (2010), the study of volunteering should evolve to grasp its different aspects. The authors point out a “stagnation in research on volunteering” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 2) due to three elements. The first is defining volunteering as a monolithic phenomenon composed of constant elements (p. 2), as explained above. They raise two other methodological issues. The first is “methodological individualism” (p. 2): volunteering is considered as the outcome of an individual choice, while the influence of factors at the meso or macro levels is omitted. The second issue is the normative approach that consists of considering volunteering as positive for the whole society while overlooking the inequalities existing in volunteering, or the role of volunteering in the reproduction of inequalities (p. 2). They explain that the two approaches favored in volunteering research, the “dominant-status theory” and “resource theory” have maintained the “status quo” (p. 1) in research on volunteering. They often consist of trying to determine who will or will not volunteer depending on the resources and status of individuals (pp. 1-2). Hustinx et al. consider that, while they rely on data, those approaches have omitted the role of organizations in inequalities in volunteering.

The authors explain that another form of inequality exists “at the epistemic level” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 10). Research on volunteering has mostly been based on the Western definition of volunteering while other understandings of “helping behaviors” (Whittaker et al., 2015, p. 360) have been overlooked (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 10). Whittaker et. al (2015) explain for example how in Māori culture, “the idea of public service” (p. 360), which is mandatory to be a citizen, a
member of society, cannot be captured with a definition of volunteering that must include free will.

A new “research front”: Inclusion and exclusion

To tackle those methodological and epistemological challenges, Hustinx et al. (2022) propose a “new research front” (p. 1) around the idea of inequality. According to the authors, research on volunteering should: analyze the dynamics at play in volunteering, including the inclusion and exclusion of volunteers; approach different types of voluntary activities and understandings of it; move beyond the view of volunteering as a positive and inclusive phenomenon to analyze the inequalities that can take place and be reproduced in volunteering; analyze the impact of organizational and contextual factors. They give the example of four approaches that have been developing and can meet those criteria, respectively “focusing on (a) resources, (b) interactions, (c) governmentalities, and (d) epistemologies” (p. 3).

The first approach to inequality in volunteering is the “resource-based” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 3) one. Hustinx et al. argue that the resource-based approach should shift its focus: inequalities in volunteering should be approached relationally, not only as the resources and attributes that individuals have or do not have before volunteering but also as an unequal allocation of resources. The dominant theories in research on volunteering, the resource theory and dominant status theory, are part of the resource-based approach. These approaches have contributed to volunteering research by showing how the resources and status of individuals influence access to volunteering. However, the “stagnation” (p. 2) in research is due to the focus on resources and status as individual characteristics while the selection of volunteers by organizations, based on those characteristics, or the allocation of resources by organizations, are often left aside.

For Hustinx and al., to move forward, the research must address new questions. First, it should show how the role of resources varies from one field of volunteering to another. Secondly, the study of volunteering should look at the whole “volunteering process” (p. 5) and not only at the resources that individuals have before volunteering. Inequalities can exist within the volunteering field, in terms of status and roles allocated but also as an outcome of volunteering (p. 5). The authors explain that studies on the management of volunteering can highlight the role of volunteering coordinators in the creation and reproduction of inequalities. As “organizational gatekeepers” (p. 6), volunteering managers control access to volunteering during “recruitment
and placement” (p. 6) and “reflect inclusionary and exclusionary practices” (p. 6) at play in organizations.

An example of research that looks at practices of exclusion in organizations is the one conducted by Bonnesen (2019). The researcher states that the volunteering field is often depicted as “inclusive” (p. 53) and “fair” (p. 53) to a broader audience while in reality inequalities exist in the organization. On one hand, the selection produces the same inequalities as the ones existing in job selection. Concerning formal forms of volunteering, Bonnesen argues that “white, well-educated high earners midway through life are among the most likely to volunteer their spare time” (p.54). On the other hand, inequalities are also increased, as volunteering enables the ones selected based on their capital to acquire even more skills and extend their network (p. 54). Bonnesen explains that, while it is now a known fact that inequalities exist in volunteering, few research have looked at the role of organizations in creating them (p. 55). Research has mostly looked for the reason for inequalities at the individual level, for example, the studies focusing on the “circumstances of ‘unlikely’ groups of volunteers, such as working-class or unemployed citizens, ethnic minorities […] and refugees” (p. 55).

Based on the case of a social work organization in Denmark, Bonnesen analyzes the practices of exclusion of the organizations. The results show that the organization selects volunteers based on an image of “the ideal volunteer” (p. 59), that have characteristics perceived as valuable, in terms of motivations and skills. Altruistic motives have to be placed above any personal motive such as learning skills. The volunteer must also have aptitudes such as proactivity. To exclude people who do not correspond to this ideal, the organization uses different forms of exclusion: “non-recruitment, informal exclusion, and formal exclusion” (p. 62). Bonnesen explains that formal exclusion is less used in the volunteering field than in the labor market because rejecting an aspiring volunteer affects the image of organizations as inclusive (p. 63). Informal exclusion is less visible and can be indirect. For example, by delaying the reimbursement of some costs for the volunteer, the organization disfavors volunteers with lower economic status, who need this reimbursement to carry out their volunteering activity (p. 64).

Van Overbeeke et al. (2022) also analyzed the role of organizations as “gatekeepers”. Whereas Bonnesen analyzed exclusion, Van Overbeeke et al. focused on the inclusionary practices of the “sending” (p. 34) organizations. The authors emphasize that inclusion in volunteering, which
means “equal formal volunteering opportunities […] available to all individuals” (p. 33) is not a “straightforward” (p. 33) process but is shaped by organizations. The researchers describe inclusion as a two-step process: the “individual self-selection to (not) volunteer” (p. 35) and the selection by organizations. Individuals with resources are more likely to decide to volunteer whereas individuals with fewer resources or facing “structural barriers” (p. 35) like health problems might feel less confident to become volunteers or are confronted with obstacles (p. 35). They are also more likely to be excluded by organizations. As a consequence, some groups, including people with disability, without employment or from an ethnic minority, are less present among volunteers (p. 34).

In the last years, some policies have been implemented to encourage volunteering among those groups, and those policies are reflected in the practices of the organizations (van Overbeeke et al., 2022, p. 34). The authors argue that while organizations can close the doors to aspiring volunteers, they can also lift obstacles restricting access to volunteering and “enhance inclusion” (p. 34). Based on the interviews with Dutch volunteering organizations, Van Overbeeke et al. identified three strategies of inclusion used by organizations: “encouraging, enabling, enforcing” (pp. 39-41). The researchers mobilize the concept of “volunteerability” to show how those strategies help individuals to have access to volunteering (p. 41) (see 3.1). Organizations want to “activate” (van Overbeeke et al., 2022, p. 36) “the potential volunteer energy” (van Overbeeke et al., 2022, p. 36), or volunteerability of individuals. Organizations that influence volunteerability can be organizations that specifically work with volunteers, but also other actors, or “third parties” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010, cited by Van Overbeeke et al., 2022) such as schools.

The first strategy used by the sending organization, identified by Van Overbeeke et al., “encouraging” (p. 39), consists of promoting volunteering through workshops, lessons explaining what volunteering is or with flyers. Instead of the term “volunteering”, the expression “doing something […] for society” (p. 39) was used by some workers to attract more people. The promotion could target certain groups less represented in volunteering, for example by going to certain city areas. Concerning the second strategy, “enabling” (p. 39) volunteers meant preparing future volunteers by training them, organizing “trial days” (p. 40), choosing a volunteer mentor for them, or helping them economically. The “Enabling” strategy can also target the receiving organization by preparing them to receive volunteers, for example through meetings with future
volunteers. The goal was to show that individuals who do not correspond to their image of ideal volunteer could also be good volunteers (p. 41). The last strategy, enforcing, consists of making volunteering mandatory. It was less popular among the organizations (p. 41).

Those studies shed light on how organizations can create or reproduce inequalities in volunteering (Hustinx et al., 2022). In the analysis, I will adopt a similar approach as Van Overbeeke et al. to try to identify the organizational practices that enhance the inclusion of asylum seekers in volunteering or limit their access to volunteering (see 3.1). Hustinx et al. (2022) mentioned three other approaches that can be used to address inequalities in volunteering: the approaches focusing on interactions (b), governmentalities (c) and epistemologies (d).

The second approach looks at the way inequalities are produced at the individual level through interactions (p. 7). While the approaches based on resources and interactions show how inequalities can be created or increased “within” (p. 8) volunteering, the third approach, based on governmentalities, shows the inequalities in the construction of the “external boundaries of volunteering” (p. 8). In this approach drawing on Foucault, volunteering is seen as a “relational, changing field of discourse and practice, embedded within social, political, and historical contexts, and characterized by the participation of various actors in changing positions” (p. 8). This approach addresses the power imbalance existing between the actors who determine what volunteering is and those who are made “governable” (p. 8) through different techniques. Actors in power are not only volunteer organizations but can also be “third parties” (p. 8) such as the government, who can shape volunteering through policies. For example, some studies criticize the fact that policies aim at including specific groups such as migrants or unemployed people, without questioning the fact that those groups are given limited power in the governance of volunteering (p. 9).

The last approach based on epistemologies consists in looking at the inequalities existing in the production of knowledge regarding volunteering (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 10). Hustinx et al. explain that even though more and more research addresses this “epistemic inequality” (p. 10), the Western standpoint still prevails. For the author, research should “provincialize” (p. 10) Western knowledge on volunteering, which presents itself as universal, by reconsidering the definition of volunteering and by approaching volunteering as a social construct. This approach criticizes the fact that research has been focusing on formal forms of volunteering, which is based
on the Western view of volunteering, and does not address other forms of volunteering existing in other contexts (p. 11).

2.2 Migrant volunteering

Benefits of volunteering

Some of the measures to increase volunteering participation target groups that can be subject to social exclusion, including migrants (De Waele and Hustinx, 2019, p. 73). The European Commission Common Agenda for Integration of 2005 encouraged states to implement volunteering as an integration tool for third-country nationals (Ambrosini and Erminio, 2020, p. 16). Some countries have policies in this direction. In the Netherlands, volunteering has been included as one of the activities of the integration path (Slootjes and Kampen, 2017, p. 1902). In Flanders, in Belgium, volunteering can be an option in the participation programme of the civic integration programme (Vlaanderen, n. d.).

In the literature, migrant volunteering in the destination country is a recent topic. For a long time, research has focused on migrants as recipients of volunteering (Ambrosini and Erminio, 2020) or on other forms of migrant participation in the host country (Alfieri et al., 2019). Research has centered more on how migrants participate in “political debate” (Alfieri et al., 2019, p. 1091) or engage in their community of origin in the host country rather than on voluntary activities for the benefit of the host community. Concerning volunteering, in Volontari Inattesi, Ambrosini and Erminio (2020) explain that volunteering is usually seen as one-sided, with migrants as recipients and locals as helpers. The researchers aim at analyzing volunteering from a different perspective by showing how migrants can be actors in volunteering in Italy (p. 13). A growing body of literature has been approaching the role of migrants in volunteering (p. 15). While some researchers emphasize how volunteering can benefit migrants, others have raised some critiques regarding volunteering integration policies.

While the term “migrants” refers to a heterogeneous group (Ambrosini and Erminio, 2020, p. 12), some studies made in different contexts and focusing on different groups showed how volunteering could benefit individuals who experienced migration and were confronted with “integration barriers” (Greenspan and Walk, 2023, p. 2), such as “language barriers, cultural barriers, and discrimination” (Handy and Greenspan, 2009, p. 956). Some studies support the fact

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that volunteering can help migrants to acquire social, cultural and economic capital (Ambrosini and Artero, 2022a, p. 253). Volunteering is a form of civic participation that is generally more accessible to migrants than other forms of participation, such as political one, that requires specific status (Lai, 2021, p. 196). Through volunteering, migrants can build a network, acquire or practice some skills and learn the language (Handy and Greenspan, 2009; Manço and Arara, 2018). In Canada, Handy and Greenspan (2009) made a study on migrants volunteering in religious organizations based on 34 interviews, 33 focus groups and 754 questionnaires. Their sample includes “recent” (p. 961) migrants and migrants who had been in Canada for more than five years. 85% of the migrants in the sample were volunteers, and migrants present for more than five years were more likely to volunteer (pp. 963-964). Concerning motivations, after religious values, the first motivation was meeting people in the organization or in the community (p. 969). However, the authors emphasize the importance of organizational factors to enable migrants volunteering. Like Hustinx et al., Van Overbeeke or Bonnesen in their works mentioned above, Handy and Greenspan point out that individuals’ characteristics or motivations alone do not determine who will volunteer. While individual factors impact the likeliness to volunteer in the general population, migrants face particular obstacles that require attention (p. 976). For example, they can ignore which volunteering programs are available in the destination country (p. 976). The organizations thus play a role in enabling migrant volunteering. In their study, Handy and Greenspan show that “shared values, ethnic homogeneity, financial stability, and congregations as community centers” (p. 976) are factors that reduce obstacles to accessing volunteering. Recruitment practices, whether through formal documents or informal interactions, also helped to reach potential volunteers (p. 977-978).

Concerning the tasks, Handy and Greenspan use Putnam’s idea of “bonding” and “bridging volunteer activities”: bonding activities are performed within the organization and create links between its members while bridging activities are performed out of the organization and create links with the outside world (Handy and Greenspan, 2009, p. 969) (see 3.2). In religious organizations, most volunteering activities were bonding ones (p. 967). Concerning the benefits, the most prevalent one among both recent and migrants present for more than five years was building a social network (friends and connections) (p. 973). The authors note that benefits related to work got a higher rank on a scale of five among recent migrants (p. 973). In the interviews, interacting with the locals, acquiring “Canadian experience” (p. 973) to find a job and
getting to know the culture were also mentioned as benefits. Some individuals whose degree was not recognized in Canada volunteered in their field of experience (p. 973).

Along the same line, a study made by Baert and Vujic (2016) in Flanders in Belgium shows that having volunteering experience impacts migrants’ integration into the labor market. The authors created and sent applications with names perceived as local or foreign-sounding names, with or without volunteering experience (p. 96). The results show that among applicants without volunteering experience, applicants perceived as natives receive more answers than applicants with a migration background. However, among applicants with volunteering experience, there is no significant difference between the natives and the individuals with a migration background (p. 95).

In the specific case of asylum seekers living in reception centers, volunteering has also been praised for providing a network and meaningful activity out of the reception center and increasing their skills. Some studies explain how a lack of occupation can affect the mental health of residents, with the concept of occupational deprivation (De Koker et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2022). Moore et al. (2022) explain that in centers, asylum seekers are in a “liminal space” (p. 865) in which access to civic activities is limited by “mental and structural barriers” (p. 865). Consequently, asylum seekers can hardly develop a sense of belonging and inclusion through participation (p. 865). Moore et al. argue that, in a political context where belonging is associated with citizenship, engaging in activities in the community enables asylum seekers to challenge this view and claim for belonging. Volunteering can be one of those activities (Ghorashi et al., 2018).

A debated topic: Benefits or false promises?
Other researchers nuanced the benefits of volunteering regarding employment or as a form of participation for asylum seekers. They question the volunteering policies from the angle of governmentalities (Hustinx et al., 2022). First, concerning employment, some research shows that volunteering experience is not necessarily recognized in the labor market. In Canada, Wilson-Forsberg and Sethi (2015) conducted research focusing on immigrant workers, mainly highly educated women. They criticize the “Canadian experience paradox” (p. 97): as immigrants’ previous work experience is not valued by the state, the state encourages immigrant workers to acquire “Canadian experience” through volunteering in order to find a job. However, volunteering is not recognized by employers. Volunteering helped migrant workers to build a
network but not find a paid job. The researchers note that these results contrast with Handy and Greenspan’s study (pp. 103-104). Volunteering helped migrant workers to acquire social capital but did not increase “economic integration” (p. 103). Handy and Greenspan’s study participants were also mostly highly educated since 53% had a university degree (Handy and Greenspan, 2009, p. 963). Wilson-Forsberg and Sethi argue that policies that encourage migrants to volunteer to find a job depict migrants as responsible for their non-integration in the labor market: they have to prove their deservingness to work through volunteering while the exclusion at play in the labor market is not questioned (pp. 104-105).

In another study made in the Netherlands, Slootjes and Kampen (2017) raised the same paradox as Wilson-Forsberg and Sethi, even though their study concerns a different group of migrants. The authors interviewed first and second-generation women migrants in the Netherlands, who are proportionally more concerned by unemployment and low education level in comparison with native and migrant men (p. 1907). On the one hand in the Netherlands, a policy implemented volunteering in the integration courses and migrant women hope to find a job through volunteering (pp. 1902-1912). On the other hand, volunteering helped women to acquire social capital but not a paid job. Volunteering mainly creates bonding capital between female volunteers: the volunteering group is a space for understanding and support. Slootjes and Kampen observe that volunteering only enhances employability when the volunteers carry out bridging volunteering activities that make them practice the language and learn new skills, outside the group of women. However, even volunteers who have acquired bridging capital are rarely recognized by employers (p. 1914). Consequently, like Wilson-Forsberg and Sethi, Slootjes and Kampen argue that volunteering policies are based on an ideal of “worker-citizen” (p. 1917) which is impossible to reach for migrants through volunteering. Volunteering helped to acquire social capital but not to be recognized in the labor market.

Secondly, some research criticizes volunteering activities organized for asylum seekers. Di Cecco (2021) Giudici and Boccagni (2022) question the role of volunteering and participation programs for asylum seekers in Italy. Since 2014, the government has been encouraging municipalities to implement volunteering programs for asylum seekers (Di Cecco, 2021, p. 186). Giudici and Boccagni (2022) show how, while they reside in specific housing such as reception centers, away from society, through integration programs, asylum seekers have to engage in the public in a way
that shows that they are good “would-be citizens” (p. 1223). The volunteering programs are said to improve the inclusion of asylum seekers in the community, but their belonging and access to the community are “conditional” (Giudici and Boccagni, 2022, p. 1225) and shaped by the state (Di Cecco, 2021; Giudici and Boccagni, 2022).

Di Cecco notes that asylum seekers do not have full freedom of choice: they are pushed by the institutions to participate in those programs, for example cleaning projects in municipalities. However, for the author, “their commitment is therefore neither totally free nor entirely constrained” (p. 196), because they can have their reasons to volunteer. Through volunteering, some asylum seekers distance themselves from the dominant discourse on migrants while others constitute themselves as workers. However, Di Cecco argues that this positive effect on identity is limited since volunteering itself is not recognized as work (p. 196). For Di Cecco, another risk of this discourse is the fact that asylum seekers themselves establish a hierarchy between inactive migrants and volunteers (pp. 197-200).

As mentioned above, some researchers consider that, rather than meeting the objectives that they claim to achieve, which were migrants’ inclusion in the labor market or asylum seekers’ participation in society, volunteering policies are mainly a technique used by the state to shape migrants’ participation so they become “active” citizens. However, in some of these studies, it was observed that volunteering enabled some migrants to build a network (Wilson-Forsberg and Sethi, 2015; Slootjes and Kampen, 2017). For some authors, the fact that volunteering has the potential to bring social capital outweighs the risk of placing an ideal to attain on migrants or creating a hierarchy between inactive migrants and volunteers. Ambrosini and Artero also analyzed migrant volunteering in Italy. The authors realized a questionnaire and interviewed immigrant volunteers from different statuses in Italy (2022a) and focused on second-generation migrant volunteers in another study (2022b). The researchers support the view that, although volunteering migrant volunteering may reinforce the distinction between deserving and undeserving migrants (2022a, p. 7), volunteering mostly leads migrants to challenge natives’ view of migrants by building bridging capital with natives (Ambrosini and Artero, 2022a, 2022b). In the case of second-generation migrants, volunteering was a way to “build mutual understanding” (p. 211). Although they are born in Italy or arrived at a young age, second-generation migrants face stereotypes on migration (p. 207). By having bridging capital with
natives, young volunteers redraw the lines of who is judged as belonging to society and who is not (p. 211).

Similarly, in the book *Voluntari Inattesi*, Ambrosini and Erminio defend the idea that volunteering allows migrants to increase their “relational integration” (p. 337, translated) which refers to having good relationships, including with natives, being accepted and not discriminated against. Ambrosini and Erminio have collected 658 questionnaires filled by migrant volunteers in Italy. The results show that only 8% of them were asylum seekers or refugees whereas the majority have acquired Italian citizenship (pp. 33-34). The authors are opposed to the view that volunteering policies are a technique used by the state to transform migrants into autonomous subjects, responsible for their integration, because most migrants start volunteering when they already have a certain level of “structural integration” (p. 337 translated) which includes a house and a job. Most volunteers are migrants who have been in Italy for several years and can extend their network and become more accepted into society through volunteering (p. 337). The results of the questionnaires show that building a network and meeting new friends was mentioned as the main outcome of volunteering regardless of the length of stay or the status of the migrants (p. 55-60).

**Precising the object of study**

It is important to note that Ambrosini and Erminio, and Ambrosini and Artero, did not focus on the same type of volunteering and the same group of migrants in Italy as Di Cecco or Giudici and Boccagni. While the latter analyze exclusively the volunteering programs for asylum seekers, studies made by Ambrosini and Erminio (2020) and Ambrosini and Artero (2022a, 2002b) address both formal volunteering in organizations and informal volunteering. Furthermore, respondents have different legal statuses and were not only asylum seekers. Ambrosini and Erminio (2020) explain that, while some asylum seekers have answered the questionnaires, in the qualitative part of the research, they did not look at the voluntary work of asylum seekers, because it does not rely on full freedom of choice (p. 25). Di Cecco, Giudici and Boccagni have a more critical view of volunteering, seen as a way to govern asylum seekers’ participation, but their research only concerns formal volunteering programs encouraged by the state.

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3 « Ho allargato la mia rete di rapporti sociali, mi sono fatto nuovi amici » (p. 55)
Recently, Greenspan and Walk (2023) have raised the importance of the distinction between formal and informal migrant volunteering and different groups of migrant volunteers. They argue that the term “immigrant volunteering” is imprecise because volunteering includes different types of volunteering activities, as highlighted by Hustinx et al. (2022), and a diversity of profiles among immigrants. Research often concerns formal volunteering and more attention needs to be given to informal volunteering. What is more, comparisons between natives and migrant volunteers are often made, while the variety of profiles within the migrant group is less studied. Consequently, the reasons why some migrants are less likely to volunteer are not addressed. Greenspan and Walk argue that research should look at the participation of different migrant groups in different volunteering activities to reveal forms of exclusion (pp. 1-2).

In their study, Greenspan and Walk (2023) compared the level of formal and informal volunteering among native-born individuals and different generations of migrants based on the German Survey on Volunteering. Their analysis also concerns the influence of citizenship status, language proficiency and time since migration. The results show that level of formal volunteering remains higher for native-born individuals than for the different generations of migrants. On the other hand, for informal volunteering, there is only a difference between first-generation migrants and native-born individuals. The rates of informal volunteering of native-born individuals, 1.5 generation⁴ and second-generation migrants are similar (pp 8-9). Among first-generation migrants, “insufficient language proficiency” (p. 9) decreases the likeliness to take part in formal volunteering but has no link with informal volunteering. First-generation migrants with citizenship were more likely to participate in informal volunteering, but citizenship did not affect formal volunteering.

Those results indicate that informal volunteering is more accessible to migrants, compared with formal volunteering, and that language requirement is one of the barriers that restrict access to formal volunteering. According to Greenspan and Walk, this suggests that results of studies showing inequalities in volunteering such as the one by Hustinx et al. mainly concern formal volunteering and not informal volunteering (p. 10). They point out that further research is needed on discrimination limiting migrants’ participation, notably “organizational mechanisms that

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⁴ Greenspan and Walk use the term “1.5 generation migrants” to refer to “those who migrated with their parents before reaching adolescence” (p. 3). They differ from first-generation migrants who have migrated as adults.
increase/lower barriers to formal volunteering” (p. 13). In the thesis, I focus on this question by analyzing the impact of organizational practices on asylum seekers’ access to formal volunteering (see 6.1).
3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Volunteerability, volunteering organizations and third parties

To understand the role of organizations in asylum seekers’ access to volunteering, I will use a set of concepts introduced by Meijs, Brudney, Van Overbeeke and others (Meijs, Ten Hoorn and Brudney, 2007; Haski-Leventhal, Meijs and Hustinx, 2010; Brudney, Meijs and Overbeeke, 2019; van Overbeeke et al., 2022): volunteerability, sending and receiving organizations and third-parties. Like Van Overbeeke et al. (2022), I will use the concept of volunteerability to analyze the role of organizations in the inclusion and exclusion of volunteers. The concept of volunteerability has been introduced by Meijs et al. (2007) to answer the question “What makes a person more or less willing and able to volunteer?” (p. 36). This concept, inspired by the concept of employability (p. 37), enables to analyze the “mechanisms to overcome barriers that prevent people from volunteering at the individual, the organizational and societal levels” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018, p. 1143). Volunteerability has three dimensions: the willingness, the capability and the availability of the individual:

- Willingness refers to the motivation to volunteer
- Capability includes the skills and knowledge needed for volunteering in an organization and the self-perception of those skills
- Availability refers to the time that can be allocated for volunteering but also to emotional availability and commitment (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010, p. 5; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018, p. 1143)

Volunteerability depends on the individual themselves but also on external factors at the meso and macro levels (Meijs et al., 2007, p. 39). According to Meijs et al. (2007), the volunteering field is composed of a “demand and supply side” (p. 44) of volunteering opportunities and volunteers. Volunteerability is at its highest when the demand side matches the supply side. Even though a high volunteerability increases the chance to volunteer, volunteering is only possible when organizations provide adequate volunteering “opportunities” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018, p. 1143). This concept shows how inclusion into volunteering is not only a consequence of an individual choice but relies partly on the organizations.
At the meso level, organizations involved in volunteering adopt strategies to increase the volunteerability of individuals and to find volunteering opportunities (Meijs et al., 2007, p. 40). These strategies can aim at increasing different elements of volunteerability simultaneously. For example, volunteering programs that include training of volunteers increase capability, but knowing that there is training might increase the willingness of individuals who want to acquire skills through volunteering (Meijs et al., 2007, p. 44). The organizations that impact volunteerability can be of different types. While, habitually, volunteering involves the volunteers, the recipients, and the volunteering organizations, nowadays, more actors play a part in the volunteering field and might affect the volunteerability of individuals (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010). Haski-Leventhal et al. (2010) call these multiple actors “third parties”. The different roles are not mutually exclusive: for example, volunteers and recipients can be from the same group (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010, p. 3), or third parties such as schools can play the role of sending organization of volunteers (van Overbeeke et al., 2022). In their third-party model, Haski-Leventhal et al. (2010) analyze how third parties such as governmental institutions or schools impact volunteerability but also organizations’ “recruit-ability”. Recruit-ability is composed of the organization’s accessibility, resources and networks (pp. 5-6). While the concept of volunteerability shows how organizations “enhance volunteering […] at the micro level” (p. 16), recruit-ability shows how parties at the macro-level impact organizations’ capacity to recruit volunteers.

In another paper, Brudney, Meijs, and Van Overbeeke (2019) distinguish different models of volunteering management by organizations. They explain that in, some cases, the home or sending organization and the receiving or host organization are distinct. On one side, the home organization sends volunteers to one or several host organizations, while on the other side, the host organization provides volunteering opportunities and welcomes volunteers.

Based on such a “dual management” (van Overbeeke et al., 2022, p. 34) model, Van Overbeeke et al. (2022) identified different strategies used by “sending-organizations” to increase the volunteerability of potential volunteers. The authors argue that sending-organizations and receiving organizations, which manage volunteers (p. 34), play the role of gatekeepers of volunteering by creating forms of exclusion and inclusion. Their analysis shows that sending
organizations, who are the “first gate” (p. 34), tackle forms of exclusion and increase inclusion through different strategies: encouraging, enabling and enforcing (see 2.1). The first strategy, “encouraging”, can impact the willingness to volunteer. “Enabling” increases the capability of individuals by preparing or training them to volunteer. Finally, the third dimension of volunteerability, “availability” could be increased by the three strategies: encouraging and enabling can lead a volunteer to dedicate more of their time to volunteering while enforcing forces to do so (p. 42). Van Overbeeke et al. mention that “receiving-organizations” (p. 34), who provide volunteering opportunities and have the role of second gate, could also tackle obstacles through different strategies.

My goal in using those concepts is not to argue that volunteerability should be increased but to understand the strategies of organizations from their perspective. I would like to analyze how both sending and receiving organizations impact the volunteerability of asylum seekers volunteers.

3.2 Bridging capital
A second concept that I will use to understand the strategies of organizations regarding asylum seekers volunteers is the concept of “bridging capital” introduced by Woolcock in 1998 and developed by Putnam (Jacquemain, 2005, p. 15). Putnam (2000) differentiates two types of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding or “exclusive” (p. 20) capital exists within homogenous groups, such as religious organizations, while bridging or “inclusive” (p. 20) capital links people across social boundaries. Putnam explains that “to build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves” (p. 448).

Whereas Bourdieu perceives social capital as a “private” (Jacquemain, 2005, p. 8, translated) resource that can be acquired by individuals, Putnam analyzes social capital as a collective resource. Bourdieu’s analysis shows how social capital is mobilized by individuals in social competition while Putnam focuses on social capital as networks that can lead to cooperation (Jacquemain, 2005, p. 8). Bonding capital increases the solidarity within a community: “strong ties” (Jacquemain, 2005, p. 16, translated) within the group can help to address mental or financial hurdles (“getting by”). On the other hand, bridging social capital helps to disseminate
information (“getting ahead”): “lose ties” (Putnam, 2000, p. 20) with less close people can lead to finding new opportunities (Jacquemain, 2005, p. 16).

A limitation of the concepts of bridging and bonding capital is their blurred boundaries (Jacquemain, 2005). A network can create both bridging and bonding capital. Putnam (2000) gives the example of a religious organization, that can be homogenous in terms of religion but can gather people who are different in other aspects, such as gender or age. A network does not belong to one or the other category of social capital but is situated along a continuum between bridging and bonding capital (p. 21). Consequently, an analysis with those concepts can lead to different interpretations (Jacquemain, 2005, p. 15). However, despite this limit, those concepts are useful to show the different types of networks (Jacquemain, 2005, p. 17). Using this concept will help me to analyze how organizations could try to create a network that links them to other organizations and link asylum seekers volunteers to other parts of the population through volunteering.

In the literature on migrant volunteering (see 2.2), Handy and Greenspan (2009) used those concepts in their study of religious organizations in Canada to show that most activities were bonding ones, carried out within the organization. In the case of migrant women in the Netherlands, Slootjes and Kampen (2017) observed that access to bridging capital through volunteering was limited. Volunteering was mainly a source of bonding capital between the volunteers. In a few cases, volunteering activities were bridging ones and helped to learn the language and new skills. Ambrosini and Artero (2022b) noted that for young second-generation migrant volunteers, volunteering was a way to acquire bridging social capital by engaging with the locals.
4. Context: Asylum and volunteering in Belgium

In Belgium, migration policy is a federal matter, while integration policies vary across regions (Whitehouse et al., 2021, p. 241). In Flanders, the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium, the Flemish Community rules integration policies. In Wallonia, the French-speaking region, integration is a competence of the Walloon Region, while in Brussels, the bilingual region, policies were developed by both the Flemish Community and the French Community Commission (Xhardez, 2020, p. 1508). In the German-speaking region, the German Community is responsible for integration (Xhardez, 2020, p. 1508)5.

Fedasil, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, is responsible for providing accommodation and material assistance for asylum seekers (Whitehouse et al., 2021, p. 241). Material assistance includes basic needs (food, clothing) and social, medical, and legal support (Whitehouse et al., 2021, p. 241; Fedasil, 2022). Asylum seekers receive no financial assistance, but they receive a weekly allowance of a few euros (Fedasil, 2022). The residents can receive a few euros more by participating in tasks such as cooking or cleaning (Fedasil, 2022). Concerning accommodation, reception centers are ruled either by Fedasil, the Red Cross, or other partners (Fedasil, 2022). In a minority of cases, Fedasil also provides accommodation in housing ruled by associations or communes (Fedasil, 2022; Ciré, 2022). Asylum seekers can decide to live outside of reception centers. In that case, they do not receive the support from Fedasil existing in centers, except for medical fees (Fedasil, 2022; Ciré, 2022).

In Belgium, asylum seekers have the right to work from four months after their asylum application (Fedasil, 2022). Asylum seekers who have a job must give a part of their salary to the center. The amount depends on their salary and can be up to 75% (Ciré, 2022). In November 2022, Fedasil decided that asylum seekers who have a “stable contract […] and sufficient income” (p. 2, translated) will have to leave the reception centers. This corresponds to a fixed-term contract of more than six months or a permanent contract, with a salary higher than the social integration income (p. 2). Fedasil explains that this measure will first concern single persons with no children and should be applied from early 2023. The agency justifies this

5 According to a law voted in 1980, integration is a competence of the Communities. However, the French Community has transferred this power to the Walloon Region for the French-speaking part and to the French Community Commission for Brussels territory (Nassaux, 2021, p. 5).
measure by a “saturation” (p. 1, translated) of the reception network. Since 2014, asylum seekers also have the right to volunteer.

In Belgium, volunteering is regulated by law. The law on the rights of volunteers\(^6\) of July 2005 defines volunteering as any activity carried out without remuneration or obligation; to benefit others, a group, or the collectivity; organized by an organization out of the family or private setting. This organization must be non-profit. This can be a public organization or an association (PFV, n.d.). This activity cannot be carried out by someone who works for that organization, under a contract, except if the tasks they accomplish as a volunteer and as a worker are different and the compensation that they receive corresponds to the real costs of volunteering. Before volunteers start the activity, the organization must inform them, at least about the legal status of the organization, the insurance, potential compensation and professional secrecy, if necessary. The organization can communicate this information in any form but must be able to prove the communication. The *Plateforme francophone du volontariat* (PFV) notes that many organizations use written documents (PFV, n.d.). Volunteers can receive compensation; it is not considered as remuneration. However, it is not an obligation for organizations to give compensation to volunteers. In the case of compensation, there are two options: a reimbursement of the actual costs such as transport or a fixed daily allowance. In the case of a fixed allowance, there is a maximal limit (40,67 euros per day from January to December 2023) (PFV, n.d.).

In 2019, Hustinx and Dudal conducted a statistical analysis of volunteering in Belgium. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has encouraged countries to gather data on volunteering based on guidelines that include a definition of volunteering and a methodology of study. However, Hustinx and Dudal mention that cross-country comparisons are “problematic” (p. 18, translated) because countries have applied the guidelines differently. Different definitions of volunteering are used based on the national context and questions are formulated differently (p. 18). Hustinx and Dudal explain that their study concerns mostly volunteering as defined by Belgian law, carried out in organizations, whereas the ILO definition also includes volunteering performed out of organizations (pp. 6-7).

\(^6\) Loi relative aux droits des volontaires du 3 juillet 2005
Hustinx and Dudal’s analysis is based on numbers collected by the Statbel labor force survey, which concerns the working-age population (15 years old and over) (pp. 4-7). In 2019, 866 521 people volunteered in Belgium, out of whom 735 739 performed a volunteering activity that corresponds to the legal definition (p. 9). Hustinx and Dudal write that these numbers correspond respectively to 9.2% and 7.8% of the total working-age population of Belgium (p. 9). In Wallonia, they were 232 404 volunteers, that is, 7.8% of the working-age population of Wallonia. 195 560 people were volunteers in a legal sense, which corresponds to 6.6% of the working-age population of Wallonia (p. 9).

The two first sectors in which people volunteered in Belgium were the cultural sector (23%), sports (18%) and social help (13%) (p. 16). Concerning the profile of volunteers, there was no major difference between men and women in terms of numbers (52% vs 48%). However, men were more involved in sports, while women were more present in youth, teaching and health sectors (p. 29). Concerning age, most volunteers were older than 60 years old, but there was no significant difference between the different age groups (p. 22). Concerning education, people with a bachelor and master degree were more likely to volunteer than other categories (p. 23). 53.6% of volunteering activities were performed by people with a higher education degree (p. 23). Statbel labor force survey participants are selected from the national register. Consequently, asylum seekers, who are registered in the “waiting register”, are not included in the sample (Statbel, 2022).

In 2014, the law of 2005 has been modified to enable volunteering of any foreigner who held a residence permit and “reception beneficiaries”, which include asylum seekers, their families, and unaccompanied minors (PFV, n. d.).

In 2016, the Plateforme Francophone du volontariat (PFV) launched, Volonterre d’asile, a network that gathered associations, some Red Cross and Fedasil centers, with the help of some experts or researchers (PFV, 2018). The network existed until 2018. During the first year, the aim was to map the volunteering of asylum seekers in Belgium. Then, during the second year, they implemented and observed the results of some pilot projects. In 2018, Fedasil financed a project

7 Based on the labor force survey of 2019, the total Belgian population of people aged 15 and older was 9 387 000. (Statbel, 2019).
8 In Wallonia, the total population of people aged 15 and older was 2 972 000 (Statbel, 2019).
by Red Cross whose goal was to develop volunteering for asylum seekers (p. 8). The Red Cross aimed at implementing volunteering for residents in all reception centers in Southern Belgium, Wallonia. The funding was part of a broader call for projects by Fedasil in 2017-2018 (Fedasil, 2018). Fedasil (2018) called for projects increasing the participation of asylum seekers in social life and meeting the specific needs of vulnerable groups (p. 1, translated). In total, Fedasil financed 17 projects across Belgium, including a project of one of the volunteering organizations that I met (see 6.3).

In 2018, the network Volonterre d’asile published a synthesis (PFV, 2018). Based on the observations and testimonials of asylum seekers and workers, they concluded that volunteering can benefit asylum seekers in different ways but that barriers still exist. Volunteering responds to different motivations: fighting boredom, creating a network, learning the language, having a feeling of “giving back”, using and learning skills,… Concerning the obstacles, they point out the lack of information among asylum seekers, the fact of not speaking the language, the price of the transport from the center to the place where they volunteer, but also the expectations that some asylum seekers can have. A member of an association where asylum seekers can volunteer mentions that asylum seekers with a high level of education have higher expectations from volunteering and sometimes need to be “brought back to reality” (p. 15, translated). Associations’ expectations regarding volunteers also become higher because they are “professionalizing” (p. 15, translated). their activity. The network states that a challenge for the future is finding more associations that would accept to welcome asylum seekers volunteers. To help associations and volunteers, a set of tools is available on the Plateforme Francophone du Volontariat’s website. The synthesis included a list of recommendations. First, volunteering should not become an obligation for asylum seekers to benefit them. Secondly, volunteering coordinators are encouraged to follow some steps: informing both asylum seekers and associations about volunteering; finding associations and identifying the wants, needs and skills of asylum seekers but also the “problematic expectations” (p. 44, translated) such as finding a job, by explaining to them that volunteering does not necessarily lead to a job; matching asylum seekers with suitable volunteering opportunities based on their motivations, as far as possible; preparing both volunteers and the association by explaining the legislation, verifying the legal status of the organization. The report emphasizes the importance of the autonomy of asylum seekers in the process, and the respect of the law (pp. 44-45).
5. Methodology

5.1 History of the research topic
This section aims at presenting the “history” (Silverman, 2010, p. 334) of my research question, the course of choices that led me to this topic. My thesis topic arose from a research proposal that I wrote in the first year of my Master, after a personal experience of volunteering. When I used to volunteer in an NGO, another volunteer, who had applied for asylum in the country where we both volunteered, told me that volunteering was something he did to “pay back” to the country where he lived now. This sentence led me to question volunteering programs. Drawing on the debate in migrant volunteering literature, I wanted to explore the following questions in the research proposal: Why do asylum seekers volunteer in Wallonia? Do they perceive volunteering as a way to prove the deservingness of being in the country? Does it challenge or reinforce the discourse considering that migrants have to prove that they are deserving? To address those questions, I proposed to focus on the volunteers’ point of view by adopting a qualitative design (Creswell, 2014) and conducting interviews.

I chose to continue exploring this topic in the Master's thesis, but I decided to approach it from a different angle for ethical and practical reasons. First, I preferred to avoid placing people who are already interviewed for the asylum procedure in another interview setting. Secondly, being in Sweden, I realized that reaching out to volunteers in Wallonia would be difficult. Consequently, I shifted the focus from volunteers to organizations, to understand how organizations perceived volunteering by asylum seekers: was volunteering seen as a way to “integrate” asylum seekers? Were asylum seekers volunteers perceived as more deserving than others? I hypothesized that the critique that had been raised in other countries could also be made regarding volunteering in Wallonia.

In the first interview with an organization member, I discovered that many obstacles still restrict access to volunteering: not only the language or transport but also the non-answer from organizations or misunderstandings. After this interview, I started to be interested in the question of access to volunteering. My initial question in the research proposal had been “Why do asylum seekers volunteer? How do they perceive their volunteering activity?” However, this interview made me realize that access to volunteering could also be approached, not as a matter of motivation or capital, but as related to other factors. I wondered, beyond personal factors, how
the practices of the organizations could create forms of exclusion or, on the contrary, foster inclusion in volunteering.

When I decided to focus on the views of organizations, I considered the risk of reproducing “epistemic inequality” (Hustinx et al., 2022, p. 10) by privileging one understanding or view of volunteering over another and not listening to the view of asylum seekers volunteers. However, the fact that scholars in both migration (Lang et al., 2021) and volunteering studies (Hustinx et al., 2022) mention the importance of analyzing the role of organizations in producing inclusion or exclusion encouraged me to adopt this view. Focusing on the side of organizations would help me to analyze access to volunteering, not in terms of volunteers’ motivations and capital but as a result of organizational factors and practices.

5.2 Research approach
To better understand the role of organizations in asylum seekers volunteering in Wallonia, I used a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach consists of “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p. 43). First, a qualitative approach was a better option to address my research question. My goal was to understand the processes of inclusion and exclusion of asylum seekers from volunteering from the perspective of organizations: what obstacles workers in organizations face to include volunteers, how they might try to tackle those barriers, how they recruit volunteers, and how this selection might create forms of exclusion. A qualitative design is well adapted to understanding a phenomenon from the views of the actors (Creswell, 2014, p. 54). Bonneson (2019) explains that, while exclusion can be approached in statistical terms, a qualitative approach enables to study it as a process, by unraveling the practices that lead to exclusion. Rather than looking at the exclusion itself, the author analyzes how it “comes to be” (p. 56). The same approach can be applied to inclusion, as shown by van Overbeeke (2022). Secondly, as pointed out by Manço and Arara (2018), there is little quantitative data on migrant volunteering in Europe, including in Belgium. I did not find any databases on this topic. As mentioned above, Statbel’s labor force survey, which was used by Hustinx and Dudal (2019) for their report on volunteering, does not use the waiting register for making their sample.
Concerning the method, I chose to conduct interviews. When I first looked for information about organizations that might be involved in asylum seekers volunteering, I found a few documents such as the report of the Plateforme francophone du volontariat published in 2018. However, the information was not sufficient to address my questions regarding the view of organizations. Consequently, I decided to use interviews with members of organizations as a main method of data collection to have a more precise view of the topic from their perspective (Van Campenhoudt et al., 2017, p. 244).

5.3 Data collection

Interviews

I conducted five interviews with members of organizations: two Red Cross workers and three workers from different organizations involved in youth volunteering. I also engaged in one observation in one of the volunteering organizations. All interviews were in French and lasted between 35 minutes and 1 hour and 5 minutes. The two first interviews were done online in February and March, while two other interviews were conducted face-to-face in Belgium in April. The last interview was conducted online in April. To find participants, I used the “snowball sampling” (Barglowski, 2018, p. 166) method: interviewees gave me the name of other people or organizations whom they worked with. I was given the email contact of the first interviewee by an acquaintance who also works for Red Cross. I contacted the informant by email and we set a meeting for the interview. The interviewee forwarded my email explaining the thesis project to another worker from Red Cross, who accepted to participate in an interview. The two first interviewees mentioned that Red Cross worked with different organizations. Consequently, I sent an email to three of these organizations, explaining that, for my thesis, I was conducting interviews with organizations’ members to understand the role of organizations in asylum seekers volunteering in Wallonia. Members of the three organizations answered me back and accepted the interview.

All interviews were semi-structured: I had prepared some questions, topics to approach during the interviews (see Appendix), but all questions were not necessarily asked or asked in a specific order (Van Campenhoudt et al., 2017, p. 242). Some follow-up questions also emerged during the interviews, and interviewees brought up new topics. Semi-structured interviews aim to let the
interviewees speak as freely as possible, in the order that they prefer (Van Campenhoudt, et al., 2017, p. 243). The interviewer only reframes the interview to stay on topic, or to ask questions about themes that the interviewees did not mention by themselves (Van Campenhoudt, et al., 2017, p. 243). This type of interview is well-adapted when the researcher already has information on the research topic but “but does not know and cannot anticipate all of the answers” (Morse, 2012, p. 142).

As I went back and forth between the field and the theory (Van Campenhoudt et al., 2017, p. 29), my interview guide became more precise. Some questions prepared for the two first interviews concerned the broader framework, for example the law. In the following interviews, my goal was to approach the strategies of exclusion and inclusion of the organizations. Consequently, I wanted to ask interviewees whether the organization ever worked with asylum seekers volunteers, what the criteria to volunteer were, and to which extent the status or the situation of asylum seekers volunteers had an impact on the possibility to volunteer. I also asked them about their collaboration with reception centers and potential difficulties to be able to compare their view to the ones of Red Cross workers.

Before the fourth interview, the interviewee proposed me to join an organization’s activity whose goal was to explain to youth workers from different European countries how the organizations’ volunteering activities create links between the local community and young migrants, including asylum seekers. I thus engaged in direct observation by watching events as they occurred during the presentation (Van Campenhoudt et al., 2017, pp. 247–248). For the interview, I also prepared questions related to what I had observed during the presentation of the organization: the observation served as a guide for the interview (Silverman, 2010, p. 202).

**Ethics and positionality**

Before the interviews, all participants were provided with a document that included a description of the thesis project, the data management and a consent form. On the consent form, I asked them for their authorization to record the interview. All interviewees accepted the recording. The document explained the different steps of the data treatment. After the interviews, I stored the recordings on my Linkoping University One Drive account, as it is secured by a password.
During the transcription, I anonymized the data by removing any information that could reveal the identity of the interviewee, such as names and places. This information was replaced by the letter “X” or a pseudonym. After the transcription, I stored the transcripts on my Linkoping University One Drive account. I did not use any names but numbers to identify the transcripts and I deleted the list of contacts. The document also explained the interviewees’ right to withdraw and their GDPR rights. It also specified that the data would be only used for the thesis and potential presentations or publications linked to the thesis.

While this might affect the analysis, to protect the participants’ identity (Creswell, 2014, p. 143), I chose not to reveal the names of the different organizations, except the Red Cross. First, Red Cross is a bigger organization with more than twenty reception centers across Wallonia, which makes the participants less identifiable than in smaller organizations. I did not write the name of the specific Red Cross centers mentioned in the interviews. Second, it seemed important to me to indicate that the workers who I interviewed were linked to volunteering in Red Cross reception centers, in order to distinguish volunteering coordination in reception centers managed by Red Cross from volunteering in centers managed by Fedasil. I did not interview any workers from Fedasil centers and the interviewees told me that they did not know how volunteering coordination worked in Fedasil centers. In the analysis, I also specified that the three volunteering organizations are youth organizations, the types and the length of voluntary activities, because it affects who can access these activities.

While I had never contacted any of these organizations before the thesis, the fact that I volunteered might have helped me in contacting the organizations: when I explained my thesis project to the organizations, in the email, I mentioned that I chose this topic because I have an interest in volunteering and volunteered myself. Carling et al. (2014) point out the importance of reflecting on which personal experiences were shared with the participants and why for research ethics. By sharing personal experience, some invisible characteristics can be made visible (p. 52). For example, the skin color, accent or age group of researchers are visible for interviewees, while other attributes are invisible. The researcher is perceived based on visible characteristics in any case, but has to decide which invisible characteristics should be shared.
In my case, it seemed important to present briefly why I chose this topic for my thesis and why I was contacting organizations. The fact that I mentioned my volunteering experience might have influenced how I was perceived. Carling et al. (2014) state that mentioning familiarity with a field, if “truthful” (p. 52), reduces “suspicion about the motivation for asking questions” (p. 48). Another element is the fact that I am already familiar with certain volunteering programs names such as “work camps”. Consequently, I made my familiarity with volunteering visible so it could explain why I could be familiar with some terms during the interviews. Having a “sense of commonality” (p. 50) with the participants can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, my volunteering experience might have helped me to better understand how certain activities work and how volunteering is organized. On the other hand, some elements might have appeared as obvious to me due to the lack of distance, and I might have omitted to ask certain questions.

However, while I might have been seen as an “insider” (p. 50) of the volunteering field, I am not a member of the organizations. I am familiar with volunteering but did not participate in these organizations’ activities. Carling et al. show how the distinction between insider and outsider is not strict and can vary along different lines. They use the term “insider by proxy” (p. 51) to refer to researchers who were not part of the same group as the participants but shared a similar experience. In my case, I was part of a youth volunteering organization, but not the same as the participants. Other important characteristics are my age and status. As I am 24 years old, I am the age of the target group of youth organizations. As I volunteered, I might be closer to volunteers than to the workers in the youth organization whom I interviewed, in terms of experience and in the way I am perceived.

5.4 Data analysis
When I had to choose a method to analyze the transcripts, I was confronted with a difficulty. As I interviewed members of organizations, which method could I use to highlight the practices of the organization itself, but also to take the views of the workers, the interviewees into account? I thought that an appropriate analysis should look at the meaning as given by the interviewees, but also enable to identify more general practices of the organizations.
I thus analyzed the interview transcripts in two steps as described by Paillé and Mucchielli (2021). First, I used the “phenomenological rephrasing” (p. 189, translated). The authors explain that this analysis consists of “synthesizing phenomenologically the congruent content by using appropriated statements, i.e. using sentences getting the essential of the section of the corpus that is approached” (p. 189, translated). Those statements can be taken directly from the testimony or consist of a reformulation by the analyst (p. 191). For Paillé and Mucchielli, adopting a phenomenological attitude consists of trying to put any analysis or interpretation aside and seeing the meaning “as it stands” (p. 190, translated), as presented by the interviewee. The analyst must try to adopt a new eye (p. 190). First, the texts must be read several times. The second step is to synthesize “the essence of the testimony” (p. 320, translated) in the margin by asking questions such as “What is put forward?” (p. 192, translated) or “What is the experience expressed through these words?” (p. 191, translated). In this first step, I tried to identify the “range of voices that [the] respondents use” (Silverman, 2010) as they might speak in the name of the organization. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) explain that words such as “speaking as a woman” (p. 227) show which voice respondents are using.

The second step consists of a “conceptualizing categories analysis” (Paillé and Muchielli, translated by Chebli and Kadri, 2022, p. 586). Paillé and Mucchielli (2021) explain that “after a first […] phenomenological analysis of the data, the researcher approaches conceptually their data with the purpose of qualifying the experiences and events with a theorizing glance” (p. 360, translated). The conceptualizing category refers to “a short statement” (p. 360, translated) to describe a phenomenon that can be identified by reading the data. It differs from a theme because the category aims at “going beyond a strict synthesis of the content” (p. 361, translated) to refer to the phenomenon itself. It has a dynamic dimension and can refer to different sorts of phenomena such as an experience, a “collective action” (p. 367, translated) or a “process” (p. 367, translated). It has a “generalizing function […] by grouping under the same heading of various objects with complementary and similar characteristics” (Chebli and Kadri, 2022, p. 598). Paillé and Mucchielli add that the researcher must define and identify the different proprieties and the conditions for the existence of the categories (pp. 407-414). The proprieties are “the essential elements […] that characterize the category” (p. 409, translated). Conceptualizing categories analysis is a continuous process: some categories can be reformulated, merged or unused in the final analysis (pp. 430-431).
This first way of identifying categories corresponds to an inductive method. The analyst can also adopt a deductive method by identifying conceptualizing categories through the lens of a theory or borrowing some categories from previous research (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2021, p. 386). In this analysis, I used some of the categories already made by Van Overbeeke (2022) and Bonnesen (2019) that refer to strategies of inclusion and exclusion, when I identified a similar phenomenon.
6. Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the analysis. In the first part, I specify the object of the analysis: which type of volunteering is concerned and who the actors involved are. I briefly describe the types of projects of the volunteering organizations that I met. The following parts explore the role of organizations in the inclusion and exclusion of asylum seekers volunteers at both “gates” (van Overbeeke et al., 2022), the reception centers and the volunteering organizations.

6.1 Object of the analysis: Formal volunteering and organizations

Hustinx et al. (2022) explained the importance of re-contextualizing volunteering as a phenomenon, whose definition is based on a specific vision and which involves different actors exercising a set of practices in a specific setting. Greenspan and Walk (2023) also argue that research should specify which type of volunteering is analyzed. In my thesis, I focus on formal volunteering, existing in organizations, which excludes informal volunteering that exists outside of organizations (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 7).

In Belgium, volunteering in organizations is framed by the law voted by the government in 2005 on the rights of volunteers, which defines volunteering as an activity carried out in nonprofit organizations (associations or public organizations), with no remuneration and that benefits others. Since 2014, the law gives the possibility for asylum seekers to volunteer. If we analyze this definition of volunteering with the four dimensions of volunteering identified by Cnaan et al., which are free will, remuneration, structure and relation with the recipients (Whittaker et al., 2015), we can see that the legal definition of volunteering is more or less restrictive for the different elements: the law accepts a reimbursement and does not specify who the beneficiaries must be, but it excludes activities carried out in family or private settings.

To understand how asylum seekers can access this type of volunteering, I met members of different organizations. The interviews were in French. Consequently, I translated all the quotes from the interviewees. The two first interviewees work for Red Cross: one is a volunteering
adviser\textsuperscript{10} in a reception center managed by Red Cross and the second interviewee is a volunteering coordinator\textsuperscript{11} in charge of training and helping the volunteering advisers working in the different Red Cross reception centers in Wallonia. The analysis concerns, not Red Cross as a whole, but reception centers managed by Red Cross. Reception centers can be considered as the home or sending organizations (Brudney et al., 2019) of asylum seekers volunteers since they recruit volunteers and work with partner organizations that provide volunteering opportunities. Furthermore, reception centers are third parties since they are not volunteering organizations, “traditionally” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010, p. 3) involved in volunteering. Those partners can be seen as host or receiving organizations (Brudney et al., 2019).

I met members of three organizations who have the role of receiving organizations (Brudney et al., 2019). The interviewees presented the volunteering projects of the organizations during the interviews. Those different organizations are all youth organizations: their activities are for people between 18 and 25 years old or sometimes 18 and 30 years old. Their volunteering activities vary in length. To name the different volunteering organizations and refer to the interviewees from those organizations, I will use the letters A, B and C.

Organization A organizes a volunteering program of six months for young people. The voluntary program has two dimensions. First, the participants volunteer individually in a partner organization in Belgium, that has to be a nonprofit organization. Voluntary work can be done in four sectors: aid to individuals, environment, culture and education, and sports. Aside from this voluntary activity, the volunteers are part of a group, a cohort of around twenty volunteers who have started the program at the same time. The interviewee explained that the aim of this group is that youngsters exchange their experiences and create bonds. The volunteers also attend different training sessions about civic issues and orientation activities to reflect on their future after the volunteering program.

The second and third organizations (B and C) organize volunteering projects abroad and in Belgium. The projects organized in Belgium are either one-day, one-weekend projects or longer

\textsuperscript{10} « Référent volontariat » in French
\textsuperscript{11} « Coordinatrice volontariat » in French
projects that last between one and three weeks. These projects of several weeks, or “work camps”, are international, which means that the participants come from different countries. The language used in the group is generally English. Organizations B and C are in charge of the coordination of the project (recruiting volunteers, informing volunteers,…) but the volunteering projects are organized in partnership with a nonprofit organization, which is the beneficiary of the project. For example, the project can consist of helping to prepare a festival, gardening or building a shed. Organization B mentions that, in their projects, an animator is in charge of the “group life”. For projects of several days, the beneficiary organization is generally responsible for housing.

The three organizations that I met work with partner organizations, where the volunteering project takes place. Those organizations could be seen as beneficiaries but also as receiving organizations as they welcome the volunteers in their activities. In the analysis, I will consider them as beneficiaries, since, in the partnership, it is mostly organizations A, B and C who are in charge of providing the volunteering projects, recruiting and accompanying volunteers. I will thus use a third-party model (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010) in which at the first gate (van Overbeeke et al., 2022), reception centers managed by Red Cross in Wallonia are “third parties characterized as sending-gatekeepers” (van Overbeeke et al., 2022, p. 34) while, at the second gate, receiving organizations are volunteering organizations (A, B and C). The beneficiaries are the partner organizations, in which the project takes place, volunteers are asylum seekers, and volunteering refers to the formal volunteering framed by the law of 2005. To analyze how organizations impact asylum seekers’ access to volunteering, I will use the concepts of volunteerability and bridging capital.

Another third party that can be mentioned is the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, Fedasil, as they financed volunteering projects in Wallonia after a call for projects, but it is not the focus of the analysis, as the goal is to understand the role of organizations at the meso level.
6.2 First gate: The reception centers

In 2018, Fedasil financed a Red Cross project in Southern Belgium (see 4. Context). In each reception center, a worker now plays the role of volunteering adviser. The interviewee explained that being a volunteering adviser can be one of the tasks of the workers in the centers, but is not their only task. They have different responsibilities. The volunteering adviser that I met works in pairs with a second adviser in the center. The volunteering advisers participate in training every six months. Those meetings are an opportunity for advisers from different centers to share their experiences and practices. To organize volunteering for the residents, the interviewees, who are volunteering adviser (first interviewee) and coordinator (second interviewee), play different roles. They adopt different strategies to enhance the residents’ participation in volunteering or their volunteerability.

Promotion of volunteering outside and within the center

A first role mentioned by the interviewees is the promotion of volunteering among organizations outside of the center and among residents of the center. Concerning the organizations, volunteering advisers look for partner organizations, if possible close to the center to increase the availability of the volunteers: “So we decided to canvass nonprofit organizations, either very close to us or in [name of the city], even though, in terms of accessibility, transport, it’s not so easy. But in [city], there is really a big network of associations, so it’s hard to do without it” (Adviser). Haski-Leventhal et al. (2018, p. 1161) point out that a lack of transportation can limit the availability of volunteers.

In line with the law on the rights of volunteers, the organizations that the advisers contact have to be nonprofit. The Red Cross workers in charge of volunteering play the role of law keepers by excluding any organization that is not nonprofit, but also by verifying the tasks given to volunteers. This exclusion limits the number of volunteering opportunities but protects the rights of volunteers. The interviewees denounce the risk of exploitation:

There are farms that pass as cooperatives for example and will ask for volunteers […] so we cannot play with that and we have to check absolutely […] I ask many questions about

12 « Références » in French
the legal status, the insurance, the reimbursement, the type of mission. Because this also...: we [the partners] hire volunteers but give them too many tasks, anything and everything. So it becomes slavery; it’s not volunteering. (Coordinator)

The first interviewee explains that the map of nonprofit organizations on the Plateforme Francophone du Volontariat’s (PFV) website has been useful to contact potential partners. However, among all the nonprofit organizations that the volunteering advisers of the center contacted, 70% did not answer. “Contact-avoidance” is a form of indirect exclusion identified by Bonnesen (2019, p. 63). The non-answer from organizations restricts access to some sectors for volunteers. The interviewee states that the associations that answered were mostly organizations that already worked in the field of migration, inclusion or social help:

There’s already something social that creates a sensitivity towards working with people with a migration background. And then [...] You have things like protection of animals, ecology, sports...In fact all those things, we have very few ways to reach them and they are not really interested in our propositions. (Adviser)

Based on numbers from 10 Red Cross reception centers\(^\text{13}\), the volunteering coordinator explained that in 2022, 78 people volunteered in three main sectors: environment (57%), social action (28%) and culture (9%). The coordinator mentions that finding partners is easier in some sectors than others. Volunteerability is affected by the demand for volunteers, or the offer of volunteering opportunities, (Meijs et al., 2007) in different sectors:

Each center works with the municipality where it is situated, so in the environment, it is way much easier to have contracts, conventions with local authorities [...] Why culture? Because after two years of covid, festivities, cultural events started again so more volunteers are hired.

\(^{13}\) All the centers did not communicate the numbers to the coordinator so the coordinator warned me that those statistics are not representative of all volunteers from the Red Cross centers in Wallonia.
The second dimension is the promotion among the residents of the center. On the one hand, volunteers are informed about what volunteering consists of so their *capability* to volunteer increases. The adviser can use flyers from the PFV website, that explain volunteering in different languages. On the other hand, residents are also informed about the benefits of volunteering. Promoting volunteering aims at increasing the *willingness* to volunteer, or “encouraging” (van Overbeeke et al., 2022, p. 41) potential volunteers:

I organize workshops for the residents. So I ask residents to come to collective information sessions to talk about volunteering in Belgium and what they can do. They can be an added value, it gives hope, kills time, creates a network… (Coordinator)

Volunteering is promoted as an activity with three main benefits: having an occupation, building a network and increasing skills, including the language. First, volunteering is seen as a way to “meet the occupational wants” (Adviser) of the residents, especially during the four months during which they cannot work. This evokes the “occupational deprivation” in reception centers mentioned by some authors (De Koker et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2022). The interviewees explain that residents volunteer mostly during those four months because their *availability* is higher. The coordinator notes that some residents who work continue to volunteer aside from their job, during their free time: “I know a resident […] who works during the week but volunteers either on Saturday or Sunday”. However, residents who work are less *available* in terms of time, and working can be a priority for financial reasons. Promoting volunteering as an occupation in order to increase *willingness* might be less efficient among residents who can work. The interviewee compares volunteering and working and states that working outweighs volunteering as an occupation because it has the advantage of being paid:

But, often, what happens is that once they can access the labor market, they go to work. In fact, work has the same benefits as volunteering, i.e. learning French, building a network, etc., except that you are paid in addition. (Adviser)
The adviser mentions that promoting volunteering in the center can also be challenging because residents might also prefer to follow professional training than volunteering. Different strategies are adopted to reach residents: the coordinator organizes some workshops while the adviser is available for answering questions from the residents informally or during specific hours at an information desk. The adviser “tested” different techniques to reach residents. The information desk\textsuperscript{14} for volunteering was moved to the same day as the information desk for professional training, so residents who cannot take part in training are directly redirected to the information desk for volunteering:

You have to keep in mind that when people arrive here and realize that they cannot work, before thinking about volunteering, they think about professional training. […] But now, having them directly [at the information desk for volunteering], it motivates them […] They come for training but we explain to them that there is another solution. (Adviser)

According to the adviser, while residents would rather work or follow professional training than volunteer, the recent measures of Fedasil concerning the salary of residents (see 4. Context) might discourage them from working. Due to the regulations that oblige residents with a certain salary to leave the center or give a higher part of their salary to the center, workers might be more willing to volunteer as an occupation:

All those new regulations, it becomes a brake on the residents’ willingness to work, because why they want to work, it’s to earn money. And they realize that if they work and earn too much, they are taxed enormously on what they earn, up to 70% of the salary, and in addition, they might have to leave the center and lose access to all the social services and assistance for the procedure that we provide. […] So we have more people who come back to us, volunteering advisers, and tell us “I need a daily activity because staying here is heavy” […] So we have a light increase of candidates in these last weeks, that me, I link to that [the regulations].

\textsuperscript{14} “Permanence volontariat” in French
Concerning the second benefit of volunteering, the interviewees explain that volunteering is also offered so residents can build a network out of the center and the institutional context, that they can “mobilize as a resource in difficult times” (Adviser) after leaving the center:

Because, we, as social workers in a reception center, are resource persons for the residents, but we are also the incarnation of the institution, so, in a way, sometimes they distrust us, including when they receive negative decisions […]. So, it’s totally understandable, but in consequence, the network they make aside, during their residency in the center and their volunteering, it’s a resource they can mobilize after, at any difficult moments, in fact. (Adviser)

Volunteering is also seen as a way to enable residents to meet people from Belgium, learn the language, and get to know the city and the “cultural codes” (Adviser). Aside from the language, volunteering is encouraged to acquire experience that can be valued on a curriculum vitae. Volunteering is thus considered as a bridging activity that allows residents to acquire bridging social capital out of the center, which can be mobilized to “get ahead” (Putnam, 2000) after leaving the center and to find new opportunities such as a job.

Matching the supply and demand
Once they have found partner organizations and have contacted potential volunteers, volunteering advisers have to “match” (Adviser15) residents with a volunteering opportunity. When advisers suggest a volunteering opportunity, the residents receive a written document that informs them about the tasks, the schedule, the potential reimbursement for the volunteering activity. This follows the law on the rights of volunteers of 2005 that indicates that the organization has to provide information to volunteers. Residents can refuse the offer or accept it by signing the document. This agreement document does not only inform volunteers but also aims at protecting their rights by specifying exactly the tasks to be performed. It limits the risk of exploitation mentioned by the interviewees.

15 The adviser used the English term “match”, used in French with the same meaning
The selection of a volunteering opportunity for a resident is based on the resident’s willingness, capability and availability: “So we started with people who came, and in fact, depending on their story, their affinities, their expectations, we tried to match them with associations that could meet those expectations.” (Adviser)

First, the adviser tries to find opportunities in an area of interest of the resident. Although the profiles of volunteers vary in terms of socioeconomic or educational backgrounds, all residents might be more willing or feel more capable to volunteer in a sector in which they already have experience or skills:

There are really all types of profiles […] For example, we have a family from a high socioeconomic level where the mister wants to volunteer, because before he had himself many responsibilities. We have other people […] who have always cultivated and whose job was shepherd or farmer, so when we tell them about working in a boutique, they look at us with big eyes: “What will I be doing in a boutique”.

However, finding a volunteering opportunity that matches the volunteer’s expectations and skills is difficult in certain fields due to the limited offer of volunteering opportunities, for example in IT sector:

I have partnerships with associations, not in all domains, so I understand that the person has a specific demand and I address it as far as possible. But when it’s not possible, it’s not possible […] The person chooses in fine what they want to do, but in what exists. (Adviser)

The two previous quotes show how access to volunteering depends not only on the volunteer’s side but also on the “supply” (Meijs et al., 2007, p. 44) side: the adviser mentions that some volunteers have specific skills, a certain level of capability in a field and are willing to volunteer in this field, but cannot access their field of experience because there is no volunteering opportunity in that sector. Another factor that is not only dependent on the volunteer’s side is
language. Language can be an obstacle to finding a volunteering opportunity for volunteers, due to the level, the *capability* of the volunteer but also the language skills of the organization:

The language can cause difficulties because, if people do not speak French, it can be complicated, because in the associative sector, people who speak English, it’s not so frequent, and in addition, the resident has to speak English, which is a bit complicated sometimes. (Adviser)

The selection is linked to the expectations and profile of the volunteers, but also to the expectations of the host organizations. The interviewee explains that asylum seekers are in a particular situation that organizations need to understand. Their *availability* is impacted by the asylum procedure and life in the center:

It was trying to match everyone’s expectations and taking into account the reality of asylum seekers, which is a very very…uncertain reality, where you don’t know what tomorrow will look like, when decisions will be taken, when the appointment will take place… […] So whether or not they can come [in the association], that’s also something complicated in the residents’ involvement in volunteering. That’s what we try to make our partners understand, that the people will maybe come 3-4 times a week, and then won’t, and then come back one week later. (Adviser)

Moore et al. mention (2022) that in reception centers, asylum seekers are in a “liminal space” (p. 865) in which engaging in civic activities is difficult due to “mental barriers” (p. 865). Similarly, for the adviser, asylum seekers living in the center are in a situation of “uncertainty”, with a different track of time, which does not make them as available as “Belgian volunteers”, for example, retired people, what organizations must take into account. This observation parallels Bonnesen’s statement that “well-educated high earners midway through life are among the most likely to volunteer their spare time” (p.54). The specific situation of the residents impacts their availability in terms of time, due to the uncertainty of the procedure, but also their mental or *emotional availability* (Hustinx et al., 2010). Misunderstandings or “ruptures” (Adviser) can
occur due to the mismatch between the volunteer’s availability and the organizations’ expectations:

We already had difficulties with people who were volunteering and would systematically be late, would forget sometimes to go to some meetings, to do things, but not in bad faith at all, in fact. It’s just that their reality, track of time is completely different from ours […] That’s understandable, but the institution that welcomes the volunteer has expectations regarding this volunteer and needs to be able to count on the person at specific moments. (Adviser)

This quote seems to indicate that for the adviser, the fact that some volunteers arrive late at their voluntary work is not due to a lack of willingness (“it’s not in bad faith at all”) but due to limited mental availability. The adviser mentions that there can be a mismatch between the length of the project and the volunteer availability, in the case of a volunteering activity of six months: “It is a volunteering that requires a lot of commitment, and our residents, they are not ready to commit that much in a volunteering activity”. In the case of a mismatch between the availability of the volunteer in the volunteering activity, the adviser sometimes redirects the volunteer to an organization that is more “flexible” (Adviser).

Furthermore, there can be a mismatch between the volunteers’ availability and the organizations’ wants in terms of schedule and transport. The volunteering coordinator explains that some organizations ask for volunteers on Saturdays and Sundays, when there are no buses from the center, and some organizations refuse to pay for the transport. Bonnesen (2019) analyzes the delay or absence of reimbursement of volunteering costs by organizations as an informal exclusion of volunteers who cannot afford those costs. Red Cross pays a few tickets to increase the availability of volunteers (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018, p. 1154). However, the coordinator considers that it is the role of the receiving organization to pay for transport and explains that Red Cross cannot drive volunteers to the receiving organization:

Red Cross will give a maximum of 6 round trip tickets […] but in the first months. That means that it’s just to start, before the association sets things up. It is not for Red Cross to
pay for volunteering. [...] So it creates many problems because associations want to hire volunteers but do not pay the...[...] The center cannot organize shuttles. (Coordinator)

The volunteering coordinator also mentions that schedules can be an obstacle for mothers. The nursery in the reception centers is not open soon or late enough so they can leave their children at the nursery during their volunteering activity16: “Imagine if she has to leave at 7 am to take transportation to... The nursery opens at 9 am, so there are schedules that block.” The coordinator mentions that some mothers might also prefer not to let their children at the nursery. The coordinator states that women in general volunteer less than men and would like to investigate what are the obstacles that restrict their access to volunteering: “It is really blatant. [...] I am doing a study about the causes for this low [female] participation”. Based on the numbers collected by the coordinator17, the percentage of female volunteers has decreased from 2021 to 2022: “I have less than 10 women who volunteer while we have hundreds and hundreds... [...] In 2021 they were 28% of women [out of 70 volunteers] but in 2022 it’s a disaster”. In 2021, most female volunteers were between 21 and 30 years old. This corresponds to the general trend since, regardless of gender, most volunteers were between 21 and 30 years old. For the coordinator, while some women do not volunteer to stay with their children, the main reason for the low female participation is work: “I know it’s 90% linked to work but I have to dig deeper for the rest [...] The majority have a temporary18 job”.

In some volunteering projects, volunteers sleep on site, which limits the problem of transportation. However, asylum seekers have a limited number of “days off”19 out of the center. The coordinator explains that residents can spend three days out of the center without informing the center but need to take days off to spend more time outside. Consequently, residents have to take days off to sleep on site for projects of more than three days, which can decrease the willingness of some residents: “Some residents say: but I don’t want it [volunteering] to take some of my days off” (Coordinator). The coordinator mentions some exceptions: Red Cross

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16 When I asked whether children could go with their parents to the volunteering activity, the coordinator answered that it is not possible due to the insurance and the law.
17 These statistics are not representative of all volunteers from the Red Cross centers in Wallonia since all centers did not communicate their statistics to the coordinator.
18 “Intérimaire” in French
19 Two interviewees mentioned that the limit is 15 days off.
centers sometimes authorize residents to participate in three or four-day projects which do not count as days off or to extend their days off by a few days to participate in work camps of some organizations: “We have an exception with [organizations] because we work with them permanently. So centers tolerate it, that residents spend a few more days off.”

6.3 Second gate: The volunteering organizations

Collaboration with the reception centers

The organizations that I met do not work specifically with asylum seekers but with youth in general. They thus promote volunteering through different media such as social media, to reach young people, among whom there can be asylum seekers. When I asked whether the organizations have volunteers who are asylum seekers but do not live in a reception center, the interviewees answered affirmatively but stated that they cannot know how these volunteers learned about the organizations’ activities, as they promote volunteering through different media. However, the volunteering organizations have a specific collaboration with reception centers. Networking with the centers is one of the ways to reach asylum seekers: “There are very few [asylum seeker volunteers] who come like that, freely and do not know us. It is still part of a network” (C).

The youth organizations have been collaborating with reception centers for several years. On the one hand, residents of reception centers have been the beneficiaries of some of their volunteering projects: the organizations sent young people to volunteer in the centers. On the other hand, the volunteering organizations now receive volunteers from the centers. This evolution corresponds to the shift of vision from migrants as beneficiaries of volunteering to migrants as actors of volunteering mentioned by Ambrosini and Erminio (2020, p. 13) (see 2.2). According to the interviewees, sending volunteers to the centers has promoted volunteering among residents of the center. Seeing other young people volunteer can have increased the residents’ willingness to volunteer themselves. One organization’s member states: “It [volunteering] raises questions among the residents. Some participate in the project. It makes them want to participate” (B).
To promote their activities, the organizations also contact the reception centers regularly. However, the interviewees state that contact with the centers is not easily maintained, because workers in the centers have other responsibilities than managing volunteering and the teams regularly change. Reception centers are a third party of volunteering (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018) whose main action is not volunteering:

It's not always easy [collaboration with centers] because after each action or work camp we debrief with the advisers and sometimes it’s complicated. They tell us “We have many responsibilities” and volunteering is a small thing in all they have to do. So we have to adjust because sometimes we suggest some actions at a time when they have no time. […] We learn, so I inform, I come back I call but it’s a lot of coming back and forth because if I let things go, not much happens. So from our side, there is a real will to maintain the offer for the residents. It takes some energy. (C)

Consequently, the volunteering organizations have more contacts with some centers than others, or “privileged contacts” (C). The organizations are sometimes contacted by centers who have suggested their activities to a resident, but they recontact the centers regularly, to remind them about their activities. Organization C mentions that most of the time, it is the organization that contacts the center. During the interviews, it was also mentioned that the person of contact in the center is not necessarily the volunteering adviser: “In a center for example, it is the person in charge of technical maintenance, because he is in contact with residents who like manual work” (B).

Concerning the reasons for the promotion of volunteering, the youth organizations promote volunteering as non-formal education for youth. Interviewee C states: “An essential aspect about the specificity of our youth organizations is that we believe in non-formal skills and learning, in skills that can be learned through volunteering”. Interviewee B explains a similar goal: “For young people in general, we have a macro goal which is to make responsible, active, critical, solidary citizens.” Similarly, Organization A wants that young people, the beneficiary and society all “win” something from volunteering: the goal is that volunteer learn skills, while their voluntary actions benefit the partner organization and make society as a whole more inclusive.
Organizations B and C organize shorter programs but their goal is that young people volunteer in the long term, participate in different voluntary missions and stay involved in the organization so they learn through non-formal education. Interview B explains that, in the case of young asylum seekers, this vision differs from the view of some workers who suggest volunteering as a short-term occupation for asylum seekers who cannot work:

There is a lady in a center, I know that she suggests volunteering to residents who are waiting for the work permit, so in the first four months of the asylum procedure […] because she thinks “after they want to find a job but meanwhile they have nothing to do so it’s nice” so there are some for whom… there is no interest to come back after the four months. But the idea is that it can be recurrent. I mean, that they evolve within the association as any other young person. We have youngsters who have entered with [name of mentoring project for asylum seekers volunteers] and who are part of the general assembly or who are animators for example.

Second selection of volunteers
Young people with the status of asylum seekers can join the activities of the organizations: this status is not a barrier legally as the law on the rights of volunteers enables asylum seekers to volunteer. However, some other requirements can limit their access to volunteering. Aside from the age limit, interviewees mention the willingness to volunteer and a minimum level of language as requirements.

First, the volunteer must be willing to volunteer: the decision has to come from the volunteer, and not “from a parent, an educator or social worker” (B). Interviewee B mentions that although the young person can be helped in the process, free will is an important part of volunteering. The volunteer must also be willing to take part in the whole project. In the case of the volunteering program of six months, Organization A verifies that the aspiring volunteers are willing to participate in the whole program. The organization also verifies whether they are available for the duration of the project, in terms of time and mentally:
For us, the only two criteria are being between 18 and 25 and speaking a minimum of the language. And I would say, being ready to commit for six months full time, because it is not insignificant […] And I would like to say, being in a good…being available mentally. Because it’s true that sometimes some young people can go through personal difficulties.

The interviewee explains that the availability needed for the project can be a barrier to any young person confronted with difficulties but mentions particular difficulties that asylum seekers volunteers could face:

Yes, it’s not always easy. We already had young people…I remember a young person who had to go back to [country] to handle documents, who was stuck at the border and could never come back. Or young people who are caught up in family reunification or all procedures and eventually have other priorities. What we totally understand. (A)

The second requirement is the language. For the six-month project, the volunteer has to be able to use French orally. Workers in the center are made aware of this requirement, for their “first selection” (A) of volunteers, but the organization makes a second selection based on the capability to speak French:

They [workers in the centers] know our expectations, requirements. So they make a first selection, I would say, of young people who could be interested and they maybe won’t suggest it systematically to young people who do not speak French at all. And then there are “middle” cases when they [workers in the centers] think it could be enough, but they are not sure. So they come to the information session and we organize a small interview – With all youngsters I mean, it is not just with them [asylum seekers]. We interview all youngsters and my colleagues estimate whether they have a sufficient level.

Potential volunteers who do not meet the language requirement are advised to join the program when they know the language better, including asylum seekers who might be learning French:
There are some young people in centers who do not speak French at all, so unfortunately, the doors of the program are still closed to them. It is a matter of integration in the group. […] What we do sometimes is to say: “For now you don’t have sufficient bases, continue the French course […] and come back, maybe in three or four months, it will go well. […] So we never close totally the doors. It’s just not the best moment sometimes.

It is thus a form of indirect exclusion (Bonnesen, 2019) or temporary exclusion. Greenspan and Walk (2023) noted that requiring “language proficiency” (p. 11) is an organizational practice that restricts first-generation migrants’ access to formal volunteering (see 2.2). The interviewee argues that volunteers are expected to speak French to be able to “integrate” into the cohort of volunteers and in the partner organization in which they volunteer: “We aim at their integration in the group and that they can volunteer easily where they are on a mission”.

It appears that the level of language required by organizations for the volunteering project depends on the length of the project, the tasks of the volunteer and the type of group of volunteers. The two other volunteering organizations that I met (B and C) require a lower level of the language for the projects that last whether one day, one weekend, or around ten days. First, volunteers are mostly given manual tasks which do not require a high level of French or English. The member of organization B states: “It’s like that in every work camp: as we work together, as long as the instructions are understood, you don’t necessarily need to speak the language. Interviewee C observes: “We are often in manual work, so we speak with corporal language, by hands, etc.” (C). However, interviewee C mentions that not speaking the language at all can still be an obstacle in longer projects of more than ten days. Like organization A, the interviewee tries to verify the level of language of the volunteers: “There was an experience when young people did not speak French or English, and it was complicated… So really I insist, and, as far as possible, I check that there’s a minimum of language. […] It was more in work camps of 2 weeks that it was complicated. Otherwise, we find a way to communicate” (C).

Interviewee C explains that volunteers mentioned that the short projects were also an opportunity to practice the language: “He [a volunteer] told me that actions and work camps enabled him to practice French […] It is one of the secondary benefits because you learn words, you will learn
words. [...] And it maybe comes more easily than when you feel the pressure to speak”. Some of the non-formal education tools used by the organizations, such as “icebreakers” also do not require a high level of language. This could suggest that including asylum seekers volunteers with a lower level of language in the work camps reduces inequalities by enabling them to increase their level. Bonnesen (2019) points out that organizations reproduce inequalities by selecting volunteers who already have more knowledge and will increase their knowledge through volunteering.

Like the volunteering adviser, the interviewees mention that communication depends, not only on the level of English of the volunteers themselves, but also on the language skills of others, that is, the beneficiary organization and other volunteers. In some groups, for example, some volunteers translated for others. The work camps, in particular, are composed of volunteers from different countries, with different mother tongues. The “group life animators” (B) are also trained to manage a team of international volunteers. Consequently, in a work camp, for interviewee C, asylum seekers who are not familiar with the language might not be perceived as “strangers”: “In the work camps, they are not the ones who are strangers, so there are many similitudes in the end”.

While work camps are composed of a group of international volunteers, the cohort of the six-month program of organization A is composed of young people who live in Belgium, at least during the six-month project, and speak French. The organization observed that asylum seekers who are part of the program face difficulties in being part of the cohort:

So in fact, for all those years when we have been welcoming this public [asylum seekers], we notice that it is not always easy for them to integrate into our groups of youngsters who are yet very mixed. We have young people from every level of study, different ages, socioeconomic conditions, sociocultural conditions. But we notice that it’s still not always easy for people who live in reception centers to really integrate into the cohorts. I don’t really know why, but those are youngsters who drop out a bit more quickly. Some finish the program and it’s great. But yes, we thought that something was lacking so they can
A hypothesis is that the barrier that asylum seekers face within the cohort is not only the language barrier, as language is a requirement for being part of the program so volunteers can speak French.

Other barriers to volunteering that were mentioned by the Red Cross workers were the transport and the schedule. The members of the volunteering organizations explain how they try to overcome it. Organizations A and C mention that they try to find a volunteering opportunity not too far from where the volunteers live and choose a schedule that enables volunteers to go back to their place. In organization A, volunteers agree on a schedule with their “tutor” at the partner organization and with the “cohort leader”: the cohort leader verifies that the availability of volunteers, for example, if there are buses at that time. Concerning the transport costs, in organization A, all volunteers can be reimbursed up to a certain amount. Interviewee C states that “Red Cross centers pay transport fees”. Interviewee B explains that the financial cost should not be “an obstacle to participate in activities” and that organization B could intervene to help the volunteer for the cost of transport. However, interviewee B considers that in case of partnership with an institution, in this case Red Cross centers, “it is also the responsibility of the institution”.

The interviewee from organization B points out that finding a transport option to reach the partner organization can be particularly difficult for volunteers who have not been for long in the country, including asylum seekers, because they do not know the context. They thus need help in finding a means of transport. For the interviewee, the lack of information can also be a barrier to volunteering itself. In Canada, Handy and Greenspan (2009) observed that the lack of information about volunteering can be a particular barrier for migrant volunteers. Some young people cannot access the activities of the organization because they do not have “knowledge” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018, p. 5) about those opportunities or a network that could lead them to these opportunities, which limits their capability to volunteer:

It’s also an obstacle. You see, I think that we are the type of organization that, maybe, someone who is in higher education, it will seem evident to them, that they can go abroad, volunteer etc., but there is a whole part of the young population who has no idea that it’s
possible and it can bring them something. Because you could think “It’s free labor, why would I do that?” [...] Not only asylum seekers, but still particularly because it’s a new country, another context, maybe very different from theirs, and yes, they do not necessarily know people who can tell them about it. (B).

Inclusion of asylum seekers volunteers
As mentioned in the previous section, interviewees state that the language and willingness requirements concern all volunteers and not just asylum seekers. The previous section has also shown that organizations use strategies to enhance the participation of youth in general in their activities such as tutoring, adapting the schedule or verifying that they have a means of transportation. However, those requirements can create specific barriers in the situation of asylum seekers. Faced with this observation, organizations have implemented specific measures to address the obstacles that limit the volunt...
during the mentoring, the interviewee asks for the help of the center, a translator, or writes on WhatsApp so the volunteer can use a translation program.

The second strategy used by Organization B to include asylum seekers volunteers is reserving several spots for asylum seekers volunteers in their projects. However, the interviewee states that the offer of spots is limited. According to Meijs et al. (2007), a mismatch between the demand and the supply of volunteering limits volunteerability. Organization B cannot always meet the “demand” from asylum seekers volunteers:

We cannot absorb all the demand and we do not have an unlimited number of projects so on every project, we have ¼ of spots -I would say- reserved for young asylum seekers. Sometimes it’s not much. So…I try to find a balance to be able to offer it to everyone, but at the same time, to be able to offer it to youngsters who want to keep coming back. It’s a balance not always easy to find.

Similarly, organization C has created a program to include asylum seekers volunteers: “We want to include them and make them participate—as long as it suits them—in the activities, as any volunteers, because it enhances integration, knowledge about anchoring points like farms and coliving”. The program consists of one-day or weekend projects that gather a “diversity” (C) of volunteers: asylum seekers volunteers and other volunteers. Like in organization B, several spots are specifically for asylum seekers volunteers. Interviewee C first plans the project with the beneficiary organizations. The second step is to communicate the opportunity and the specific number of spots to reception centers, preferably centers close to the project, so everyone can be available for the project. Organization C and the partner also adapt the schedule based on geographical distance or transport: “Recently, for one of the centers, it would have taken too much time, coming from [city], so we give up or we adapt the schedule […] so everyone can go back.”

For interviewee C, the program has two goals. First, it enables residents of the centers to discover structures and activities outside the center, which also contributes to the skills and self-esteem of the resident, like for other volunteers. Second, it allows them to build a network outside the
center. The interviewee mentions that, after the volunteering project, some asylum seekers volunteers kept volunteering at the partner organization, which is seen as a success: “Some came back afterward, so it’s very positive because it doesn’t depend on us anymore”. This parallels the fact that organizations want to enhance long-term volunteering and not “one-shot” (interviewee B) projects, so volunteers evolve in the organization (see previous section). Some volunteers also keep in touch after the project, and this network can benefit them in other ways:

The idea is that it builds a network with our youngsters to fight loneliness but for those who obtain a status as well. We have some volunteers who have their documents and residence permit, they stay in contact with us, they invest themselves. And some of them found housing or professional orientation…that gravitate around [the organization]. We are not a social work organization but we see… (C)

In the work camps, two spots are also reserved for asylum seekers volunteers. Interviewee C explains that a maximum of two volunteers with the same language can participate in a project and the same limit was applied to asylum seekers volunteers. The rule seems to aim at creating heterogenous groups of volunteers:

So we reserved two spots for asylum seekers because that’s what we did for international volunteers to avoid that there is…That’s what we put in place as a framework and rule to avoid having too big groups of people who speak the same language. If the idea is the encounter indeed, if we have 5 French, we know that we’ll speak French…

Volunteering is thus perceived as a bridging activity: through volunteering, organizations want to create solidarity between asylum seekers volunteers and volunteers who are not asylum seekers, but also between asylum seekers and local organizations outside the center. On one hand, volunteering at local organizations is encouraged for providing asylum seekers with a network that they can use outside the center, including after the volunteering project, to “get ahead” and access new opportunities (Putnam, 2000): Interviewee C mentions housing and work as indirect benefits. On the other hand, organizations aim at creating “encounters” between asylum seekers
and non-asylum seekers volunteers around volunteering: projects aim at making volunteers of different profiles collaborate.

Recently\(^{20}\), organization A has implemented a project with the similar goal of increasing the links between volunteers who are third-country nationals, which can include asylum seekers volunteers, and other volunteers: “We are going to implement a system to enhance intercultural exchanges and to help…to enhance encounters between the youngsters as a first step” (A). This new project is financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union. Before this project, an adaption for asylum seekers already existed in the six-month program. Interviewee A explains that asylum seekers can volunteer 21 hours instead of 28 hours a week, so they have the time to follow French courses aside. This adaptation thus aims at maintaining the volunteer’s availability for the program.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, interviewee explained A that volunteers faced barriers in the cohort of the six-month program. Consequently, volunteers who are third-country nationals will now have a volunteer partner in the volunteering project to “facilitate their integration on the volunteering site” (A) and overcome potential language barriers. Assigning a “volunteer-buddy” (van Overbeeke et al., 2022, p. 40) is one of the techniques identified by Van Overbeeke et al. to “enable” volunteers and help them with the language. Additionally, volunteers will also have a “volunteer-buddy” whose role is to take part in activities with the volunteer aside from volunteering, so they can meet young people who are Belgians or reside in Belgium: “so it could be visiting the city, going for a drink or bowling […] to build a network and to enable those young people to meet other young Belgians, or who live in Belgium” (A). The volunteer buddies and partners will be European Union nationals. A third measure of the new program is the implementation of six days of training for the volunteers and their volunteer partners and buddies. This training will aim at informing about migration and interculturality. to increase awareness of these topics among natives: “Our goal is to enhance this diversity, interculturality, this openness among young natives and that, eventually, they do it naturally. Some do it already easily, fortunately” (A).

\(^{20}\) In April/May 2023
7. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, my research questions concerned the role of organizations in asylum seekers’ access to volunteering opportunities in Wallonia. The analysis has shown that formal volunteering for asylum seekers is organized by both sending and receiving organizations, the reception centers and the volunteering organizations. At both gates of volunteering, members of these organizations manage access to volunteering. Some organizational practices aim at enhancing inclusion by increasing volunteerability or addressing obstacles that limit volunteerability, while others create forms of exclusion.

The practices of the sending and receiving organizations mirror each other in their influence on volunteerability. On both sides, members of organizations promote volunteering and make a selection based on volunteerability. Firstly, promoting volunteering aims at increasing willingness and capability. On the reception center side, workers promote volunteering among organizations to provide residents with volunteering activities that they will be willing and able to carry out. They also encourage residents and inform them about volunteering. Promotion of volunteering is a two-way process since receiving organizations contact reception centers to reach potential volunteers. Once they receive volunteers, receiving organizations also inform them about volunteering by explaining the specificities of their activities. Secondly, both sending and receiving organizations consider the volunteers’ volunteerability: their willingness to volunteer and in which sector, their skills including language, and their availability, both mentally and physically. Based on these three elements, the volunteering advisers match the volunteer with a volunteer opportunity in one of the different host organizations. The selection by host organizations consists of verifying that the volunteer meets the requirements for their volunteering activities. This second selection is connected to the first selection made in the centers, as organizations transmit their requirements to the centers.

However, while some parallels can be made, reception centers and volunteering organizations differ in their primary function and target group: reception centers are third parties of volunteering while receiving organizations are specialized in volunteering. On one side, reception center workers promote volunteering and make a selection among asylum seekers living in centers. The role of workers in the center is shaped by the structure of the asylum procedure and
the life of residents in the center. Promoting volunteering can be easier among residents who do not have yet the right to work. Furthermore, matching volunteers with host organizations require taking the specific situation of residents of the center into account. Reception centers as a place of residence create mental and structural barriers to volunteering. In this specific setting, the volunteerability of asylum seekers is limited by the lack of transportation and a limited number of days off. An additional barrier is the uncertainty of the procedure. The fact that some host organizations do not consider these barriers can create a mismatch between asylum seekers volunteers and organizations.

On the other side, receiving organizations do not specifically work with asylum seekers. They promote and select volunteering among a larger population, youth in the case of the organizations that I met. Concerning promotion, reception centers and youth volunteering organizations defend different visions of volunteering. While the former promote volunteering as an occupation during the first four months of the asylum procedure, the latter encourage long-term engagement. The network with centers is one channel for reaching asylum seekers. Concerning selection, the requirements regarding willingness and language concern youth in general but create particular barriers for asylum seekers. The capability of individuals who have not been long in the country can be limited due to the language barrier and the lack of information regarding volunteering opportunities. Furthermore, as mentioned above, asylum seekers’ availability is affected by the asylum procedure and, for some of them, life in a reception center.

Volunteering organizations seem to be in tension between the equal treatment of all young volunteers and adopting specific measures to address inequalities that restrict access to volunteering for asylum seekers. On one hand, during the interviews, interviewees emphasized that the requirements to volunteer and forms of mentoring such as help to find transportation concern all volunteers. On the other hand, organizations have implemented special measures to include asylum seekers volunteers. Another ambivalence is the fact that requirements of language aiming at inclusion can lead to forms of exclusion. Requiring a high level of language aims at enabling communication and inclusion within the group of volunteers but excludes those who do not have this level and could have improved their language skills through volunteering. On the contrary, requiring a low level of language includes more people in volunteering but volunteers who do not speak the language might be confronted with the language barrier in the group. This
shows how inclusion and exclusion are two extremes of the same “continuum” (Bonnesen, 2019, p. 56). The risk of exclusion linked to language depends on the type and length of volunteering work.

Both gates have thus their specificities but are connected: on both sides, organizations manage volunteering for asylum seekers through the promotion of volunteering and selection of volunteers. They collaborate and sometimes have privileged partnerships. However, this partnership is not easily built or maintained. From the center perspective, difficulties are caused by the non-answer from organizations from some sectors. From the organization’s perspective, contacting centers is not easy because centers are third parties of volunteering and workers have other tasks than managing volunteering. They can also have different views on the question of who should be responsible for the transport cost. Although their visions of volunteering differ on some aspects, through these networks, sending and receiving organizations seem to have the common objective of building bridges between asylum seekers, other volunteers and the local community.

The goal of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on inequalities in volunteering and on migrant volunteering by offering a different view on the question of asylum seekers’ access to volunteering and highlighting the role of organizations. Using concepts that focus on the meso level shows how access to volunteering is not strictly a matter of definite, stable individual characteristics or individual decision but also results from “organizational mechanisms” (Greenspan and Walk, 2023, p. 13). Concepts from volunteering management studies show how organizations influence the individual ability to volunteer while the concept of bridging capital highlight how organizations try to build networks that connect different groups of volunteers, including asylum seekers. The third-party model does not specifically concern migrant volunteers or asylum seekers volunteers but can be applied to analyze any individual’s volunteerability. However, applying these concepts in the case of asylum seekers volunteers has shown how the specific situation they are in creates additional barriers that can be increased or reduced by organizations. To come back to the quote from Ambrosini (2020) at the beginning of the thesis, migrant volunteering can be analyzed in terms of “what” it brings or why migrants volunteer, but the question of “how” volunteering is organized and accessed is equally important.
While the analysis has shed some light on the role of organizations, some aspects are unaddressed. First, the volunteers themselves could be interviewed. While I decided to focus on the organizations’ perspective, it could be useful to analyze how asylum seekers volunteers perceive the obstacles to volunteering and compare their view with the vision of organizations. Furthermore, my analysis mainly mentioned residents of reception centers, but it could be interesting to explore whether asylum seekers who do not live in a center face different barriers. Secondly, another aspect to address is the influence of individual characteristics such as age and gender. The numbers collected by the volunteering coordinator show that volunteers from the centers are mainly young men (see 6.2). While an underlying cause might be the general distribution of the population in reception centers if there is a majority of young men, some other factors might play a role. An intersectional analysis could thus be adopted to see how, among asylum seekers, age, gender, and other factors affect access to volunteering and how organizations adapt their strategies to include different subgroups of asylum seekers. Thirdly, interviews could be conducted with other types of receiving organizations than youth organizations, in particular with those that are not linked to social help or diversity but are in sectors such as sports. Workers in centers managed by Fedasil could also be interviewed to compare their management of volunteering with the one in Red Cross centers.

Finally, recent Nicole de Moor’s statement, which shows the intention to develop volunteering projects for asylum seekers in Belgium (see 1. Introduction) brings the question of the future evolution of migration volunteering policies in Belgium. Fedasil had already funded volunteering projects for asylum seekers in 2018 but this statement raises the question of the influence of the Federal Agency on organizations and on migrant volunteering in the future.
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Appendix: Interview guide

Interview 1: Volunteering adviser, 07/02/23
- Their job in the center: what does it consist of? Link with volunteering?
- What is the process to volunteer? How do they explain volunteering? Are there many people interested?
- What is the effect of the legal framework?
- Benefits and negative aspects of volunteering? What does it bring and what are the difficulties to organize it?
- Since when does it exist in the centers?
- Does it have any link with the integration path?
- Do volunteers ask about the impact of volunteering on the decision for asylum?

Interview 2: volunteering coordinator, 08/03/23
- Who implemented volunteering in the centers and why? Since when?
- What is your role?
- What does the training for the advisers consist of?
- For you, what is the purpose of volunteering for residents?
- How do you find partner organizations?
- In which sectors can residents volunteer?
- Do you know about volunteering in Fedasil centers? Do you have any links with Fedasil centers?

Interview 3: member organization A, 11/04/23
- Do you sometimes work with asylum seekers volunteers?
- Are you in contact with reception centers/with asylum seekers who do not live in a center?
- Does the specific situation of asylum seekers require adaptation? (legal status, life in the center, the fact they have to volunteer several days a week)
- Other organizations mention the language and transport as obstacles: do you make the same observations? If yes, what are the solutions?
- Do you collaborate with Fedasil like with Red Cross?

Interview 4: member organization B, 17/04/23
- During the activity (observation), you mentioned that there is mentoring for asylum seekers volunteers to face certain obstacles. Could you reexplain?
  You mentioned language and transport as obstacles, but are there any other obstacles to the participation of asylum seekers?
- Do you work in the same way with Fedasil and Red Cross centers?
- You said that for the gardening project (observation), a small group of volunteers was created and that this group is viewed in the long term, because sometimes volunteers come only once and don’t come back. Can you re-explain?

Interview 5: member organization C, 26/04/23
- I saw on your website that there is a specific project to include asylum seekers volunteers in short-term actions. What does it consist of? Why this project was launched?
- Is there a similar project for work camps?
- How do you collaborate with reception centers (Red Cross and Fedasil)? Who contacts whom?
- What are the difficulties faced by asylum seekers volunteers?
- Are there any asylum seekers volunteers who do not live in a center?