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**The security of asylum seekers in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic: A study on how the governmental measures imposed to contain the pandemic affected the current and future security position of asylum seekers**

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# *The security of asylum seekers in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic*

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*A study on how the governmental measures imposed to contain the pandemic  
affected the current and future security position of asylum seekers*



## Universiteit Leiden

Master thesis: MSc Crisis and Security Management

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## *Abstract*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is felt on a global scale. Governments all over the world have been creating measures to cope with the risks of the virus and to protect the vulnerable members of society. The Netherlands developed a set of measures to try and minimise the impact of the virus. This thesis studied the impact of these measures on one particularly vulnerable group, namely asylum seekers. Via a newly developed questionnaire the impact of the governmental measures on the security of asylum seekers within Dutch asylum seeker centres is studied. Results show that both the physical and the socio-economic security of asylum seekers have been affected negatively. The main stressors for these negative effects have been the decisions to halt the asylum procedures and the decision to restrict activities (including education). It is determined that the current way of living within asylum seekers centres is unfit during a pandemic. This thesis thus shows that there has been no notion on the precarious security of asylum seekers when the governmental measures were imposed, causing an increase in their vulnerability and dependency.

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## 1. Introduction

On 30 December 2019 an “urgent notice on the treatment of pneumonia of unknown cause” was issued by the Medical Administration of Wuhan Municipal Health Committee (ProMED, 2019). A few days later, on January 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued its first Disease Outbreak News report on this pneumonia of unknown case (2020). In this report the WHO stated that a link to a seafood market was plausible, indicating an exposure link to animals. However, it was stated that the available information was still too limited to determine the overall risk (WHO, 2020). By conducting gene sequencing Chinese investigators determined that the pneumonia and hospitalization of infected people was caused by a novel coronavirus, in February 2020 dubbed the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). Although there are several different known coronaviruses, the impact of SARS-CoV-2 quickly became as such that it is now widely known as *the* coronavirus. The disease that is caused by this novel coronavirus was dubbed COVID-19 (WHO, 2020a).

The number of cases of COVID-19 rose quickly in the weeks that followed. Soon the virus had spread across the world, raising uncertainty and concern. As a result of these rising numbers among many countries, the director general of the WHO issued a media briefing. During this meeting Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic, the first ever pandemic caused by a coronavirus. The speech was also used to call on countries to prepare: “*I remind all countries that we are calling on you to activate and scale up emergency response mechanisms;*”. Several times more the director general called upon the people of the world to: “*look out for each other, because we need each other.*” (WHO, 2020b).

The first official case within the Netherlands was detected on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February in the city of Tilburg (RIVM, 2020). The then Minister of Healthcare and Sport, Bruno Bruins, was informed of this during a live broadcast on national television concerning the coronavirus. In the following days the reported cases rose significantly, forcing the government to implement measures designed to slow down the spread and thus contain the coronavirus. The Dutch approach during this initial period has been termed the ‘business as usual’ approach (FRA, 2020). A clumsy exemplification was given by prime minister Mark Rutte and head of the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) Jaap van Dissel: shortly after announcing a no-handshake policy they shook hands upon ending their press conference, which was dismissed as a comical misunderstanding at the time.

While the situation continued to worsen the Dutch government installed increasingly

harsh measures, including several lockdowns. The first sets of measures were announced on March 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. These measures included the closing down of schools, sport facilities and restaurants/cafes. Roughly one week later the ‘intelligent lockdown’ was announced via a live press conference by Mark Rutte. This intelligent lockdown included a ban on all gatherings and the closing down of professions which are reliant on physical contact such as barbers and massage therapists (Government of the Netherlands, 2020). This approach has since acclaimed criticism for being ‘too soft’ (O’Leary, 2020), ‘high-risk’ (Holligan, 2020), and ‘disjointed’ (Meuwese, 2020). What followed was more than a year of press conferences, speeches and interviews announcing either aggravations or relaxations of measures. The three ‘basic measures’ throughout the pandemic have been to wash hands regularly and profoundly, keep 1.5 meter distance, and stay at home with symptoms. These rules were supplemented by measures such as the closing of schools and universities, the advice to work from home, and so forth. The general trend throughout these press conferences and appearances in the media was that the measures were specifically tailored to protect vulnerable members of society, apparent from several transcriptions of their speeches (Government of the Netherlands, 2020). By vulnerable members of society Prime Minister Mark Rutte and his colleagues mainly referred to the elderly and people with a medical condition because of the risks of severe complications after a contamination. However, groups vulnerable to the implications of the COVID-19 crisis are not limited to those in poor physical health. Other risk factors include precarious financial means, socially isolated and groups that struggle with mental problems and/or low subjective well-being (OECD, 2020). This thesis focuses on one such group, namely asylum seekers in the Netherlands.

Anyone who applies for asylum in the Netherlands is entitled to reception and shelter (Reception Act, 1994). This shelter is facilitated by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). An *asylum seeker* is understood as a subject of a third country or a stateless individual that issued a request for international protection awaiting the definitive decision. The reception centres or asylum seeker centres (AZCs) that fall under the responsibility of the COA provide safe housing and necessary resources. During the stay in an AZC asylum seekers have to adhere to Dutch legislation, including the imposed measures to contain the coronavirus. Most measures were applicable nation-wide, others were specifically designed to fit the asylum process. Per example, the procedures were completely halted for a month and new applicants were sent to an emergency shelter (Broekers-Knol, 2020). Furthermore, family reunification became nearly impossible due to the limitations for

investigations, hearings were cancelled, supervision and contacts were brought to an absolute minimum, and activities and programs were cancelled (Broekers-Knol, 2020). The term governmental measures refers to the complete package of measures conducted by the central government to restrict the spreading of COVID-19. These measures could lead to infringements on the security of asylum seekers due to the implications in terms of health and socio-economic status. The aim of this thesis is to assess the truth of this statement and discuss the risks of the governmental measures on the security of asylum seekers.

### *1.1 Research Question*

The following research question was developed in order to study the situation of asylum seekers during the COVID-19 pandemic:

*To what extent is the security of asylum seekers within Dutch asylum seeker centres (AZCs) affected by governmental measures implemented to contain the spread of COVID-19?*

In order to reach an answer that is as conclusive as possible, the research question is divided into three sub-questions. The first sub-question discusses the physical security of asylum seekers. The second sub-question looks into another dimension of security, socio-economic security. The third and final sub-question focuses on the internal crisis communication during the crisis.

The first sub-question focuses on the effect of the governmental measures on the physical security of asylum seekers. The term physical security entails both physical and mental health. Besides physical health, the mental health of a considerable amount of asylum seekers is likely to be affected due to the governmental measures. Stress, already a numerous reported incidence within AZCs, is likely to increase due to uncertainty about specific measures and insecurity about the outcome of the asylum procedure can further damage mental health. Both of these segments will be discussed within one sub-question because physical and mental health often go hand-in-hand. When the mental well-being of an individual is breached, this is likely to have an effect on the physical well-being and vice versa. The question to be asked is therefore: *What is the effect of the governmental measures on the physical security of asylum seekers within an AZC?*

The second sub-question will focus on the threats to the socio-economic security of asylum seekers that arise from the governmental measures. Contrary to the aforementioned threats to physical and mental health that mainly take place in the present, threats to the socio-economic



security have a more indirect nature and mainly endanger the future security of asylum seekers. The socio-economic security of asylum seekers plays a significant role in their future integration because an improved socio-economic security is beneficial to a successful integration. The sub-question is as follows: *What is the effect of the governmental measures on the socio-economic security of asylum seekers within an AZC?* Two indicators within the socio-economic domain will be assessed in order to research to what extent this segment of security has been affected by the governmental measures. These indicators are education (1) and labour participation (2).

The last sub-question looks into the vital role of internal crisis communication in the asylum process as a whole, a role which importance has been amplified due to the crisis. Crisis communication in this thesis refers to the total of verbal, visual and written communication about the COVID-19 crisis towards asylum seekers. The key of this sub-question is the degree of dependency of asylum seekers on the communication of the organisations within the asylum process in order to understand the enforced governmental measures and comply to them. This section answers the sub-question: *Was the crisis communication sufficient to prepare and protect asylum seekers?*

The answers to these sub-questions are assembled in the conclusion and their combination provides an answer to the main research question.

## *1.2 Relevance*

The relevance of this research is two-fold, namely societal and academic. The societal relevance can be determined by a number of reasons. The pandemic has an enormous impact on virtually every human being around the world. However, people who already suffer through considerable hardship such as war, famine or extreme poverty are likely to be hit harder than most citizens in Western Europe, without detracting the situation of these European citizens. The situation in India during the months of April and May underline this difference. The Delta Variant caused an enormous spike in contaminations and severely sick individuals who were unable to be treated in hospitals due to shortages in medical supplies (Haq, 2021). Hardships such as these may cause more people to migrate (Reynolds, 2020). Almost all European countries, including the Netherlands, imposed measures on halting asylum procedures in order to lower the risk of the spreading of COVID-19 (EASO, 2020). In the meantime the influx of refugees from Middle-Eastern and North-African countries continued, resulting in badly managed,

overcrowded refugee camps on Greek islands (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Scenes like these underline the need of an increased focus on the vulnerable members of today's society.

Another relevant societal point to be made is that the more vulnerable members of society tend to be overlooked. This was painfully illustrated by the recent child benefits scandal where thousands of parents were falsely accused of being fraudulent, resulting in high fines and major financial distress for the people involved. Especially during crises it is of vital importance that attention is paid to the more vulnerable members of society since inequalities tend to exacerbate during times like these (Walsum, van., 2021). The need for coherent and efficient crisis management with regards to the situation of asylum seekers in the Netherlands was recently underlined when news reports documented that institutions were ill-prepared for an outbreak of the coronavirus in asylum seeker centre in Groningen (RTVNoord, 2021).

Topics with a high societal relevance deserve academic attention as well, hereby automatically gaining academic relevance. An academic research can address the existing problems, identify certain mistakes or omissions, and ideally provide solutions. Therefore, the main academic focus of this research is to discuss risks of the governmental measures to the security of asylum seekers by identifying these risks and their consequences.

## *2. Body of knowledge / Conceptual framework*

In order to study the effects of the governmental measures on the security of asylum seekers the following chapter will discuss the most relevant literature and consists of three sections. The first section discusses the vulnerabilities and dependencies of asylum seekers with emphasis on the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, an important overall theme throughout the research which deserves attention in this section. This section is subdivided into the following three parts: *inequality (1)*, *vulnerability (2)* and *dependency (3)*. Secondly, an in-depth analysis on the meaning of security is given, including the different components of security that have a central position within this research: *physical security (1)* and *socio-economic security (2)*. The third section discusses the academic view on the concept of crisis communication and delves into the theory that will be assessed in order to research the crisis communication towards asylum seekers.

Since there are no overarching theories linking the studied phenomena it is impossible to provide a theoretical framework. Therefore a conceptual framework is set up in order to build and structure this research and to strengthen the existing literature. Some concepts are directly derived from existing literature (e.g. inequality, vulnerability), some are newly developed (e.g.

physical security) and others do exist in literature but are mainly researched in a different context (e.g. aid dependency, socio-economic security). These differences are acknowledged within the text.

## *2.1 Inequality, vulnerability and dependency*

### *2.1.1 Inequality*

Inequality is mainly a disparity; disparity of opportunity, social disparity, and so forth. COVID-19 is known to have exposed, and even increased, a different number of these inequalities worldwide. For instance, on a global scale, the inequality between countries is on a rise because governments of lower- and medium-income countries have less abilities to support citizens and firms (Goldin, 2020). Inequalities on a national scale increased as well, including within countries with a high-income such as the Netherlands. This growth in inequality happened in various areas. The described rise in inequality due to COVID-19 has caused Oxfam Novib to declare it ‘the inequality virus’, exacerbating inequalities of wealth, race and gender (Berkhout et al., 2021).

An interesting research linked to inequality is done by Belgian researcher Hanne Vandermeerschen (2007) who studied the experiences and wellbeing of asylum seekers within Belgian AZCs in her research “*Between hope, fear and boredom*”. Vandermeerschen suggests two options to categorise AZCs: as ‘total institutions’, a concept founded by Goffman (1975), and as a ‘street-level bureaucracies’, a concept founded by Lipsky (1980). Both mainly emphasize the inequalities within an AZC. This is for instance shown by the function of an AZC as part residential community part formal organization, one of the characteristics of a total institution (Goffman, 1975). Although the COA strives to ensure a pleasant stay, asylum seekers have to adhere to a set of rules including a duty to report. Asylum seekers are informed of this during a ‘rights and obligations talk’ after which they are obliged to sign the ‘rights and obligations document’ and thereby agreeing to sanctions should one not adhere. Geuijen (1998) compares the AZC to the concept of the ‘street-level bureaucracy’, founded by Lipsky (1980). One of the main reasons for this comparison is the inequality of power between ‘clients’ and employees. Geuijen argues that the employees determine the rules within an AZC, to which the ‘clients’ (being the asylum seekers) have to comply. The main takeaway of these concepts is the structural inequality of power between asylum seekers and employees within an AZC, which both concepts have in common (Vandermeerschen, 2007). This conceptual discussion highlights the structural inequality that was apparent even before the pandemic.

Governmental measures, enforced by the COA, are likely to have further increased this

inequality of power. Scholars in South-Africa already concluded that the containment measures which were enforced by the South-African government have “tremendously deepened the unequal treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees in South-Africa” (Mukumbang et al., 2020). Closer to home, researcher Yung Hu studied the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ethnic and native-migrant inequalities in the UK (2020). He concludes that the “pandemic exacerbates entrenched socio-economic inequalities along intersecting ethnic and native-migrant lines.” While these studies have shown an increase in inequality the precise effects for the asylum seekers in the Netherlands are still unknown. This thesis contributes to the aforementioned studies by exploring whether the governmental measures, enforced by the COA, further increased inequalities within Dutch AZCs.

### 2.1.2 Vulnerability

The vulnerability of asylum seekers is determined as such by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in the case of the *M.S.S. v Belgium and Greece* on the asylum seekers transfer system within the European Union. In this case the ECHR states that an asylum seeker is “*a member of a particularly underprivileged and vulnerable population group in need of special protection.*” (*M.S.S. v Belgium and Greece*, 2011). The increased vulnerability of asylum seekers stems from experienced traumas in the country of origin, hardships during the migration, insecurity about the future and the many cultural and lingual differences they experience in the country of arrival (Dutch Safety Board, 2014).

Within the academic world a discussion arose whether this definition did value to the heterogeneity of the group of asylum seekers. One of the critics is Baumgärtel (2020), who refers to the common group-based conception of vulnerability as ‘problematic’, ‘unduly homogenizing’ and possibly ‘stigmatising’. Instead, he argues for the principle of ‘migratory vulnerability’ which has to be examined and determined in each separate case. This principle is dismissed for this research since a group-based outlook is upheld and it is simply impracticable to determine the ‘degree’ of vulnerability per asylum seeker. Besides, to study an infringement on the security of asylum seekers the ‘degree’ of vulnerability to which they are subjected is irrelevant.

Emma Stewart (2005) studied the primary cause of the vulnerability of asylum seekers and identified the so-called interstitial position within the nation state as the primary cause of this vulnerability. The concept of interstitial space is the space between structures, in the case of asylum seekers this would mean the denial of rights within and inbetween political domains.

The interstitial feeling originates from waiting on a decision and the corresponding uncertainty which often leads to a ‘suspended identity’, since asylum seekers tend to link their identity to the decision of the authorities (Stewart, 2005). The interstitial position that Stewart introduced is likely to be lengthened due to the aforementioned decision by the Ministry of Justice and Security to postpone all asylum applications, while already experiencing delays (Broekers-Kno1, 2020).

Although there is academic consensus about the vulnerability of asylum seekers, the effects of the governmental measures remains understudied. One research by Sander van Walsum (2021), journalist for The Dutch newspaper ‘de Volkskrant’, indicates vulnerability from a medical point of view, reporting that the risk of death after contamination with COVID-19 is twice as big for individuals within the lowest income category as it is for individuals on the top of the ‘social hierarchy’. This thesis contributes to this field of study by further exploring the vulnerability of asylum seekers in the context of a pandemic.

### 2.1.3 Dependency

The dependency of asylum seekers manifests itself in different aspects, which will be discussed in this section. Among scholars there is no consensus to which degree asylum seekers are dependent, or in what way they are dependent on which organisations. This is due to the fact that the precise scope of dependency is hard to determine.

One of the available options is to adopt the ‘aid dependency’ definition which is formulated by Lensink & White (1999). They state that “a country is aid-dependent if it will not achieve objective X in the absence of aid for the foreseeable future”. Although this definition is clearly directed at countries, it could also be converted to fit individuals such as asylum seekers. In that case an asylum seeker can be defined as aid-dependent if it will not achieve objective X in the absence of aid for the foreseeable future. The most obvious objective of an asylum seekers is to be granted asylum. Without aid by organisations within the asylum process such as the COA and Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) this objective will not be reached, thereby defining the asylum seekers aid-dependent.

Another frequently used concept with regards to the dependency of asylum seekers is that of welfare dependency, where an individual is mainly reliant on economic support to meet the expenses of daily living. This concept is thoroughly researched by Conte and Mazza in a research commissioned by the European Commission (2019). A division is made into contributory and non-contributory benefits. Contributory benefits require individual payment

to secure entitlement to benefits, non-contributory benefits do not require such payments. Asylum seekers make use of these non-contributory benefits. The research clearly shows that in most countries (including the Netherlands) immigrants show a higher welfare dependency than natives for non-contributory benefits. An in-depth study concerning the Netherlands is non-existent but Hansen and Lofstrom (2003) did study the welfare participation of immigrants in Sweden, which has roughly the same approach as the Netherlands. Within their report they conclude that according to data, immigrants are more likely to receive welfare than natives. Furthermore, refugees have a bigger share within this process than non-refugees. The analysis of this thesis discusses whether the governmental measures led to an increase in the dependency on welfare benefits among asylum seekers, thereby contributing to the existing literature.

When one is deprived of the ability to take paid employment, and thus ‘forced’ to rely on welfare, it can be termed as ‘forced welfare dependency’ (Mayblin, 2013). Although asylum seekers within the Netherlands are allowed to work part-time via a work permit, this is paired with limitations. Besides, the governmental measures were especially strict on the sectors which they work in such as catering so the governmental measures were likely to have had an effect on the welfare dependency of asylum seekers.

Possibly the most obvious dependency stems from the inability of asylum seekers, especially in the beginning, to fluently communicate in Dutch. As a result they are dependent on interpreters to understand most of the essential information, a crucial factor during the pandemic. The difficulties connected to linguistic abilities are further discussed within the sub-part socio-economic security.

In conclusion, it can be stated that according to the existing literature asylum seekers are definitely aid-dependent, albeit to different degrees. This dependency however does not seem lead to trust and affection for the organisations with a leading role in this dependency. As is known from a report by the Children’s commissioner (2017) in the UK, a majority of young people within the asylum process describe it as ‘overwhelmingly hostile’, ‘inaccessible’ and ‘difficult to understand’. These feelings contribute to an erosion of trust in authorities and institutions, which are meant to help them, and reinforces existing barriers. These findings are confirmed by Natalia Paszkiewicz in her dissertation *Care, welfare and enforcement: responses to asylum seekers and refugees* (2011).

Dependency is an important concept in this thesis and the mentioned forms of dependency all relate to fragments of security. The greater the amount of dependencies, the greater the expense at personal security. By providing asylum seekers with the ability to become “self-sufficient”,

which is the obligation of the person/organisation responsible, their personal security will be strengthened. The flipside is that the security of the dependent will be weakened when these needs are neglected.

## 2.2 Security

The discussed probable increases in inequality, vulnerability and dependency are likely to have an effect on the security of asylum seekers. The precise definition of the term security remains clouded. Baldwin (2018) formulated security as “the low probability of damage to acquired values”. The following section will further analyse the academical contributions to two concepts of security: *physical security* and *socio-economic security*.

### 2.2.1 Physical security

Although the aforementioned definition of security by Baldwin is a clear and concise definition, it is problematic for the concept of physical security since physical security is connected to health which is hard to define as an ‘acquired value’. Health is defined by the WHO as “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Rockenschaub et al., 2007). Although a lot of precautions can be taken to improve one’s health, there is still a possibility of becoming sick, either physically or mentally. Thus health can not be defined as an ‘acquired value’. The term *physical security* is therefore defined as: the low probability of damage to physical – and mental health.

This section is devoted to the existing knowledge on physical security of asylum seekers. The physical security of asylum seekers is dependent on many different variables. Several themes impacting this physical security are discussed below in different sub-chapters. The discussed themes are: *prolonged stay*, *restricted activities*, *compliance to measures*, *domestic violence* and the *approach to healthcare*. The sub-chapters constitute of known dangers to the physical security of asylum seekers that are likely to become enlarged due to the governmental measures.

#### *Prolonged stay*

In principle an asylum seeker stays at an AZC for several weeks awaiting the decision on their application. In 2019 this waiting time increased significantly, the main reason being a high influx of asylum seekers in 2015 due to the ‘European migrant crisis’ (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2019). The global COVID-19 crisis is slowing down this mechanism even further, causing

asylum seekers to be destined for a longer stay than the few weeks which is aimed for (Roetman, 2021).

Various scholars studying the asylum process acknowledge that longer procedures increase the insecurity about the future and possibly initiate medical complaints (Haker et al., 2010; Goosen, 2014; Hondius et al., 2000). Research by Haker et al. (2010) states that the general health of asylum seekers is worse than the general health of the indigenous population of the host country. One of the main reasons identified for this phenomenon are long procedures. This can be especially detrimental to mental health since stress and insecurity are likely to increase. Although mental distress and physical complaints often go hand in hand, this awareness is not widespread among asylum seekers. These findings are done by Simone Goosen (2014). Her study states that the risk of damage to one's health, and therefore risk to infringement on physical security, is enlarged due to an accumulation of past experiences and experiences in the host country. Examples of these problematic experiences include 'the uncertainty of the asylum procedure', 'the living conditions in asylum seeker centres', 'the limited possibilities for participation' and 'limited financial means' (Goosen, 2014). A third study discussing a link between lengthy asylum procedures and health problems among asylum seekers within the Netherlands is a survey study conducted by Hondius et al. (2000). This study concluded that many respondents described the asylum procedure as a state of 'passive waiting', which increased their health problems. The research presented striking numbers of 40% of asylum seekers linking their psychological complaints to their 'postmigration situation'.

These studies show a very clear link between a prolonged stay and a decreasing physical security due to physical and mental health problems. These findings put the decision by the Dutch government to postpone virtually all asylum procedures during the first outbreak (Broekers-Knol, 2020) in a different daylight since the time spend within an AZC will increase. This thesis discusses whether the length of stay actually increased and explores the consequences thereof.

### *Restricted activities*

The COA organises several activities during the stay of asylum seekers. The importance of these activities is acknowledged by multiple researchers. These activities range from activities with an aspect of sport to more creative activities and are organized to improve the physical and mental condition of asylum seekers. During the pandemic the governmental measures caused



these activities to be cancelled for a long period of time which may have affected the physical security of asylum seekers.

The restriction on physical activities is problematic since research has shown that the prevalence rate of obesity among refugees and asylum seekers is demonstrably higher than in the general population in the Netherlands (Agyemang et al., 2012). Another report provides worrying numbers that this effect is also highly apparent among asylum seeking children (Stellinga-Boelen et al., 2007). Governmental restrictions with regards to group activities and sports are thus problematic due to the news about a very likely link between obesity and a severe sick-bed due to COVID-19 contamination (Brody, 2020). At one point, 78% of the COVID-19 patients on the intensive care units of Dutch hospitals suffered from obesity. (NICE, 2021).

The restriction on gatherings and activities could also have been detrimental to the mental health of asylum seekers. Before the pandemic many caretakers already expressed their concerns about the lack of meaningful daytime activities and the effect thereof on mental wellbeing. According to Vandermeersch (2007) a meaningful daytime activity and/or the ability to work has a bigger influence on the wellbeing of asylum seekers than the provided reception. Such meaningful activities could even (partly) compensate for the negative effects of the prolonged stay (SCP, 2020). Restricting these group activities is therefore not only detrimental to physical health, but the loss of emotional connections is likely to have a negative influence on the mental health of asylum seekers. The importance of the group activities has been reported by previous research. This thesis contributes to that existing body of knowledge by testing what the negative effects of these restrictions had on the physical security of asylum seekers.

### *Compliance*

Due to the new character of this phenomenon there is no current body of literature discussing the compliance of asylum seekers to governmental measures. As stated before, there are certain house rules to which asylum seekers have to comply but the governmental measures are stricter, more extensive and of greater impact to the daily life. In order to extend the current body of knowledge, this thesis explores the concept of compliance of asylum seekers to the governmental measures.

Compliance to the governmental measures is reliant on two factors. One being the willingness to comply, the second being the ability to do so. As an example one can look at the measure to keep 1.5 meter distance. If asylum seekers are willing to do so, the accommodations and facilities in which they take residence must give them the ability to do so and thus not be too crowded or

too small. The same principle is applicable to the mandatory quarantine when symptoms occur or when a test comes back positive. The facilities have to be sufficient to provide the needs for quarantine and an asylum seeker has to be provided with its basic needs. The ability to adhere to the hygienic measures such as wearing a mouth mask and using disinfection spray is subject to the same conflict between willingness and ability. According to answered questions within the Dutch parliament, it is known that asylum seekers were solely responsible for the purchase of these materials (Tweede Kamer, 2021). Due to the limited financial means, aggravated during the pandemic, this seems unfeasible.

The discussed worries are not unfounded, since a survey among location managers at AZCs showed that a shortage of protective equipment and a shortage of quarantine-locations were among the main worries during the pandemic (Kuiper, 2020). However, before the pandemic caretakers were already critical on the living situation within AZCs and its effect on the wellbeing of asylum seekers (Haker et al., 2010).

### *Domestic violence*

The definition for domestic violence is provided on the website of the Government of the Netherlands (n.d.): “violence conducted by someone within the domestic- or family circle of the victim.” This violence can be physical, psychological or sexual of nature. This definition is also applicable to families within AZCs because the location of domestic violence is irrelevant. The characteristic aspect is the person inflicting the damage, therefore the aforementioned definition of domestic violence is upheld during this thesis.

The task force ‘child in AZC’, a project co-funded by UNICEF and War Child, conducted a research on the impact of COVID-19 on children within AZCs. One of their findings was that increased tensions could lead to aggression indoors (Werkgroep Kind in AZC, 2020). This same conclusion is made by researchers in Leipzig (Hörschelmann & Kirndörfer, 2020) who acknowledge the increased risk of domestic violence against children, as well as between siblings and spouses. The main reason for this finding is the fact that families are on top of each other a lot more due to governmental restrictions. These findings amplify the findings of the scholars Goosen et al. who researched child abuse among asylum seekers. They concluded that specific riskfactors for child abuse are already prevalent among asylum seekers (Goosen, 2014). The ‘Knowledge platform Integration and Society’ (KIS) also state that the dissatisfaction among asylum seekers about residence and crowded AZCs play a role in further enhancing these riskfactors (2017). From an academic point of view it can be determined that

risk factors for domestic violence are already prevalent among asylum seekers, and the COVID-19 crisis has possibly exacerbated these risks.

It goes without discussion that domestic violence and the possible infliction of damage is a direct break-in on physical security. Therefore it is worth reviewing whether the governmental measures had an (in)direct effect on the occurrence of domestic violence among asylum seekers within AZCs.

### *Approach to healthcare*

Approach to healthcare in this context means to what extent asylum seekers are able to ‘find’ medical care and whether they are satisfied with the medical care. One known difference is that the Dutch system of medical care is mainly based on the opinion of a general practitioner, whereas most asylum seekers are more accustomed to a hospital-oriented medical care. Previous research on this topic shows that differences like this in the approach to healthcare lead to dissatisfaction among asylum seekers about the received medical care (Muijsenberg, van den., 2016). In most countries of origin the asylum seekers are used to antibiotics being much more accessible, whereas Dutch health practitioners are much more reluctant in prescribing antibiotics. This enhances the feeling of asylum seekers that their complaints are not taken seriously (Goosen, 2014). Haker et al. (2010) therefore state that asylum seekers deserve to be informed better about the Dutch medical care in order to prevent misunderstandings. This finding becomes amplified during a pandemic, when it is of great importance that the approach to healthcare is as accessible as possible.

Scholars emphasize that the perceived distance to medical care is also applicable to mental health services. Pasckiewicz (2009) states that it is difficult for refugees and asylum seekers to engage successfully with mental health services unless basic needs for safety and security are met. This distance becomes visible when the data about suicides among asylum seekers are consulted. Especially among male asylum seekers the suicide death rate is higher than among the reference population (Goosen et al., 2011). The main reason for suicide, and hospital-treated suicidal behaviour among asylum seekers was reported as the asylum procedure (30,4%). Other identified stressors were relationship issues, loss of a family member, transfers between centres, substance abuse and living conditions (Goosen et al., 2011).

This thesis explores to what extent the governmental measures influenced this concept. The need for research on this section is exemplified by The National Ombudsman, who warned in 2013 that the approach on medical care altogether is too much government-oriented.

A combination of these indicators will help answering the sub-question: “*What is the effect of the governmental measures on the physical security of asylum seekers within an AZC?*”

### 2.2.2 Socio-economic security

The second concept used within this research is that of socio-economic security. Although this is a fairly understudied concept, Gordon provides a very clear and useful definition in his research *Socio-economic security* (2012). He defines socio-economic security as follows: “socio-economic security depends not only on having enough income to live decently but also on having access to necessary services and the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights.”

The two concepts which are studied in this thesis in order to discuss socio-economic security are *education* and *labour participation*. These indicators are selected due to their direct link with the time spend in an AZC. Education is an important indicator because the foundation of education is received during the time in an AZC. The level of education furthermore reflects other indicators such as future income. Although labour participation mainly relates to the period after living in an AZC it is chosen as the second indicator because the time spend in an AZC is very influential to the future labour participation. Besides, the two indicators have a strong link with eachother.

#### *Education*

Asylum seekers living at an AZC are entitled to education. Children will receive primary education, if necessary with a stopover at a specialized school for intensive language lessons. Children between the age of 12-18 always partake within an international transition class before joining the regular school. Adults can voluntarily participate with language lessons known as Dutch as a second-language (NT2) (Bussemaker, 2015).

Education is important to decrease the aforementioned vulnerability of asylum seekers. Researchers Kox and Van Liempt (2020a) emphasize the need for lingual capabilities which are essential for a succesful integration and basic understanding of any situation. Asylum seekers and refugees suffer from heightened anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic due to misinformation and ‘fake news’ because of the language barrier. Profound education can help overcome this barrier. Education refers to the language lessons which are provided to the adult asylum seekers, and the regular classroom education for children. The taskforce ‘Child in AZC’ identified several problems concerning the education of children living in an AZC (2020). The

main problems surfaced during the period in which the Dutch government decided to close schools and rely on digital home-schooling. The task force found that a significant amount of families experienced problems due to the bad internet connection on AZCs. Researchers in Leipzig (Hörschelmann & Kirndörfer, 2020) found the same incidents for children in Germany and dubbed the problem as 'inequality in digital infrastructure'. Kox and Van Liempt (2020) state that children within AZCs are experiencing an extra disadvantage due to the fact that their parents might lack the right skills to provide help. The skills of these parents are not likely to have improved during the pandemic since their language lessons were directed to the 'digital infrastructure' as well. Research by Van Tubergen (2010) concludes that lengthened residence within a reception center has a negative effect on the so-called L2 (second-language) skills. This is mainly due to the lack of everyday interactions with locals. Due to the uncertainty about their future and the inability to work, the incentive to learn the language drops as well. This lack in education can emphasize the already weakened socio-economic position (SCP, 2020b).

Besides the obvious educational benefits of school lessons and language lessons, the education of asylum seekers plays an important role in their social life. During the process of education asylum seekers get to know like-minded people and often interact with the Dutch population. These connections are not only beneficial to the social life, but could also help with the integration after receiving a permit (Weeda et al., 2018).

### *Labour participation*

The aspect of labour participation can be divided into participation while having residence at an AZC, and the participation after acquiring a residence permit. While staying at an AZC, asylum seekers are not allowed to work for the first six months. During this period it is allowed to do voluntary work for which they will receive a small compensation of 0.56 to 1.10 euro per hour, with a maximum of 14 euro per week. After the first six months they are allowed to work 24 weeks per year, provided they have a work permit (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.a).

Dr. Weidmann, president of the Deutsche Bundesbank, held a speech on 29<sup>th</sup> of april 2021 about the growing economic inequality due to the coronavirus. He warned for an exacerbation of existing inequalities, one of the main stressors being the unequal access to the labour market (2021). The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) state that governmental measures could lead to an increase in friction on the labour market between asylum seekers and the recipient community (2020).

The specific effect of the lengthy asylum procedures on the labour participation is studied by Hainmueller et al. (2016). The research shows that the probability of being employed is lowered by 4.9 percentage point per additional year waiting time. Furthermore, status holders often feel pressure to accept work which is not in line with the level of education which they received in their home country (SCP, 2020a), also known as “depreciation of occupational skills” (Hainmueller et al, 2016). Inequality can be seen as a vicious circle, with the economic inequality increasing social inequality and so forth. As Jencks put it: “*the social consequences of economic inequality are sometimes negative, sometimes neutral but seldom – as far as I can discover – positive*” (Jencks, 2002: 64). Whether this vicious circle has an effect on the physical health of asylum seekers is studied by Rowlingson (2011). She concludes that evidence suggests that a correlation between health problems and income inequality is existent, although the many variables make it difficult to pinpoint an independent stressor.

These indicators will help to answer the sub-question: “*What is the effect of the governmental measures on the socio-economic security of asylum seekers within an AZC?*”

### *2.3 Crisis communication*

Crisis communication is a concept which has received a lot of academic attention. For a long time the concept of crisis communication was mainly concerned with the external factor, meaning the outgoing communication of a company towards external stakeholders. Internal crisis communication has an inward focus and is concerned with internal stakeholders. The latter concept has long been understudied which contributed to a lack of understanding during an actual crisis. The emphasis of crisis communication studies has long been on external crisis communication. The emphasis on this type of communication, often conducted by ‘media specialists’, tends to lead to a neglect on internal crisis communication (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). Coombs (2010) argues that comprehensive crisis management starts with a three-way division of the crisis: pre-crisis, crisis response and post-crisis. Such a staged approach is encouraged by Frandsen and Johansen (2011). The embarkation of this study will revolve mainly on the internal crisis communication of the COA and individual AZCs towards asylum seekers. This choice is made since the external communication has little to no effect on protecting the security of asylum seekers. With regards to the staged approach, this study focuses on the crisis response phase as identified by Coombs (2010). There is not enough data to comprehensively study the pre-crisis phase since the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed the Netherlands in its ferocity, and it is yet too early to study the post-crisis phase. In order to study

the internal crisis communication the relationship between the organization and its internal stakeholders has to be acknowledged (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011), which will be done in the sub-chapter *relationship and trust*. The sub-chapter *IDEA model* discusses the model to research the internal crisis communication.

### *Relationship and trust*

With regards to an AZC the internal stakeholders are the asylum seekers taking residence, the organization is the COA. In comparison with other organizations within business where regular employees are seen as the internal stakeholder, the studied relationship between the COA and asylum seekers is tainted. This is mainly due to the aforementioned inequality between the asylum seekers as internal stakeholders and the organization. Study by the Children's Commissioner in the UK (2017) already indicated a diminished relationship between asylum seekers and the Home Office.<sup>1</sup> Due to this tainted relationship, the importance of internal crisis communication is only amplified. To achieve the needed level of constructive dialogue, credibility and trust need to be present. As stated before, asylum seekers do not immediately associate the COA with credibility and trust. Another factor which quite possibly hampered effective internal communication is that there is a certain fragmentation with regards to the communication. The institution responsible for the establishment of the measures (government) is not the same institution responsible for the ultimate communication (COA).

### *IDEA model*

The internal crisis communication towards asylum seekers during the COVID-19 crisis will be tested along the lines of the IDEA model (Sellnow et al., 2017). This model was originally developed in order to increase the effectivity of crisis communication. IDEA is an acronym which stands for Internalization, Distribution, Explanation and Action. The distribution, reaching the 'audience', is the central pivot around which the other three revolve. The first step, internalization, provides insight in how the internal stakeholders are affected. Explanation, which ought to come from reliable sources, answers the question 'what is happening'. To be successful this explanation has to be 'honest and accurate'. The last stage, action, identifies the necessary actions which have to be undertaken. By adopting this model Sellnow et al. found a significantly more effective learning cycle:

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<sup>1</sup> The organization in the UK that is comparable to the Dutch COA.

*“Instructional messages delivered with an explanation of what is happening, who is at greatest risk, and what actions can be taken for selfprotection have the potential to reduce or resolve these momentary perceptions of unfamiliarity and defenselessness. Ultimately, instructional risk and crisis messages have the potential to save lives by offering the right information to the right people at the right time.”* (Sellnow et.al., 2017: 565)

These four facets of effective crisis communication will be studied in order to provide an answer to the sub-question: *Was the crisis communication sufficient to prepare and protect asylum seekers?*

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter will explain the structure of the thesis. First the scope and demarcations of the research are explained. The second part will focus on the actual research methodology that is used. The way the data is collected is explained in the third sub-chapter. The fourth and final sub-chapter acknowledges several limitations to this research and the way these limitations are attempted to be countered.

#### **3.1 Scope**

This segment explains the exact scope of this thesis with regards to the demarcation in terms of time and breadth. The studied timeframe starts with the announcement of the first national governmental measures on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 up to the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. The 26<sup>th</sup> of June is chosen as ending date due to the fact that a lot of governmental measures were relaxed or dismissed at this date. Because of the length of the crisis several measures have been aggravated and/or relaxed in the studied timeframe. The impact of the governmental measures was probably most severe in the first weeks, but by studying this extended timeline the overall impact of the governmental measures is best represented. Another reason to incorporate the extended timeline is because not all measures were incorporated and/or relaxed simultaneously. By selecting a shorter timeframe the full impact of several governmental measures might not be reflected in the results.

The group that is studied is that of asylum seekers living in an asylum seeker centre under supervision of the COA. There is no distinction made with regards to nationality, age and/or gender although some sections will automatically emphasize a certain group. The only exception is made when discussing labour participation because this concept mainly targets



status holders. However, the time spend in an AZC lays the foundation for this future labour participation. Therefore the best way to study the influence of the governmental measures on the future labour participation of asylum seekers is to look at data concerning status holders. Asylum seekers staying in temporary locations such as Houtkamp are not examined since this location stood under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and Security. In accordance with this decision the temporary quarantine locations are not studied as well because these locations are not classified as asylum seeker centres.

This thesis only examines the effect of the official governmental measures. Per example, the position of asylum seekers within the vaccination campaign is not studied within this thesis since it has never been an official governmental measure. Although the vaccination campaign is often referred to as ‘our way out of this crisis’ by Mark Rutte (2021), it was never mandatory to get vaccinated. The choice to get vaccinated is a choice everyone makes for itself. Asylum seekers have had the opportunity to get vaccinated via the GZA since the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2021 (de Jonge, 2021).

### *3.2 Research methodology*

The choice of methodology is a mixed-method research in the form of an exploratory study to create a better understanding about the role of governmental measures on the security of a vulnerable population during an international crisis. The choice for an exploratory study stems from the lack of academic understanding of the studied problem and because the problem is still at a ‘preliminary’ stage. A comprehensive definition is given by Stebbins (2001) who defines exploratory research as: *“a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life.”* (Stebbins, 2001: 3)

The thesis uses triangulation of data, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources. This is done to increase validity and enhance findings by using more than one way of measurement (Bryman, 2012). The main body of data is derived from a newly developed questionnaire that was distributed among employees within the asylum process, the sub-chapter data collection describes this questionnaire in detail. The questionnaire collects both quantitative and qualitative data via linear and open questions. Documents by governmental organisations such as the COA and SCP provide more data on the security of asylum seekers.

To study this triangulation of data a mixed-methods research is entailed, combining quantitative and qualitative research. The main body of research will be qualitative,

strengthened by analysing quantitative statistics. Qualitative research will apply to literature analysis, document analysis and the analysis of the answers given by respondents to the open questions of the questionnaire. By combining these methods a more balanced perspective is given on the studied phenomenon (Morse & Chung, 2003).

### *3.3 Data collection*

As stated above the data to answer the research question is collected via two ways; consulting existing data and yielding new data via a questionnaire. All the numerical data such as the amount of asylum seekers within an AZC and the age distribution of these asylum seekers is derived from the official site of COA<sup>2</sup> and reports by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and Statistics Netherlands (CBS). With regards to the specific situation, the RIVM developed a script in November 2016 (the latest adjustments stem from March 2019) named: *Infectious diseases in shelters for asylum seekers* (RIVM, 2019). The COA and Ministry of Security and Justice also publish an annual overview summarizing the incidents that took place at each COA location. Existing data for the socio-economic aspect is mainly yielded by the SCP in their report *First reflection on the socio-cultural effects of the coronacrisis* (2020) and *Sight on society during the coronacrisis* (2020).

The initial planning to collect data on the effects of the governmental measures was to conduct semi-structured interviews with representatives of key actors in the asylum process. During the planning phase it proved to be harder than anticipated to reach out to these representatives due to various reasons. The main obstacle was the reluctance of key organisations to participate with this research, the primary argument being a lack of time. Besides, an organization like the COA stated they only participate in academic research from a PhD-level upwards. To overcome this obstacle and still collect relevant data, a questionnaire with both open and closed questions was distributed among employees and volunteers within the asylum process. This questionnaire had several advantages over conducting interviews. The main benefit being that it took away the time-consuming aspect of an interview, which provided the opportunity to yield data from a bigger sample group. The questionnaire also provided the opportunity to yield numerical data. The questionnaire consisted of a combination of open and closed questions divided into three segments, each one dedicated to a different theme: physical security (1), socio-economic security (2) and crisis communication (3). The closed questions were formulated according to a linear format, meaning a statement was written to which the respondent could choose an

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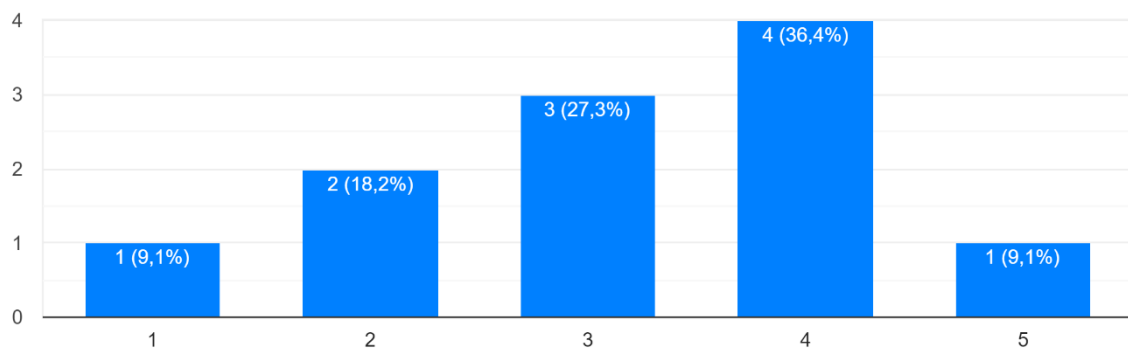
<sup>2</sup> [www.coa.nl](http://www.coa.nl)

answer ranging from *completely disagree* to *completely agree* as illustrated below with a (translated) example from the questionnaire.

The governmental measures had a negative effect on the mental health of asylum seekers. \*



Answers to these linear questions are displayed via a graph as illustrated below:



The available answers are predicted on the X-axis, 1 being completely disagree and 5 being completely agree. The percentages within the bar refer to the amount of respondents giving that answer, corresponding with the Y-axis. In this case 4 respondents (36,4%) chose option 4. The answers to the open questions are incorporated as quotes. The most relevant and useful answers were selected out of the whole. Answers to the open questions are incorporated as quotes. The most relevant and useful answers were selected.

A complete listing of the questionnaire is provided in the table below:

<i>Question</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Question type</i>
The governmental measures had a negative effect on the physical health of asylum seekers.	Physical security	Linear
The governmental measures had a negative effect on the mental health of asylum seekers.	Physical security	Linear
Asylum seekers complied with the governmental measures at all times.	Physical security	Linear
Asylum seekers had adequate access to personal protective equipment (masks, desinfectant etc.)	Physical security	Linear
The governmental measures have led to an increase in the amount of incidents within the azc.	Physical security	Linear

Was the effect of the governmental measures predominantly positive or negative on the physical security of asylum seekers? Why?	Physical security	Open
The governmental measures had a negative effect on the future integration of asylum seekers.	Socio-economic security	Linear
The level of education deteriorated due to the governmental measures.	Socio-economic security	Linear
The governmental measures had a negative impact on the labor participation of asylum seekers.	Socio-economic security	Linear
The inequality between asylum seekers and the Dutch population has increased due to the governmental measures.	Socio-economic security	Linear
Do you think that the governmental measures will have an effect on the socio-economic security of asylum seekers in the long-term?	Socio-economic security	Open
The crisis communication towards asylum seekers was quick and comprehensive.	Crisis communication	Linear
Asylum seekers showed understanding for the governmental measures.	Crisis communication	Linear
The communication with other organisations within the asylum process went smoothly.	Crisis communication	Linear
Asylum seekers had the ability to ask questions when needed.	Crisis communication	Linear
Via what procedure were the asylum seekers informed about new governmental measures?	Crisis communication	Open
When a similar situation occurs in the future, what changes would you recommend in order to (better) ensure the security of asylum seekers?	Overall	Open
Do you have any additional comments?	Overall	Open

In order to reach out to different respondents I used several contacts which I had gained during the planning phase. Several more respondents were approached by directly contacting them via e-mail. The main attribute of each respondent is that they have frequent contact with asylum seekers. The professions of the respondents range from a janitor to a location manager which ensures that the results do not stem from a one-sided point of view. These different perspectives are relevant and necessary since different respondents each have their own experience with asylum seekers and the governmental measures. Teachers can provide very useful information about the subject of education, whereas a location manager knows more about the way of living. The questionnaire was sent out to 34 different individuals. Eleven of them responded, meaning a response rate of 32.3%. The respondents are active at five different AZCs. The professions of the eleven different respondents are detailed below:

<i>Respondent number</i>	<i>Profession</i>
<b><i>Respondent 1</i></b>	Team manager
<b><i>Respondent 2</i></b>	Janitor
<b><i>Respondent 3</i></b>	Teacher NT2
<b><i>Respondent 4</i></b>	Coordinator international transition class
<b><i>Respondent 5</i></b>	Social legal assistant
<b><i>Respondent 6</i></b>	Teacher NT2
<b><i>Respondent 7</i></b>	Team manager
<b><i>Respondent 8</i></b>	Location manager
<b><i>Respondent 9</i></b>	Teaching assistant
<b><i>Respondent 10</i></b>	Residential supervisor
<b><i>Respondent 11</i></b>	Deputy location manager

Because of the relatively frequent changes in governmental measures the respondents were asked to reflect on the abovementioned timeframe in order to capture the complete impact of the measures. The questionnaire will help answer the research questions because of its versatility. Answers to the linear questions can be visualised via bar charts, whereas the open questions give the respondents the opportunity to give more detail and clarify their answers.

The use of different data enables the establishment of causality by proving a plausible link between the governmental measures and effects on security. The official data/documentation give an insight in the security situation prevailing the COVID-19 crisis and governmental measures. In some cases these documents alone are sufficient to start a plausible link by looking at differences over time, for instance the amount of incidents or the length of procedures. A limitation to these documents is that the numbers do not solely identify the governmental measures as the stressor. To establish causality it has to be proven that these differences over time are not caused by chance or via other circumstances. Therefore the official documents are supported by the questionnaire which allows respondents with extensive knowledge about the situation to reflect on it. Each question explicitly states that the governmental measures are the main subject of study, this minimalises the chance of misinterpretation. Although the opinions of the respondents could be subjective, they are the ones best suited to answer the questions.

### *3.4 Limitations*

This section is devoted to the acknowledgment of several limitations of this thesis. One of the limitations is that the questionnaire and the answers to the open questions are in Dutch. Converting this information to English entails a risk of losing valuable information in translation. This option had the preference over conducting an English questionnaire since Dutch is the native language of all respondents. Therefore there was little to no misinterpretation about the questions and respondents could answer freely without worrying about formulating an answer in a different language. Besides, the Dutch terms about the crisis are ingrained among Dutch speakers. By conducting a questionnaire in English each respondent may use a slightly different term for the same phenomenon which hampers the analysis. In my opinion, the chances of losing information in translation is secondary to the chance of not obtaining information due to a language difference.

Another limitation is that a crisis is usually studied when it has ended but the end of this crisis is not yet achieved. However, in the timeframe of this research the most influential governmental measures were introduced, aggravated and relaxed and thus their effect on the security of asylum seekers can be examined. Plentiful information and data is available from the examined timeframe to make the research contribute to the current gap of research about the security of vulnerable populations during a pandemic. This thesis does not claim to provide a conclusive answer about the final timespan of the crisis.

The final limitation are the differences among asylum seekers themselves and the centres in which they take residence. A measure that might be beneficial or easy to abide in one location, might prove to be disadvantageous or difficult to abide in another location. These differences also emphasize the complexity of the studied problem. Although these places might differ in numerical sense (size and number of residents) they all exist along the same pattern. Since it was unfeasible to factor in the numerical differences when the governmental measures were created, there is little reason to factor in these differences when looking at the effects of these same exact measures.

### *4. Analysis*

The analysis will take a closer look at the results of the questionnaire and the results from governmental reports. This chapter is divided into three parts, corresponding to the aforementioned sub-questions. The first part will look into the effects of the governmental

measures on the physical security of asylum seekers. The second part will focus on the effects of the governmental measures on the socio-economic security of asylum seekers. The third and final part zooms in on the internal crisis communication during the timespan of this thesis.

#### 4.1 Physical security

In recent months the media coverage on the precarious situation of asylum seekers during the pandemic rose. RTVNoord published an article on the inadequate preparations for an outbreak in an AZC (RTVNoord, 2021), researchers at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography (IfL) state that the pandemic is especially problematic for refugees and underline the “increased need for action in the areas of accomodation, communication and education” (Hörschelmann & Kirndörfer, 2020), the COA itself demanded extra quarantine locations for asylum seekers (Kolthof, 2020) and an asylum seeker talking to the newspaper Trouw claimed that “an AZC is not made for residence during a pandemic” (Goudsmit, 2020).

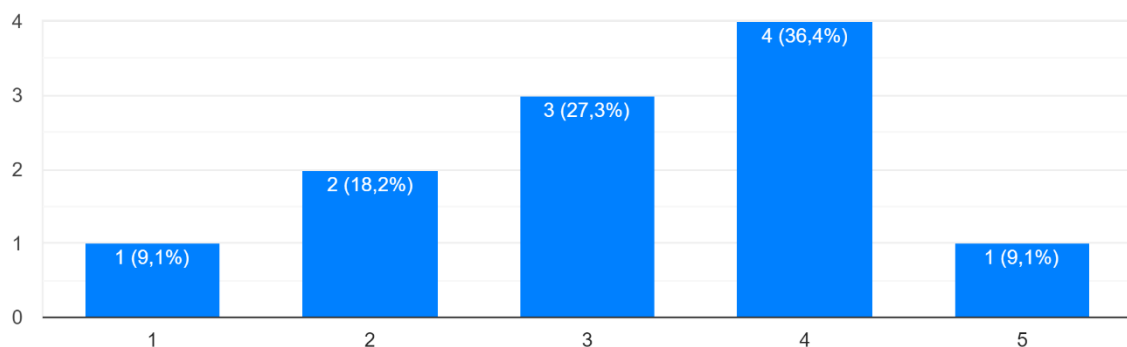
As is discussed previously, the main indicators to study the physical security of asylum seekers are physical and mental health.

##### 4.1.1 Physical health

This sub-chapter is divided into three parts. First the physical security itself is assessed. Thereafter the way of living is looked into and finally the number of incidents is studied.

The opening question of the questionnaire asked whether the respondents think the governmental measures had a negative effect on the physical health of asylum seekers.

*1 - The governmental measures had a negative effect on the physical health of asylum seekers.*



The answers to the first statement cover the whole spectrum from *completely disagree* to *completely agree*. However, as is apparent from figure 1, the main body of answers fall on the right side of the graph, equivalent to agreement with the statement.

The main reason for the few respondents that disagree with the given statement is the low number of contaminations among asylum seekers as illustrated by the following answer: “*Due to the measures we had very little contaminations, therefore the asylum seekers were physically safe.*”(R10) This answer is a testimony to the governmental measures, since their main purpose was to slow down the number of contaminations and thus protect the native population and asylum seekers alike. Another positive answer reads: “*The governmental measures were in favour of us all so we all profited from them*”(R8) However, these quotes stem from a one-sided perspective on physical health, stating that an individual is physically safe with the absence of a contamination. Other factors that play a role include the absence of physical activity and the heightened risk of violence. Besides, the lack of contaminations in one AZC is no testament to the situation in other AZCs. This is apparent from reported outbreaks in AZCs throughout the country. Several outbreaks which were discussed in national media took place in Nijmegen (51 contaminations) (De Telegraaf, 2021), Burgum (41 contaminations) (Santema, 2021) and Sneek (28 contaminations) (Speerstra, 2021).

#### *Way of living*

Almost half of the respondents (45.5%) answered that the governmental measures were in fact affecting the physical health of asylum seekers, with one respondent referring to the negative impact as “severe”(R4). Their argumentations to agree with the former statement differ from the number of contaminations. A frequently mentioned reason for an infringement on the physical health of asylum seekers is the way of living: “*The chances of becoming ill were greater due to the way of living.*”(R1) This ‘way of living’ refers to the small corridors, shared facilities, layout and limited square meters per person within AZCs (Broekers-Knol, 2020b). The combination of this way of living with the high occupancy rate of AZCs complicates the governmental measures even further since for instance the one and a half meter distance measure and the prescribed quarantine are hard to follow (Broekers-Knol, 2020b). However, the difficulty of this combination should not have been a surprise to the governmental institutions since the EASO already warned in June 2020 that:

*“collective reception facilities may pose specific challenges in terms of ensuring the required physical distancing and enforcement of sanitary requirements among a larger population,*



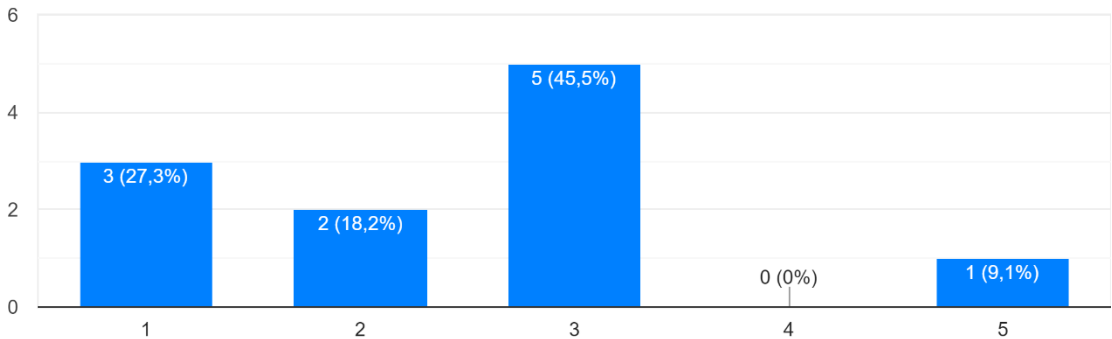
especially in EU+ states which had been operating at high occupancy or full capacity before the crisis.” (EASO, 2020: 6).

A similar warning was done earlier by a report of the inspection commission of the Ministry of Justice and Security. They concluded that the lay-out of AZCs needed attention due to overcrowdedness and unhygienic situations (2018).

*Incidents*

Another frequently mentioned infringement on physical security due to governmental measures is an increase in conflicts and/or incidents among asylum seekers: “[governmental measures] enlarged the risk of altercations, arguments and fights.”(R3) This statement seems to endorse the findings by the task force ‘child in AZC’ who stated that increased tensions could lead to aggression indoors (2020). Already in 2017 the KIS warned for an increase in incidents due to dissatisfaction about the way of living. An interesting finding is that the statements relating to this increased risk of violence mainly relate to problems within the domestic environment: “A lot of asylum seekers came in conflict with roommates or family members.”(R4) This statement is in line with the findings of Hörschelmann & Kirndörfer (2020) who also warned for the increased risk of domestic violence due to governmental measures. However, these statements and the warnings of several institutions about a rise in domestic violence are not reflected within the answers to the questionnaire, as visualised in figure 2:

2 - The governmental measures have led to an increase in the amount of incidents within the azc.



Only one respondent answered that the governmental measures actually led to an increase in the amount of incidents, 9,1% either disagrees with the statement or has a neutral point of view. The official statistics by the COA on the yearly incidents within AZCs likewise do not show an increase in number of incidents. A total of 16.255 incidents were reported over the year 2020 (COA, 2021), a decrease of 7% compared to 2019 when 17.485 incidents were

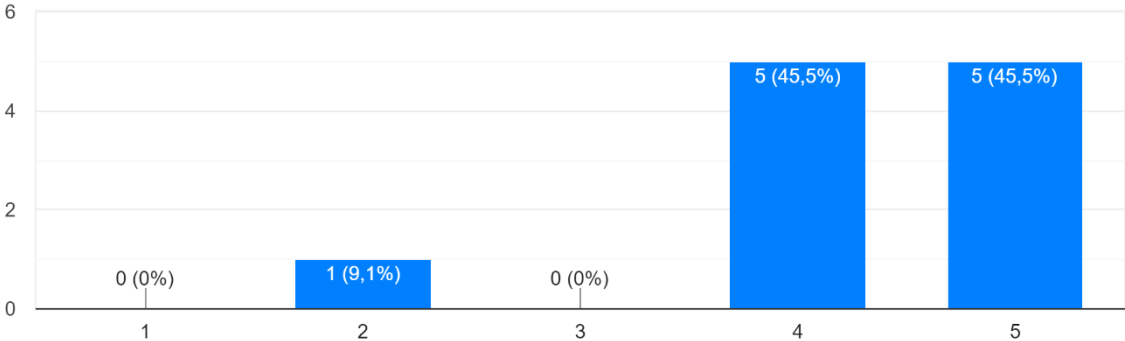
reported (COA, 2020). These numbers do not imply an increase in the number of incidents, unlike the aforementioned quotes and reports suggest.

A reason for this discrepancy could be that not all incidents are registered in the annual reports of the COA. The Ministry of Justice and Security already reported ‘missing incidents’ in their report on social security of residents of AZCs (2018). These missing incidents were due to the definition of an incident that differed per AZC, and because many incidents were not reported due to the time-consuming process. This could cause the perception of the respondents to differ from the statistics. Another possible reason is that incidents mainly happened among family members, as is known from the respondents. These incidents ‘behind closed doors’ might not get noted all the time and could therefore be underrepresented in the official statistic. However, looking at the outcome of this questionnaire and the statistics provided by the COA there is no clear reason to assume that the governmental measures caused an increase in the number of incidents at an AZC.

#### 4.1.2 Mental health

The respondents almost unanimously agreed on the negative effect of the governmental measures on the mental health of asylum seekers:

*3 - The governmental measures had a negative effect on the mental health of asylum seekers.*



This is a striking outcome, bearing in mind that psychological complaints are already prevalent among asylum seekers (Hondius et al., 2000). The answers by the respondents point at two governmental measures as the main stressors of this negative impact on the mental health of asylum seekers, the *stopping of asylum procedures* and the *restrictions on activities*.

### *Stopping of asylum procedures*

The negative effect of long procedures on the mental health of asylum seekers is declared by multiple scholars (Goosen, 2014; Hondius et al., 2000; Haker, 2010; Kox & Liempt, van., 2020), stating that lengthy procedures are often at the core of the mental problems of asylum seekers. This negative effect is underwritten by the answers of the respondents to this research. One of the respondents made the following argument on lengthy procedures:

*“It was a very stressful period for most asylum seekers due to the long waiting. Being ‘locked up’ in a small room definitely did not help with the general wellbeing of asylum seekers. Many already suffered numerous traumas and the governmental measures certainly did not help in battling these.”(R5)*

Asylum seekers are more susceptible to mental health problems due to past experiences and insecurities (Goosen, 2014) and it is known that these problems are likely to increase due to a (very) lengthy asylum procedure (Ryan et al., 2009). The negative effect of this accumulation is described as such by one of the respondents: *“COVID-19 and the governmental measures were seen as extra stressfactors on top of the already insecure periods due to their [asylum seekers] procedure.”(R9)*

To assess whether the length of the asylum procedures actually increased during the studied timeframe, the statistics by two reports from the Ministry of Justice and Security are looked into. These reports discuss the statistics about aliens and are provided every six months. By looking at the reports from the first half of 2019 and 2020 the effects of the governmental measures become clear. The Dutch government postponed all asylum procedures on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. Asylum seekers could apply for asylum again on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April, but a complete resumption was not possible due to other applicable measures. By the beginning of July 2020 the same amount of applications were handled as before the COVID-19 crisis (Broekers-Knol, 2020b). Therefore the statistics of the first half of 2020 are compared to the first half of 2019.

The effects of the governmental measure to shut down the asylum procedure are visible in the statistics about the outflow out of AZCs. The main effects of delay are visible within the tracks for ‘regular asylum procedure’ and the ‘lengthened asylum procedure’.<sup>3</sup> These tracks are studied since the main body of asylum seekers follows either one of these tracks. According to one respondent (R3) almost all asylum seekers are currently placed within the ‘lengthened

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<sup>3</sup> When eight days or more are necessary to reach a conclusion, an asylum procedure shifts from the ‘regular’ track into the ‘lengthened’ track.

asylum procedure' due to the already numerous delays. Within the regular asylum procedure the average processing time of the outflow during the first half of 2019 was 27 weeks, with 40% of the requests being decided within the legal term (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2019). The waiting time rose to 41 weeks in the first half of 2020, meaning an increase of 14 weeks on average. The percentage of decisions within the legal term fell to 29% (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2020). The statistics for the 'lengthened asylum procedure' show the same pattern. In the first half of 2019 the average processing time of the outflow within this track took 43 weeks, which increased to an average of 64 weeks in 2020. The percentage of decisions being made within the legal term dropped from 27% to 16% respectively. These statistics clearly show a drastic increase in the length of the procedures. This increase can not be blamed on an abundance of asylum applies because the influx of asylum seekers dropped from 15.040 to 7870 (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2020). With the absence of other stressors it can be determined that the governmental measure has been a strong driving force behind the increased waiting time, negatively affecting the physical security of asylum seekers.

### *Restricted activities*

The second frequently mentioned governmental measure responsible for the decline in mental health is the restriction of activities. The need for activities within an AZC to improve both physical and mental health among asylum seekers is underwritten by multiple scholars (Vandermeerschen, 2007; Haker et al., 2010) and answers by respondents of the questionnaire point in the same direction. One argues as follows: *"A lack of activities leads to stress and irritations."*(R5) Besides an increase in stress and irritations, the lack of activities poses a danger for asylum seekers who are therefore likely to fall in a slur which is described as a 'disturbed rhythm': *"Due to the lack of relaxing activities (sports, games, being-together, education) the daily life blurs, which causes a disturbed rhythm."*(R3)

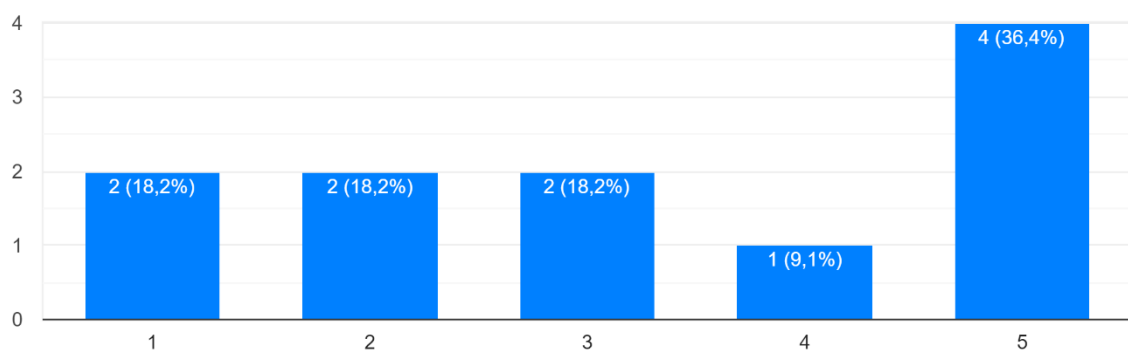
The dangers are discussed by the SCP in their reflection on the social consequences of the governmental measures. Within this research it is clearly stated that the lack of meaningful daytime activities, in combination with a lengthy stay, could cause asylum seekers to lose control over their own life (SCP, 2020). Bearing in mind the statistics about a high suicide death rate among asylum seekers (Goosen et al, 2011), these are worrying findings. The continuance of meaningful activities could even (partly) compensate for the negative effects of the prolonged stay (SCP, 2020b). To overcome these problems one respondent (R3) advocates that, should a similar situation occur in the future, activities have to continue, no matter how limited,

since participation in these activities removed asylum seekers from the daily slur and improves their physical security.

#### 4.1.3 Compliance

As is discussed in the body of knowledge the adherence to governmental measures is mainly reliant on the willingness to comply and the ability to do so. One prerequisite to comply to the governmental measures is adequate access to personal protective equipment such as masks and disinfectant. The respondents were questioned to provide an insight in this access, which produced a mixed outcome:

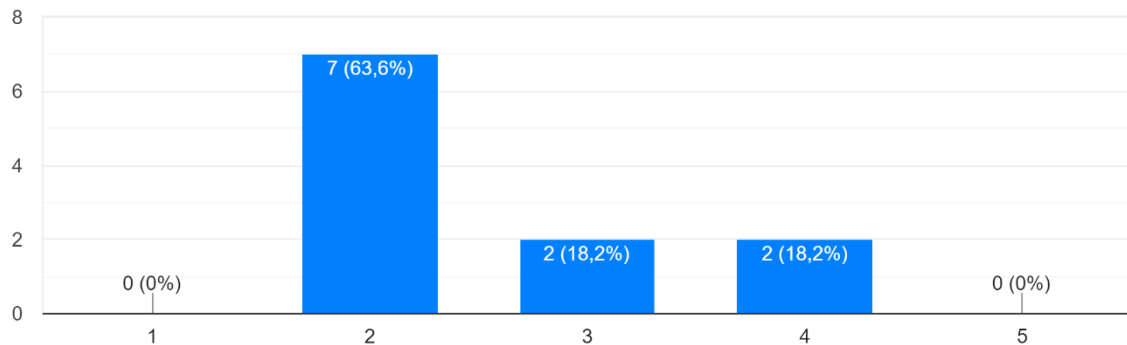
4 - Asylum seekers had adequate access to personal protective equipment (masks, disinfectant etc.)



Although the answers in figure 4 are mixed, the respondents are predominantly positive about the access to personal protective equipment. The division possibly stems from the difficulty in the beginning of the crisis to obtain the necessary equipment. In April 2020 the Dutch newspaper NRC reported that a shortage of the necessary equipment caused dangerous situations and worries among location managers (Kuiper, 2020). The Minister of Migration Broekers-Knol acknowledged these worries when she was confronted with them. She referred to the nation-wide difficulties in securing the right equipment. However, this was fixed in the beginning of May 2020 for the asylum process due to an order of the COA (Broekers-Knol, 2020b). Besides these worries in the beginning, no notable worries about personal protective equipment within AZCs existed. Besides, asylum seekers became individually responsible for the purchase of masks, which were accessible within shops. The only problem within this regulation possibly were the aforementioned low financial means of asylum seekers.

A question about the compliance to the governmental measures provides a more worrying outcome:

5 - *Asylum seekers complied with the governmental measures at all times.*



According to the data from figure 5 the compliance to the governmental measures was low among asylum seekers. More extensive answers from the respondents provide the main reason, namely the inability to do so. One argument reads that: *“They [asylum seekers] were forced to spend time with each other in a small room.”*(R4) This statement is backed up by multiple news outlets referring to ‘pitiful circumstances’ at an AZC. A group of 200 asylum seekers filed an official complaint to the COA about their living conditions with tens of asylum seekers sharing one toilet, multiple asylum seekers sharing rooms unfit for sharing, and so forth. (Kuiper & Middel, 2021). One asylum seeker expressed his worries to the newspaper ‘Trouw’ about how unsuitable the AZCs are during a pandemic. He emphasized the crowdedness of AZCs (Goudsmit, 2020), which is backed up by a respondent: *“[Asylum seekers] are almost literally together day and night, sometimes with more than six in one room.”*(R3)

The asylum seeker interviewed by Goudsmit emphasized that asylum seekers are willing to comply to governmental measures but that the conditions often make it undoable (Goudsmit, 2021). Of course, just as in society, there will have been recalcitrant asylum seekers who refused to adhere to the governmental measures. The main arguments within this research and arguments expressed by asylum seekers however state that the compliance to governmental measures was mainly hampered by the living conditions within AZCs.

The outcome of this research reinforces previous findings by other scholars and shows a direct link between the governmental measures and the decrease in physical security of asylum seekers. The physical security is mainly damaged due to a decrease in mental health. The physical health suffered as well albeit to a lesser extent, this was mainly due to the unsafe living

conditions which often made it impossible to adhere to governmental measures. The decisions by the government to halt ongoing asylum procedures and restrict activities are the main stressors of the decline in physical security.

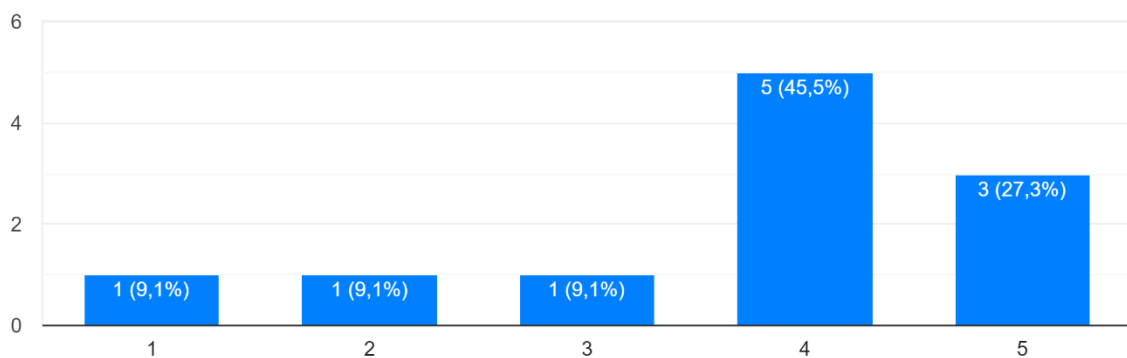
#### 4.2 Socio-economic security

This chapter will discuss the effects of the governmental measures on the socio-economic security of asylum seekers. At first the effect of the governmental measures on the future integration is discussed. Thereafter the two main indicators of socio-economic security, being education and labour participation, are looked into. The final part of this chapter focuses on whether the inequality between asylum seekers and the native population grew due to the governmental measures.

##### 4.2.1 Future integration

The respondents were asked whether the governmental measures negatively affected the future integration of asylum seekers. Future integration is understood as the integration of asylum seekers within Dutch society after a residence permit is acquired. The answers are detailed in figure 6 below:

6 - The governmental measures had a negative effect on the future integration of asylum seekers.



The graph evidently shows that a majority of the respondents predict a negative outcome of the governmental measures on the future integration of asylum seekers. The stalling of asylum procedures is once again named as a governmental measure with profound effects. One respondent states that: *“On the long term the asylum seekers suffer from the disadvantages due to the backlog. The longer the waiting on a procedure, the bigger the gap to a successful integration.”*(R4)

This indicates that lengthened procedures are detrimental to both physical and socio-economic security. Answers by the respondents show that this is also applicable to the earlier mentioned restriction on activities.

Research by Weeda et al. (2018) already showed the importance in activities for one's socio-economic security since these activities provide interaction with the Dutch society, culture and native population. The lack of these interactions due to the governmental measures might therefore hamper the future integration, something that is addressed by the following respondent:

*“Some asylum seekers arrived last year and still did not get to see the “true” Netherlands. They haven't had the opportunity to see normal life. Due to the long period of waiting their integration suffers a gigantic backlash.”(R3)*

To see this 'normal life' and participate with it, is a way of getting accustomed with it. Another important part of this normal life is the Dutch language. Lack of interaction with the culture and native population is therefore not only likely to negatively effect the future integration of asylum seekers, but also their second-language skills. The lack of contact with the Dutch language may in turn affect their education (Tubergen, van., 2010). The concept of education is discussed more extensively later on in this chapter.

Although the general picture seems to be negative, several respondents display a more positive outlook. Their argumentation is that although the governmental measures had a negative effect on the socio-economic security, this could be overcome in the long term: *“Asylum seekers will mainly experience a delay. It might turn out good in the long term.”(R2)*

This statement, however positive, is made with a slight reservation stating that it “might” turn out good in the long term. Besides, research shows that the delay that is spoken of seems to be one of the core reasons that negatively effects future integration. Another respondent also states that the negative effects will *“not be so bad in the long term.”(R1)* A certain restraint is made with this statement as well since it was added that a recurrence of a lockdown might induce damage that can not be undone.

Research by the SCP is more wary about the negative effects in the long term than most respondents, stating the negative effects could be amplified in the future. Their research warns for an increased amount of friction between asylum seekers and the native population due to governmental measures which led to stalled integration projects (2020b). An asylum seeker that is successfully integrated 'escapes' from the interstitial position (Stewart, 2005). Should the



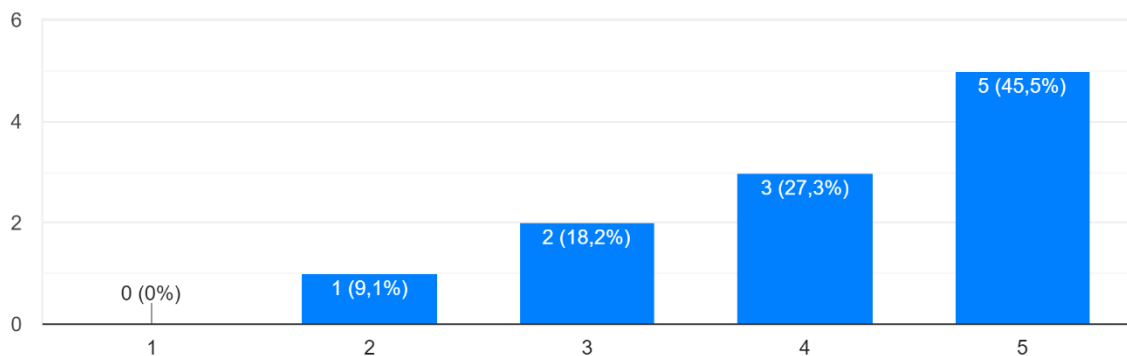
effects on the long term turn out as described by the SCP, this interstitial position could be lengthened, endangering successful integration.

The outcome of this research shows that the governmental measures hampered the future integration of asylum seekers. Although several respondents expressed hope that these negative effects can be overcome in the long term, these statements lacked confidence.

#### 4.2.2 Education

As is discussed within the body of knowledge the term education refers to the accumulation of language lessons for adults and regular scholarly lessons for children. Governmental measures were responsible for the closure of schools and made education in a classroom impossible. To overcome these restrictions the education was shifted to the ‘digital infrastructure’, relating to videocalls and so forth (Hörschelmann & Kirndörfer, 2020). The inability to access profound digital equipment means that asylum seekers are struggling to take part in this digital infrastructure. The questionnaire questioned respondents about the effects of these governmental measures on the level of education, illustrated by figure 7:

7 - The level of education deteriorated due to the governmental measures.



One of the main reasons identified causing the level of education to deteriorate due to the governmental measures is the inability to access the digital infrastructure. This finding is supported by the task force ‘Child in AZC’. Children, and adults alike, were unable to take part in the digital education due to a lack in devices such as laptops (2020). Should a family be in possession of such a laptop this one device often had to be shared among family members, making it impossible for multiple children to attend school (Kox & Liempt, van., 2020). Another expressed worry by the task force is that children are indirectly affected by the hampered education of their parents. Due to the inability to take part in language lessons the

incentive to use the Dutch language becomes minimal within a household. When parents lack education and knowledge of the language they are unable to assist the children with their homework, making it even harder for the children to effectively take part in their education. Especially during times of online learning the help is essential for the students' learning (OECD, 2020a). According to the OECD research the online learning is especially difficult for low-educated immigrants who are at the early stages of language learning. These difficulties do not only lead to a delay in their language learning but also in the broader social integration (OECD, 2020a). The answers to the questionnaire of this research underline these findings. The worries of the task force and the OECD are supported by one of the respondents in the following statement:

*“Asylum seekers had less access to education etc. Online classes were far from ideal due to bad WiFi and people could not study on a shared room but due to the measures they had nowhere else to go. Asylum seekers certainly fell behind the past year.”(R5)*

The bad WiFi-connection proved to be one of the numerous problems relating to the online education. Slow internet was blamed on the limited network capacity on AZCs that was not equipped to handle the intensive use due to homeschooling (Broekers-Knol, 2020a). During the ‘second lockdown’ it was decided that certain groups of children could go to school, to overcome these difficulties (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2020). Vulnerable children belonged to this group. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science argued which children were eligible. Several indicators include children who receive inadequate support at home, children who do not have profound access to the digital infrastructure and children who are in need of attention due to the socio-economic vulnerability of their family (2020). This situation is elaborated upon by one teacher who got interviewed by the Dutch newspaper ‘Trouw’. She said that the education of children not only stagnated during the first closure of schools, it deteriorated. It took at least two weeks to return to the very basics. Furthermore the teacher lays emphasis on the social role of education: “School provides them with safety and security which they barely experienced throughout their lives.” (Baars, van., 2020).

Another factor hampering the education of asylum seekers according to this respondent (R5) is the aforementioned way of living. Within a shared room it is hard to study and the way of living is therefore not only detrimental to physical security, but also influences the socio-economic security albeit to a lesser extent.

The previous chapter focused on the physical security of asylum seekers, proving that the mental health suffered severely due to the governmental measures. One of the main reasons identified therefore is an increase in stress. According to the respondents these negative effects flow through to the education of asylum seekers as well. Children that did have access to the digital infrastructure were often unable to learn due to the added stress, as becomes obvious from the following quote out of the questionnaire: *“I saw multiple students literally fail due to stress.”*(R3)

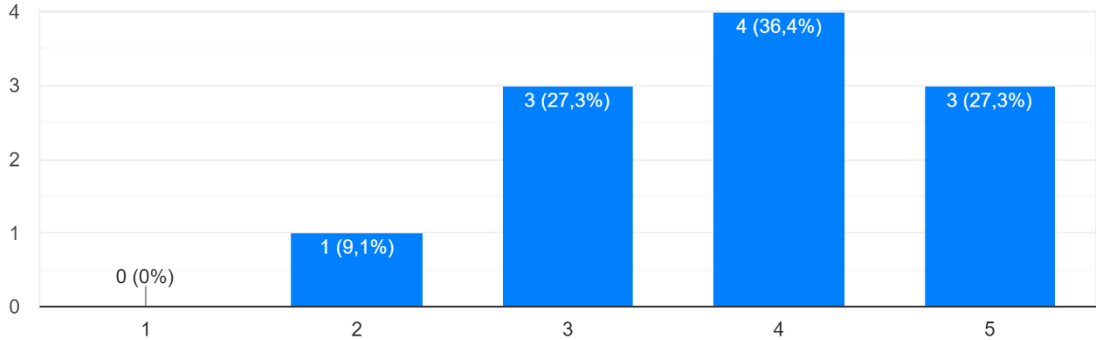
This shows that even governmental measures unrelated to school or education seem to have influenced the education of asylum seekers. All in all, the governmental measures with regards to education were especially harsh on asylum seekers, mainly due to their inability to access the ‘digital infrastructure’ which was caused by a lack of necessary technology. The lack of profound education certainly had a negative effect on the socio-economic security of asylum seekers. Although the governmental measures causing the main problems for children were lifted during the second lockdown, the consequences suffered take a lot of time to be reversed.

4.2.3 Labour participation

The labour participation of asylum seekers is divided into work during the stay at an AZC as asylum seeker and the labour participation as status holder, after obtaining a residence permit.

The labour participation of asylum seekers was already problematic before the governmental measures were introduced and the expectation is that these difficulties increased due to the crisis (Kox & Liempt, van., 2020). The respondents of the questionnaire were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that the governmental measures had a negative impact on the labour participation of asylum seekers. The answers are depicted in figure 8:

8 - The governmental measures had a negative impact on the labour participation of asylum seekers.



The majority of respondents agree with the statement and indicate negative effects of the governmental measures on the labour participation of asylum seekers. Although extensive argumentation is non-existent these findings are in line with existing research such as the report about the societal consequences of the governmental measures (SCP, 2020b). The governmental measures could lead to an increase in friction on the labour market between asylum seekers and the recipient community which could damage the labour participation of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers that are employed mostly work in the sectors that have been hit especially hard by the global crisis and the governmental measures (SCP, 2021).

Several scholars have already proven the negative relation between labour participation and lengthy procedures (Hainmueller et al., 2016; Tubergen, van., 2010). The Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) and SCP foreshadow increasing difficulties for asylum seekers and status holders to obtain a job (2020) which could result in an increase in welfare dependency. To test the effects of the governmental measures on the labour participation and welfare dependency of status holders, the data of Divosa is consulted. Divosa is an association of directors within the social domain helping vulnerable members of society acquire a job. Their data shows that the percentage of employed status holders is indeed declining. Although these numbers saw a rising trend in the past years, the percentage of employed status holders went from 30.5% in the final months of 2019, to 29.1% in the first half of 2020 (Divosa, 2021). This decline is mainly due to the loss in 'small jobs' (0,3fte) in the hospitality industry and staffing industry (CPB & SCP, 2020). On the other hand, the amount of status holders with a fulltime job rose van 37.7% to 44.6% (Divosa, 2021). Although the governmental measures are likely to have sped up the decline in overall labour participation, they can not be identified as the sole stressor since the numbers were already declining before the COVID-19 crisis.

Welfare benefits remain the main source of income for status holders but the number of welfare dependent status holders remains on a decline during the crisis. Although the decline is slowing down, possibly due to the losses in income in the hospitality and staffing industry, there is no reason to assume a rise in this statistic.

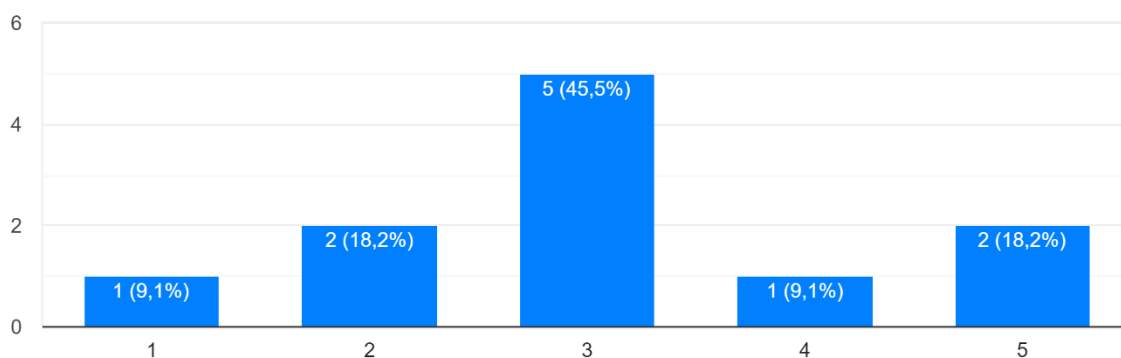
German research (Schwenken, 2020) shows a promising prospect that the labour participation of asylum seekers increased in recent years, the numbers of Divosa showing the same trend for status holders. The numerical data of this thesis and of the governmental organisations do not show immediate negative effects of the governmental measures but the overall labour participation is slightly declining and the number of status holders unreliant on welfare benefits is stagnating.

#### 4.2.4 Inequality

Inequality leads to a lesser socio-economic security for asylum seekers. Within this section it will be discussed whether the inequality between asylum seekers and the Dutch population has increased due to the governmental measures. Previous researches by Mukumbang et al. in South-Africa (2020) and by Yung Hu in the UK (2020) both state that the pandemic exacerbates inequalities and that governmental measures played a significant role in the unequal treatment of asylum seekers.

The risk of a growing inequality entails an increase in the dependency of asylum seekers. Within the body of knowledge the aid dependency of asylum seekers is already established. Meaning that they are dependent on others to achieve objective X in the foreseeable future (Lensink & White, 1999). The following graph, developed with the answers of the respondents to the questionnaire, shows that the negative effects that are visible in South-Africa and the United Kingdom are not immediately visible within Dutch AZCs and society:

*9 - The inequality between asylum seekers and the Dutch population has increased due to the governmental measures.*



The answers of the respondents show a mixed image, with the main body of answers neither agreeing nor disagreeing. The main reason for this neutrality is probably the difficulty in foreseeing the effects of the governmental measures in the long term. This neutral point of view is exemplified by one of the respondents (R8) who said that the long term effects will be neutralized. This view is shared by another respondent, but an important addition is made to their statement which reads: *“In the long term it can be alright, provided the asylum seekers receive the right guidance.”*(R2) This statement emphasises the need for correct guidance. Bearing in mind the delays and workload within the asylum process this can be read as a recommendation to the relevant organisations to take action.

Another factor which might hamper the equality is the tolerance of asylum seekers within Dutch society. A swift acceptance of status holders within Dutch society has a positive influence on the equality between them and the native population. One respondent is wary about this reception stating: “*Tolerance within society might be lower than normal which could increase intolerance against asylum seekers.*”(R7)

The SCP came to a similar finding in their study stating that the lack of interactions with Dutch society reduces their contacts within this society and might enhance the perceived distance between asylum seekers and the native population (2020). The OECD also warned for an increased risk of backlash against immigrants in the public opinion, which could further enhance the inequality (2020a). This backlash could partly be developed due to the increasing housing shortage in the Netherlands although status holders are entitled to social housing (Reception Act, 1994). This could lead to a feeling of envy against asylum seekers who are assigned a social house (SCP, 2020b).

It can be stated that the results of this study do not necessarily show an increase in inequality, provided that the right guidance is given to asylum seekers or status holders entering Dutch society. The governmental measures are however likely to enhance the intolerance against asylum seekers due to lack of contacts, or increased friction about the situation on the housing market.

#### *4.3 Crisis Communication*

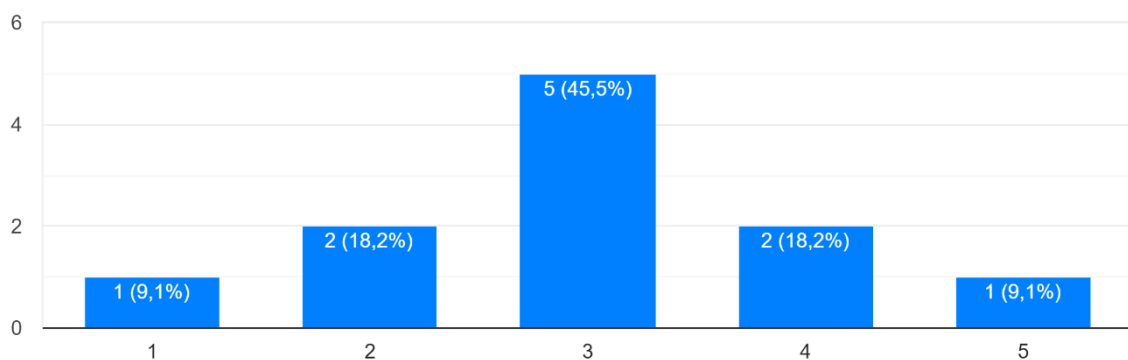
One of the most important resources to effectively tackle a crisis is internal crisis communication. Good internal crisis communication can protect the security of the concerned group, in this case asylum seekers. The importance of internal crisis communication is acknowledged by the RIVM in their script for infectious diseases in shelters for asylum seekers (2019). In the document different infectious diseases are discussed, with influenza having the closest resemblance to COVID-19 due to the way the disease spreads. One of the main advices in the script is to “develop and distribute group-specific information material about the disease to residents”. To study the crisis communication towards asylum seekers during the COVID-19 crisis, the IDEA model is consulted. This chapter is divided into the four different parts of this model, *internalization, distribution, explanation and action.*

### 4.3.1 Internalization

Internalization is the first step within the IDEA model and focuses on internalizing the potential impact of the risk or crisis event. It revolves around the following question: “How are we and those we care about affected (or potentially affected) and to what degree?” (Sellnow et al., 2017).

The questionnaire was unable to provide insight within the internalization among asylum seekers themselves since it was distributed among employees within the process. This did however enable the option to ask the respondents about the interaction with other organizations within the asylum process. Eventually these were the organizations responsible for the crisis communication towards asylum seekers.

*10 - The communication with other organizations within the asylum process went smoothly.*

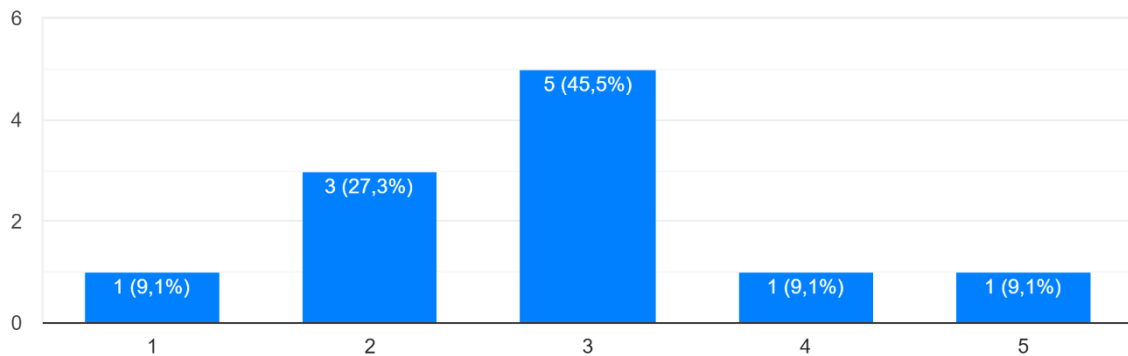


The resulting graph, figure 10, is completely balanced which makes it hard to draw conclusions upon the results. There is no clear reason to dispute the communication between the relevant organisations.

### 4.3.2 Distribution

Distribution is the core concept of the IDEA model around which the other three evolve. Distribution means the transfer of information from the source to the recipient. No matter how quick and comprehensive the other three concepts are dealt with, without the correct distribution this process is worth a lot less. In order to study this distribution of crisis communication, the respondents were asked about two factors responsible thereof: speed and comprehensiveness. The answers yield the following graph:

11 - The crisis communication towards asylum seekers was quick and comprehensive.



The answers of the respondents show a mixed response, mostly neutral. It is possible that the range in answers stems from the range in professions that filled in the questionnaire. A location manager overseeing the whole process might be happy about the general distribution of information whereas a teacher focusing more on the details might see a gap. The COA was mainly responsible for the distribution of information and other institutions played a supporting role. For instance, the COA was responsible for the flyers, information sheets, and made sure asylum seekers had access to different media outlets. Teachers frequently answered that they paid specific attention to the measures in their classes because they felt the need to ‘provide extra information’(R6).

An important factor of the effective distribution of crisis communication is that it happens quick. When governmental measures can be swiftly communicated to everyone concerned this will benefit the predicted effects. However, the speed of the communication is not undisputed among the respondents to the questionnaire: *“Instructions and translated information were provided too late. Due to this delay we lagged behind.”*(R10)

It was also stated that it took too long to convert governmental measures into guidelines on the workfloor (R10). This overall lack in speed is therefore one of the stressors of the negative response to the statement in the questionnaire.

Language is another very important factor in the comprehensiveness of information. Especially in the beginning of the crisis there was a lack of information in the native language of asylum seekers. This complicated their understanding of the crisis and, more importantly, discouraged their understanding of the governmental measures (Kox & Liempt, van., 2020). Besides, the amount of information was usually generic and lacked enough information to appeal to everyone: *“In my opinion we mostly delivered general information. By doing so the different*



*backgrounds of asylum seekers were not taken in consideration.”(R3)*

Among the asylum seekers within Dutch AZCs there are a lot of different ethnicities and thus a lot of different spoken languages. Several initiatives supported refugees in mediating and translating. After a few weeks ‘Pharos’ started translating the press conference in eight languages, all accessible via different social media such as Facebook groups ‘Syrians healthy’, ‘Eritreans healthy’ and so forth (Pharos, 2020). It proved to be necessary to provide this information in that many languages as exemplified by the following statement: *“The governmental measures should be provided in many different languages, not just Arabic.”(R6)*

The distribution of information about the governmental measures definitely experienced some hardships with regards to speed and comprehensiveness. These problems mainly arose during the earlier stages of the crisis and at the time possibly affected the security of asylum seekers due to rising fear and insecurity, and because it was not clear what had to be done. As the crisis went on and press conferences and governmental measures happened more frequently, the asylum process became more adjusted and the distribution of information became sufficient: *“Communication is difficult, but by staying calm and taking sufficient time we mostly made it work.”(R2)*

#### 4.3.3 Explanation

Explanation handles the questions such as: “What is happening?” and “Why is this happening?”. An important aspect of this explanation is that it needs to come from reliable sources. Information from unreliable sources, also known as fake news, can induce fears among the recipient group.

##### *Reliable information*

The risks of fake news among asylum seekers are studied by Kox and Van Liempt (2020). Especially in the beginning there was a lack of information from reliable sources for asylum seekers which caused a spark in fake news and dangerous theories. Asylum seekers thought helicopters would spray disinfectant (Pharos, 2020), containers used when renovating were seen as quarantine locations and a theory about holding your breath to see whether you are contaminated went around (Kox & Liempt, van., 2020). The lack of reliable information led to an increase in fears among asylum seekers. At one AZC these fears became so grave that asylum seekers chose to sleep outside in a tent, out of fear of contamination (Speerstra, 2020). The fear among asylum seekers is acknowledged by a respondent: *“I encountered a lot of fear among*

*asylum seekers due to religion and superstitions, but also the fear of the unknown. This has not achieved enough attention.*”(R3) This quote emphasizes another important point which has to be taken in consideration by employees within the asylum process, namely religion and superstitions of asylum seekers and information they receive from their native country. The remainder of the quote states the following: *“We need an explanation per ethnic group, due to the differences in religion, superstitions, habits and knowledge. That way we can prevent blind panic and help everyone in their best interests.”*(R3) Because it proved hard for the relevant organisations to account for all these differences in culture, religion and fear it is important that asylum seekers are able to ask questions to overcome these problems. Therefore the respondents were asked about the abilities of asylum seekers to ask their questions. The answers are visualized in figure 12:

12 - Asylum seekers had the ability to ask questions when needed.

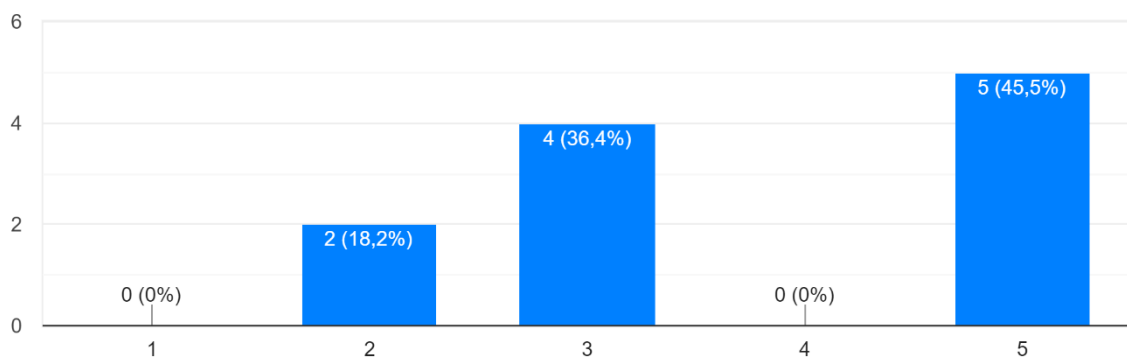
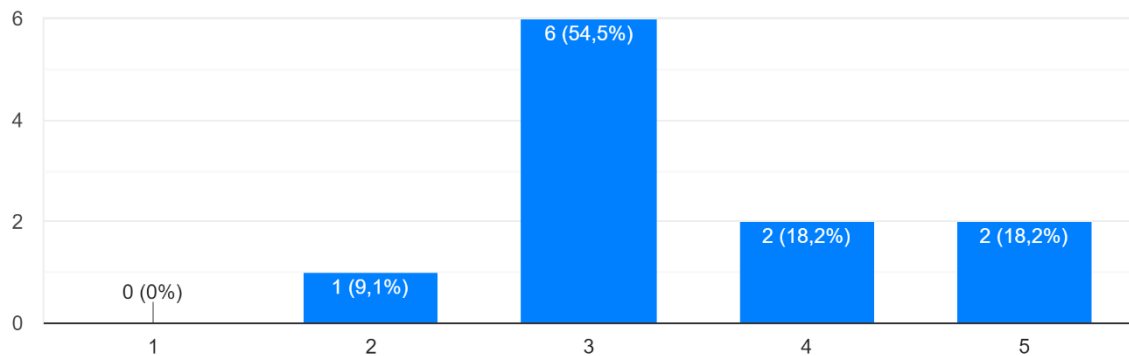


Figure 12 shows a positive image with 45,5% of the respondents completely agreeing with the statement. From the questionnaire it can be deducted that sufficient explanation of the governmental measures proved to be difficult due to the occurrence of fake news, fears about the situation and cultural differences. Besides these difficulties in explaining, the ability to ask questions has partly compensated for these problems.

#### 4.3.4 Action

The final section of the IDEA model is that of action. The respondents were asked about the understanding of asylum seekers about the governmental measures, since Sellnow et al. (2017) state that vague understanding leads to no action. Understanding in this context means whether the asylum seekers supported the need for governmental measures. Figure 13 shows a positive image of this understanding:

13 - Asylum seekers showed understanding for the governmental measures.



Due to the length of the crisis it proved hard for asylum seekers to constantly be understanding of the governmental measures. This phenomenon is of course not exclusive to asylum seekers, throughout the whole country more and more protests started to arise about the governmental measure the longer the crisis went on. Extra effort was made to keep asylum seekers engaged with the measures and show the importance of compliance: *“Because the compliance started to slack after some time, it was needed to remind students daily of the measures and adress them as a group.”*(R4) As is apparent from figure 13 this was fruitful since the understanding of asylum seekers scores high. One respondent does acknowledge that asylum seekers themselves could have shown more initiative in this process stating that meetings were organised to address information and create more understanding, which were visited only moderately.

As became clear in the previous chapters, one of the main problems has been that the governmental measures were in no way tailored to the AZCs. Therefore the actions, although they may have been clearly defined, remained a controversial issue. The negative effects with regards to the necessary actions can not be solely allocated to insufficient crisis communication. Although the distribution and explanation of these actions could have gone better, the main problem proved to be the living conditions within AZCs.

The crisis communication about the COVID-19 crisis proved to be insufficient in the beginning, which negatively affected the security of asylum seekers due to among others the rise in fear. As the crisis continued initiatives sprouted up among employees and stakeholders to account for these problems and overtime the crisis communication improved. Crisis communication remains a two way street. As one respondent stated, the asylum seekers themselves sometimes lacked in their participation in information meetings and so forth.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to find out whether the security of asylum seekers has been affected by the governmental measures imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19. In order to achieve this objective the following research question was formulated:

*To what extent is the security of asylum seekers within Dutch asylum-seeker centres (AZCs) affected by governmental measures implemented to contain the spread of COVID-19?*

Three sub-questions were formulated to support the main research question, respectively focusing on physical security, socio-economic security and crisis communication. The combined findings of these three phenomena prove that the governmental measures affected the security of asylum seekers within Dutch AZCs to a significant extent.

There are little to no indicators that the physical health of asylum seekers became endangered due to the governmental measures. Worries about an increase in the amount of incidents and domestic violence due to the governmental measures were expressed by multiple organisations (KIS, 2017; Taskforce ‘child in AZC’, 2020) and respondents but the numerical data stemming from this research and from the COA (COA, 2021) do not reflect these worries. The main identified danger to the physical health of asylum seekers has not been a governmental measure, but the way of living inside an AZC. Due to the small corridors, numerous shared facilities and the high occupancy rate of AZCs numerous respondents perceived the physical health to be at risk, specifically during a health crisis. The mental health of asylum seekers on the other hand has been severely impacted. The outcome of this thesis identifies two governmental measures as the main stressors of this decrease in mental health: halting the asylum procedures and restricting activities.

The studied indicators of socio-economic security, education and labour participation, prove that the socio-economic security of asylum seekers has been endangered due to the governmental measures. By shifting the education to the ‘digital infrastructure’ it became unfeasible for many of the asylum seekers to participate in the education due to a lack in sufficient materials and a bad WiFi-connection. The aforementioned effects on the mental health of asylum seekers also hampered their ability to focus on education. Although several programs were resumed, the created backlog is causing problems. German research (Schwenken, 2020) shows a promising prospect that the labour participation of asylum seekers increased in recent years. An important caveat however is that this increase is mainly due to education, integration and language programmes. Although it is a promising sign that these

programs yield results, these are the exact programs that came to a halt during the COVID-19 crisis. This research shows that there are certain worries among the respondents about the labour participation of asylum seekers and status holders because the governmental measures were especially harsh on the sectors in which the asylum seekers and status holders are active.

Due to problems in translations and delays in the distribution of information the crisis communication faltered in the beginning. The explanation treated the asylum seekers too homogenous, not acknowledging different cultures and superstitions and was therefore frequently unable to take away the fears of asylum seekers. As the crisis continued initiatives sprouted up among employees and stakeholders to account for these problems and overtime the crisis communication improved. This led to an overall understanding for the governmental measures among asylum seekers.

### *5.1 Implications*

Both the physical and the socio-economic security have been negatively affected. Some governmental measures, such as the restriction on activities and the halting of procedures, were imposed too rigorous resulting in extreme waiting times and a distance to the recipient community. Other measures, such as the 1.5 meter distance, were simply impossible to abide to within an AZC.

A consequence of the governmental measures imposed on asylum seekers and on the asylum process as a whole is that the vulnerability of asylum seekers as a group has been amplified. As stated by the ECHR a vulnerable population is in need of special protection (*M.S.S. v Belgium and Greece*, 2011). The imposed governmental measures have not been able to provide asylum seekers this special protection in times of a crisis, demonstrated by the decrease in security.

Furthermore, the aid-dependency (Lensink & White, 1999) of asylum seekers has increased. The aid-dependency of asylum seekers has been established since they will not achieve objective X [asylum] in the absence of aid for the foreseeable future. The governmental measures hampered the receipt of aid by restricting education, restricting activities and lengthening procedures.

The results of this thesis do not only show the effects of the governmental measures on the security of asylum seekers but also indicate that the current way of living in AZCs needs to be revised. Already before the crisis the inspection commission of the Ministry of Justice and Security warned for overcrowdedness and unhygienic situations (2018), the outcome of this thesis only reaffirms these findings.

## *5.2 Limitations and further research*

Several limitations of this research can be identified. As mentioned before, one limitation is the fact that the studied timeframe does not reflect the complete crisis. Therefore the aforementioned implications could be nuanced in the future. Another limitation is that the main subject of study, asylum seekers, have not been represented as respondents. This thesis chose to focus on employees and volunteers within the asylum process because of their executive role. By incorporating asylum seekers themselves the direct impact of the governmental measures on their lives can be measured. However, this thesis fills a current gap in knowledge about the security of a vulnerable population living in a reception centre during a pandemic.

Future research might overcome the limitations of this thesis that are mentioned above. For instance the scope of the research can be enlarged to include different European countries in order to provide a cross-national comparison. Via a comparative case study the different approaches can be compared and evaluated. Further research that can build on this thesis are studies that further explore the security of populations that are dependent on third parties for their security. Examples include the security of prisoners and the security of homeless in homeless shelters. The final suggestion is to thoroughly research the security of asylum seekers within the specific quarantine locations.

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## 7. Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix A – Questionnaire Dutch

<i>Question</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Question type</i>
De coronamaatregelen hadden een negatieve invloed op de fysieke gezondheid van asielzoekers.	Fysieke veiligheid	Lineair
De coronamaatregelen hadden een negatieve invloed op de mentale gezondheid van asielzoekers.	Fysieke veiligheid	Lineair
Asielzoekers hebben de coronamaatregelen te allen tijde goed nageleefd.	Fysieke veiligheid	Lineair
Asielzoekers hadden voldoende toegang tot persoonlijke beschermingsmiddelen (mondkapje, handgel, etc.).	Fysieke veiligheid	Lineair
De coronamaatregelen hebben geleid tot een toename in het aantal incidenten op het AZC.	Fysieke veiligheid	Lineair
Hebben de coronamaatregelen de fysieke veiligheid van asielzoekers verbeterd of verslechterd? Waarom?	Fysieke veiligheid	Open
De coronamaatregelen hadden een negatieve invloed op de toekomstige integratie van asielzoekers.	Sociaal-economische veiligheid	Lineair
Het niveau van educatie is verminderd door de coronamaatregelen.	Sociaal-economische veiligheid	Lineair
De coronamaatregelen hadden een negatieve invloed op de participatie van asielzoekers op de arbeidsmarkt.	Sociaal-economische veiligheid	Lineair
De ongelijkheid tussen asielzoekers en de Nederlandse bevolking is verder toegenomen vanwege de coronamaatregelen.	Sociaal-economische veiligheid	Lineair
In hoeverre denkt u dat de coronamaatregelen invloed hebben op de sociaal-economische veiligheid van asielzoekers op de lange termijn?	Sociaal-economische veiligheid	Open
De crisiscommunicatie richting asielzoekers was snel en alomvattend.	Crisis communicatie	Lineair
Asielzoekers toonden begrip voor de noodzaak en de uitwerking van de coronamaatregelen.	Crisis communicatie	Lineair
De communicatie met andere organisaties binnen de asielketen verliep naar behoren.	Crisis communicatie	Lineair
Asielzoekers konden te allen tijde terecht met vragen over de coronamaatregelen.	Crisis communicatie	Lineair
Hoe verliep de procedure om asielzoekers te informeren over nieuwe coronamaatregelen?	Crisis communicatie	Open
Als er zich een vergelijkbare situatie voordoet in de toekomst, welke veranderingen zou u doorvoeren in het beleid om de veiligheid van asielzoekers (beter) te waarborgen?	Algemeen	Open
Wilt u nog zaken benoemen die nog niet aan bod zijn gekomen?	Algemeen	Open