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Locational Choice and Secondary Movements from the Perspective of Forced Migrants: A Comparison of the Destinations Luxembourg and Germany*

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Abstract: In 2015 and 2016, the enormous increase in asylum seekers travelling along the Balkan Route confronted the Member States of the European Union with an exceptional pressure on national asylum systems. Since then academic literature has revealed a reappraisal of the Common European Asylum System at regulative and policy implementation level, notably regarding the fair distribution of asylum seekers across Member States and regions. Yet we know very little about the locational choices of forced migrants or how those choices evolved and transformed during their journey.

In this paper, we aim to shed light on those decision-making processes and (individual, subjective) locational choices based on the aspiration-ability model, drawing from a series of qualitative interviews with migrants held in Luxembourg and Germany in the context of the H2020 project CEASEVAL. We focus on the migrants' journeys to their actual recipient countries, highlighting mobility trajectories from the moment of first departure and on the process of decision-making regarding their choice of location. Then, we examine further mobility aspirations, which may lead to secondary mobility within or out of the country of residence. In the concluding section, we discuss the consequences of our findings for migration and asylum politics against the background of the "autonomy of migration" framework.

Keywords: Forced migrants · Locational choice · Secondary migration · Reception

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1 Introduction

In 2015 and 2016, the European Union faced a tremendous rise in third country citizens entering its outer borders to seek asylum. In spite of guiding principles of the Common European Asylum System such as the "first country of arrival principle," and partly due to political decisions and local authorities' practices, the mobility of asylum seekers through Europe demonstrated unprecedented dynamics. While scholars since then reappraised the Common European Asylum system at regulative and policy implementation level and reflected on the "refugee crisis" from various disciplinary perspectives (*Lucassen* 2018; *Piguet* 2021), there is still little research about the locational choices of asylum-seeking migrants and how those choices evolve and transform during their journeys, and before and after status determination.

One reason for this reticence is the long-time separation of mobility research and forced migration studies. Since mobility research, notably under the *new mobilities paradigm* (*Sheller/Urry* 2006), primarily focused on the agency of migrants and voluntary forms of migration, international refugee research has resisted looking at forced migration from this perspective. There was a plausible reason for this, as the mobility of forced migrants was much more robust and much more influenced by violent border regimes. Questions of migration control, human smuggling and protracted displacement seemed to be much more relevant for academic research. Only recently have there been scholarly attempts to bridge the gap between voluntary and forced migration (*Piguet* 2018; *Van Hear et al.* 2018), and mobility approaches are effectively being used to address the agency of forced migrants who, with their individual and autonomous movements, question and undermine the (im)mobilising forces of mobility regimes (*De Genova et al.* 2018; *Schapendonk* 2020; *Van Hear et al.* 2018).

In the context of immobility regimes, such as residence obligations during and after status determination, questions of how to effectively regulate the stay of forced migrants at assigned residential locations move to the fore. But even regarding the question of forced migrants' staying in a specific place, approaches to sedentariness have rarely been taken up in refugee research so far.

Both paradigms and lines of research make it possible to conceptually broaden mobility and immobility and to comprehensively contextualise social phenomena. The related questions of autonomy of migration (*new mobilities paradigm*) or the assumed seclusion of places, nations and societies (*sedentarist paradigm*) seem to be highly fruitful in dealing with refugee mobility and settlement (*Cresswell* 2002; *De Genova et al.* 2018). Against the background of these considerations and based on empirical material concerning forced migrants' trajectories to and through Europe, we aim to shed light on decision-making processes during first and secondary mobility and immobility by comparing forced migrants' experiences in two European receiving countries: Luxembourg and Germany. Our analysis focuses on asylum-seeking migrants' mobility decisions, experiences and aspirations at two points in time: during the journey to the reception country and while staying in the reception country. We use a comparative framework to discuss individual

perspectives and experiences and to highlight convergences as well as divergences of experiences and reception conditions in the two case study countries.

Following the introduction, in section 2 we briefly discuss approaches from mobility and migration research and how they could relate to the research topic of this paper. In section 3, we explain our research concept and methods. Section 4 presents the results from our research in Luxembourg and Germany, first reconstructing migrants' trajectories and the development of locational choice and then analysing decision-making processes regarding secondary mobility. We wrap up the results in section 5 and in section 6, draw conclusions and provide an outlook of further research questions.

2 Understanding locational choices of forced migrants

While the motivation for migration and choice of location of migrants is a widely researched topic, forced migration is somewhat outside these considerations. However, even though forced migrants' mobility is restricted in many stages of the migratory process, we cannot assume that their decision-making processes follow completely different mechanisms than those of voluntary migrants. Notwithstanding their forced departure, migratory decisions of forced migrants are also embedded in and shaped by social, economic and political conditions, notably regarding mobilities after their initial relocation. This research gap may exist because, in the context of forced migration, other research topics, such as legal aspects and the effects on the development of border regimes (*Tazzioli* 2018; *Zaun* 2018), human smuggling (*Triandafyllidou/Maroukis* 2012) or staying in protracted situations of displacement (*Ferreira et al.* 2020; *Etzold et al.* 2019) seem to have greater relevance and political salience.

Regarding our endeavour to shed light on migration decision-making and locational choices of forced migrants in the context of secondary movement, we need to derive the specifics in the context of forced migration. We therefore revisit conceptual approaches that explain migratory decision-making and choice of location and structural constraints on the realisation of those choices from a social sciences perspective, stressing the impact of knowledge, social capital and subjectivity in decision-making.

2.1 Migration decision-making and locational choice

The decision whether to migrate or to stay put is a complex process that entails various stages. The aspiration-ability model (*Carling/Schewel* 2018) extricates migration decisions in two separate steps: the evaluation of migration as a potential course of action (aspiration) and the realisation of actual mobility or immobility at a given moment (ability). Migration aspirations are shaped by individual attitudes and grounded on the evaluation of advantages and disadvantages of possible destinations compared with the actual place of residence. Potential destinations are considered based on the local ideas and meanings attached to these places.

The context of migration aspirations includes social norms and expectations about migrating or staying, opportunities for migration and the more general structural forces facilitating or constraining particular migration trajectories. *Mallett* and *Hagen-Zanker* (2018) use the concept of "migration thresholds," referring to a set of psychological barriers that individuals must overcome before selecting mobility as a course of action in the first place (the "indifference threshold"), deciding on the means and direction of travel (the "trajectory threshold") and prioritising particular destinations over others (the "locational threshold"). *Benezer* and *Zetter* (2014) highlight that "profoundly formative and transformative experience and a 'lens' on the newcomers' social condition" (p. 302) are most important for the destination choice. The role of the individual and the group setting during the journey and its "life-changing meaning" (p. 303) frame the further decision-making and destination choice. The second aspect of the above model highlights the actual ability to migrate as a second crucial factor for migration decisions. It is based on a combination of individual characteristics and structural context conditions, such as the economic, social and political context of migration, but also migration policies and regulations that predefine ways for (ir)regular migration (*Carling/Schewel* 2018).

Regarding forced migrants, migration research stresses the non-linearity of migratory trajectories determined by external conditions and individual resources. This is the case in the context of protracted displacements when the living situation at the first place of refuge stays somewhat provisional as forced migrants wait for an opportunity to relocate (*Brun* 2015; *Grawert/Mielke* 2018), but also regarding the fragmentation of forced migrants' journeys, interrupted by periods of immobility due to detention, waiting for further opportunities or earning money to pay human smugglers (*Hathat* 2017; *Mallet/Hagen-Zanker* 2018). After relocation or resettlement to a safe place, forced migrants may also re-evaluate their locational situation with current and future life aspirations and may decide to relocate again to better match individual life goals with the opportunity structure presented by the host country or region. In a study by *Kuschminder* and *Koser* (2016) on Afghans in Greece and Turkey, the choice of secondary movement was based on experiences of abuse, poor living conditions, unemployment, unsuccessful migration attempts and a short length of stay in the country. The main destination countries were Germany, Sweden and Austria as they are considered safe countries. However, more than in the case of voluntary migrants, the probability of forced migrants reaching their intended destination depends on external factors such as mobility restrictions imposed by destination and host countries policies. *Safouane* (2019), in his study on forced migrants' narratives of their flight to Germany, found that the migration trajectory is also reproduced in his interviewees' narrative structure, tracing an arc of first increasing and then decreasing tension made up of a series of conflicts and actions before, during and after flight. This narrative structure highlights that "the journey does not end with the actual arrival in the destination country" (*Safouane* 2019: 104).

2.2 The impact of social capital and knowledge on forced migration processes

The impact of social capital on fuelling migration is well known and social capital concepts, combined with the transnational approach, are widely used for researching migration decision-making and migration trajectories (*Castles*/*Miller* 2009; *Faist* 2000). Social capital can be characterised as mutual support based on shared belonging to a specific social group, created by family ties, geographical ties, friendship or shared biographies. It is provided in the form of information, assistance or material support with the expectation that the investment will pay off in the future (*Bourdieu* 1986: 21). In their research on refugees in Lebanese refugee camps, *Uzelac et al.* (2018) highlighted that social capital is the only form of capital "that can be created even in situations of relative vulnerability, and then exchanged for access to livelihoods or used in cost-saving measures or as a form of basic social insurance." Refugees in their study used social capital, notably within ethnic or kinship groups, to inform settlement choices and improve their livelihoods by sharing information and pooling resources (*Uzelac et al.* 2018). The transnational aspect of social networks is important for forced migrants whose network members are globally displaced as they connect individual members to a transnational support and information network (*Al-Ali* 2001; *Belloni* 2016).

Cultural capital, in terms of knowledge and skills, is crucial for preparing and carrying out a migratory project. While formalised knowledge such as language skills help people to quickly integrate into the destination society, informal knowledge is crucial for finding safe escape routes and overcoming mobility constraints such as border controls. However, knowledge acquisition may be highly selective and the quality and reliability of information about migration routes, destinations and relevant regulations, may be vague and incomplete (*Allen*/*Eaton* 2005; *Fiedler* 2020; *Wall et al.* 2017).

Regarding the instruments of information distribution, technologies such as social media and the smartphone as the primary tool for knowledge transfer recently became increasingly relevant for forced migration (*European Commission* 2018; *Frouws et al.* 2016). For example, *Dekker et al.* (2018) showed that Syrian asylum-seeking migrants in the Netherlands primarily relied on social media information from their existing social ties, which they received via their smartphones. The preferred information was based on personal experiences and they used various strategies to ensure the validity of the data. *Pandey* and *Ilavarasan* (2019: 331) studying Afghan Sikh refugees in New Delhi, found that digital practices provided them with "relevant information and experiences of being refugees" and were thus as important as physical infrastructure for the well-being of refugees in the place of refuge.

Based on the above concepts from migration theory, our research interest focuses on the specifics of forced migrants' choice of location, their aspirations and further mobility decisions. Our analysis examines two points in time: during the journey and while staying in the reception country. As case study framework, we chose the reception countries of Germany and Luxembourg. While Germany is a large country

and a well-known destination for forced migrants, tiny Luxembourg does not appear in forced migrants' mental maps as a preferable migration destination. Having conducted fieldwork in both countries in the context of a broader, comparative research project (see section 3), we found it useful to compare migratory choices and experiences in Germany and Luxembourg following a comparative framework of "most different system, similar outcome" (*Berg-Schlosser* 2012: 6). We analyse the rationalisation of migrants' decisions based on subjective knowledge, perceptions and lived experiences during the first reception process. Our goal is to understand the locational choice of forced migrants and to highlight mismatches between policy approaches that aim to regulate mobility and settlement processes of forced migrants and individual migratory decisions and trajectories. We understand these trajectories as being highly dependent both on migrants' aspirations and on their ability to implement their mobility decisions against structural constraints based on individual agency and social capital. The comparative framework will allow us to unravel both migrants' individual agency and structural frameworks and subjective imaginings about the place of residence.

3 Data and methods

The analysis is based on a series of semi-structured interviews with forced migrants (rejected asylum seekers, asylum seekers and refugees) in the countries of Luxembourg and Germany, which were carried out between May 2018 and April 2019 in the context of the research project CEASEVAL, financed under the H2020 grant agreement No. 770037. As reception countries in the European Union, Luxembourg and Germany exhibit major differences that are highlighted by a number of core data in table 1. While both are economically strong countries, major differences can be found in the countries' size and population, the diversity of resident populations, the number of refugees, asylum applications and granted refugee status. What the table does not show is that among forced migrants travelling during 2014/2015, Germany was well-known as a major refugee reception country, while Luxembourg was barely known at all. By searching for convergences and divergences in the narratives of migrants located in those very different countries of reception, we aim to highlight similarities in forced migrants' decision-making and mobility trajectories.

Questions asked concerned the journey of the migrants, their circumstances, border encounters, accommodation conditions, the locality and local context they lived in at the moment of the interview, working conditions and aspirations for secondary movement.

In Luxembourg, twelve interviews were conducted, eight of which with refugees, three with asylum seekers, one with a rejected asylum seeker; eight male, three female and one transgender interviewee. The interview partners came from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Gambia and Sudan. The interviewees were located in different municipalities in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

In Germany, 15 interviews were conducted in various parts of the country, of which eight interviewees held protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection),

Tab. 1: Key data on Luxembourg and Germany regarding forced migration in 2018 (year of the interviews)

	Luxembourg	Germany
Inhabitants	602,000	83,019,213
Share of foreign inhabitants	47.84%	12.2%
Applicants/capita	0.004	0.002
Main group of applicants	Eritrean	Syrian
Persons granted international protection	1,052	75,906
Decisions taken	1,482	216,873
Recognition rate	79.79%	35.00%

Source: *EMN Germany/BAMF* 2019, *Ministry of Family, Integration and the Greater Region* 2019, *STATEC* 2021, *DESTATIS* 2021, authors' calculation

three were rejected asylum seekers, one was in the status determination process, one was residing illegally in Germany, and two status could not be verified during the interview; twelve interviewees were male and three were female. Interviewees came mostly from Syria, but also from Afghanistan, Iraq, Morocco and Libya. At the time of the interview, they had resided between two and three and a half years in Germany.

4 Results

In this section, we will first focus on the journey to the actual recipient country, highlighting the mobility trajectory from the moment of first departure and the process of decision-making regarding the choice of location (4.1). Then, we will turn to further mobility aspirations, which may lead to secondary mobility within or out of the country of residence. We consider that aspirations and constraints largely derive from a reflection of the actual place utility but are also strongly shaped by policy frameworks (4.2).

4.1 Locational choice of forced migrants in Luxembourg and Germany

4.1.1 Migrants' journeys to Luxembourg: aspired and "accidental" destination

The reason for leaving the home country is mainly the uncertainties in the home country – especially war situations. But there is also one case in the sample who was kidnapped from their home country and then started fleeing from the destination to which the kidnappers brought them (LUX4).

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is not the primary destination choice of several interviewed migrants. However, there are two main reasons for the asylum-seeking

migrants and later acknowledged refugees to apply for asylum in Luxembourg: family/friends already living in Luxembourg or "by accident."

Before coming to Luxembourg, some of the interviewed migrants had informed themselves about Luxembourg and chose Luxembourg as their destination country. This was mainly because of family or friends. For example, a male refugee stated, "And actually I had a friend with me and they had a brother here in Luxembourg. They know about it. Then we decided to come to Lux" (LUX1).

But some migrants chose Luxembourg after comparing the different political systems and other information on the countries. For example, one migrant did not plan to go to Luxembourg, but a friend recommended that he try to find a country in the European Union where the asylum procedure is faster than in Belgium. "So he told me study all the areas. And choose the best country for your kids. So I checked online and I asked a lot of friends here and there. He recommended me to come Luxembourg. So I studied about Luxembourg and some other countries. And I checked first the education for the kids, so it was so motivated. […] Yeah, it was so far from other countries depending on education, languages and kids' treatment. So we decided to come and next day we took the train and came here." (LUX10)

The decision was also made based on job opportunities researched on the internet: "So who can speak 3 languages, can speak English. (…) I tried to convince my friend to come because he has the same education area like me, in accounting, and accounting is a very good knowledge to have in order to have a job in Luxembourg." (LUX2)

Another reason the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was the aspired destination was the multicultural environment and the perception that the lower number of asylum seekers in Luxembourg would make the whole asylum procedure more humane. "Yes, that's what I read in the internet. […] You should have a serious case. And that's why I came here. I'm sorry, but I didn't want to be a number. Because when I thought about Germany, I thought, I will be a number. […] I think I was right. Because really there is diversity, there is multiculturalism in Luxembourg. Even if we talk about how we look like." (LUX8)

There are also different ways to get to Luxembourg. The majority came through the Balkan Route, taking a boat between Turkey and Greece. Several changed their destination because they found that their preferred destination was not what they originally expected or they began following people they got to know during the journey. "While I was in Germany, I asked one of my friends in Sweden about Luxembourg, 'What do you think?' 'I don't know, but I have a relative there.' He provided me with his phone number. He gave me the address of a foyer [authors' note: foyer is a Luxembourgish word for reception facility]" (LUX2). Therefore, realising the situation in Germany, the large number of new arrivals in Germany and the long time he thought the asylum procedure would take, he decided to change his destination for asylum.

However, other cases show that flight has many routes and pathways and that asylum might not even be the aspired tool for a residence permit. This variety of arrivals and status is shown in the following example of a female asylum applicant and her family. She came with a work permit as a self-employed person. Her husband

joined her via family reunification, her brother applied for asylum in Luxembourg and her mother came as a visitor. When she lost her ability to work because she had to care for her mother, she could not apply as a salaried worker as this change of legal migration status (from self-employed to salary worker) is not allowed in Luxembourg. "So we applied for asylum, all the family, all together." (LUX9)

Another group found themselves in Luxembourg quite by accident. One asylum seeker, for example, was dropped off in Luxembourg by smugglers who had been hired by his uncle to bring him to France. He had no say in the destination from the beginning, and then found himself not in France but in Luxembourg. "He dropped me here, he told me actually, 'You are in Germany.' The smuggler said 'bye-bye, finished' and left. But I found people from Eritrea, I talked to them, 'This is Luxembourg, it is a good place also, you can ask asylum here.'" (LUX4)

4.1.2 Migrants' journeys to Germany: guided by transnational social networks and meta-narratives

Among the interviewees in Germany, the common starting point was their forced departure from their country of origin or long-term residence. Quite often, they first fled to neighbouring countries such as Turkey (Syrians) or Iran (Afghans). Facing difficulties securing a living as a refugee in those countries and realising that the crisis in their countries of origin would not be solved any time soon, they decided to move on to Europe. Notably Syrian refugees who were staying in Turkey recalled discrimination on the labour market or on the housing market as a reason to move on:

"I worked as a veterinarian. It was difficult to deal with the Turks. Some of them never paid me. And I was not entitled to officially work as a vet." (GER10)

"I saw no future there. I had no contact to Turks. I had to live in an apartment with 10 or 20 people. We were all sub-tenants. We were abused, so to say." (GER2)

Thus, their decision to move on resulted from detrimental conditions in the first country of refuge and the main rationale was to secure better life perspectives for themselves and their families. For many of our interviewees, educational perspectives were important for their locational decision. They often received advice from persons in their transnational social networks who recommended that they move on and who emphasised Germany as a possible destination. Syrians in particular relied on such networks, which often contain more than 50 close relatives in countries all over the world, so that reliable first-hand information is always available. Respondent GER1 for example was advised by his brothers in Germany to come to Germany and not to move back to UAE, where he spent his childhood and youth. They told him, "If you want to continue your master studies, you have to come to Germany. If you want to work as a casual employee, you can go to UAE." GER1 chose to come to Germany and he was close to completing his master degree at the time of the interview. Respondent GER2 was also advised by a relative to move to Germany. "He said, 'OK, in Germany you have a future, and you can do a vocational degree or study.'"

Other interviewees chose their destination country only during their flight, influenced by travel mates' narratives or the advice of smugglers. As all our interviewees who travelled on the Balkan route were organised in groups, those – sometimes irrational – fantasies of living conditions in destination countries developed as a collective "meta-narrative" based on objective knowledge, accounts of other migrants, but also rumours and exaggerations. Since they are transmitted via personal networks, migrants stick to those meta-narratives, especially when they have no other reliable source at hand. For example, respondent GER3 from Afghanistan, who knew relatively little about the world, as he concedes, adopted the meta-narrative of "*Alman*" as a destination: "We don't know many countries. That's why we – also me – asked many people in Greece: where can we go? (…) And they all said, 'we are going – we don't say 'Germany,' but '*Alman*' – and then they all said, 'We go Alman,' and then I said, 'OK, so will I.'" Respondent GER9 from Libya was already in Italy when he decided to move on to Germany. Other refugees told him that life as a refugee in Germany is much better than in Italy. "He said: 'Yes, come to Germany. It is very good there.' And then I went to Germany."

Among Iraqis, Finland and Germany are favoured destinations, as meta-narratives point to welcoming governments and good living conditions. That's why respondent GER12 from Iraq moved on to Germany when her asylum application in Finland was turned down. But at first, she heard: "Finland, all Iraqis go to Finland."

Our interviewees' experiences during and after their flight were also strongly influenced by the asylum regimes that opened up by far the greatest prospects of staying for Syrian refugees, at least in the years 2015-2016, when more than 95 percent of Syrian applicants received either refugee or subsidiary protection status (*BAMF* 2016, 2017). The information that "Merkel has opened the border" was present among the interviewees at this time, and in various narratives we learned that Syrian citizenship is used as a code to achieve preferential treatment – in particular, an unconstrained onward journey. This practice can be found not only on the part of the refugees, but also among the representatives of the authorities of transit countries. For example, respondent GER10, who was travelling in a group of Syrians and Iraqis, reports on the encounter with a Greek border official: "I told him, 'We are 32 people.' He asked, 'All from Syria?' I said, 'From Syria and Iraq.' – 'The Iraqis have passports?' I said, 'I don't know.' Then he said, 'Then you are all Syrians. So we avoid problems.'"

Although there were border controls, police operations, pushbacks and registrations, none of this discouraged our respondents regarding their mobility intentions, but rather mobilised efforts to circumvent mobility barriers. This is particularly true regarding the Dublin regulation, which cannot be specifically named by any of the interview partners, but which is internalised as a scheme that demands action. For example, several interviewees report that they avoided identification measures during the journey. Likewise, several refugees were aware that their original choice of Switzerland has a more rigid repatriation practice, so that for those whose fingerprints had been taken during the journey, Switzerland was no longer targeted as a destination (respondent GER2). This scheme of action and the knowledge anchored in it refers to regional and country-of-origin-related selective

policy approaches during the observation period, even though our interviewees were not fully aware of the details.

4.2 Locational aspirations and constraints after the reception procedure

4.2.1 Arrival, reception and secondary mobility in Luxembourg

Arriving in Luxembourg, migrants who ask for asylum, for example in a police station or at the airport, are brought to a *Centre de Primo Accueil* (Initial Reception Centre) and then to the ministry to be registered, including fingerprints. After that procedure, they are brought to a shelter where they live during the asylum process. Asylum seekers are moved around in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg according to a system. The *cellule de relogement* (rehousing unit), which is composed of representatives of different services of ONA (social workers, reception centre managers, etc.), tries to match the applicants with the reception facilities based on their personal characteristics and the availability of the reception centres. The redistribution is not always decided well, as one interviewee remembered. Although he was part of the opposition in his country, he was put together in a room with eleven migrants from his country who turned out to be supporters of the regime. "Can you imagine if something happened. I don't know, we have a kind of fighting let's say. Because I humiliated their leaders and then the social assistant say: Look refugees, they are not civilised, they just fight each other. Which is not the case. You put the victim with the […] oppressor in the same place." (LUX8)

After becoming a beneficiary of international protection, 43 percent of the former asylum seekers (Directorate of Immigration 2021) stay in the reception facility, as the housing market in Luxembourg is costly and tight.

One asylum seeker explains the locality of the shelter he is living in: "It is isolated a little bit, yes. Exactly. Because it has minimum number of residents." (LUX6) Another beneficiary of international protection had the same experience during the stay in a shelter: "Yes, I remember when I was in [village 68], every day, I told you, every time I woke up at eight o'clock and go walk in the forest, at least for 2 hours because I felt like I am in a prison. Even if it's a nice place, I feel like in a prison. Because I got stuck in this place, I'm just waiting, I don't know how much." (LUX8)

Some migrants were initially brought to the first reception centre in Strassen or were transferred to a detention centre after a rejected asylum decision and then entered a series of relocations in the asylum housing system, depending on the utilised capacities and on personal reasons (like family status, country of origin, gender, etc.). "So I stayed in Strassen for 20 days maybe and after that they supposed to move me to another camp for the integration classes. So it took about one month. (…) No, this was in [town 06]. And from [town 06] I have to go to a permanent place. And this is where I live now. It is in [village 21]." (LUX6)

However, there is also voluntary mobility inside Luxembourg: After migrants are approved for international protection, they can seek housing outside the reception facilities.

A beneficiary of international protection with school children finally found housing in a small village. "Yeah [village 81] is too small village. Even the mayor is my neighbour. (…) He is also a good friend. It's so small. So everybody knows everybody. That's what I like. If I want to do something we get to go to the commune and they do it for me. Because they know everything." (LUX11)

However, the majority of migrants experience difficulties in finding affordable housing that also suits their cultural and family needs. Therefore, nearly half of the beneficiaries of international protection stay in the reception facilities (Directorate of Immigration 2021). One beneficiary of international protection with family (one child), for example, tried to find himself a rented room without the help of an association or the like, but found his family and himself a rented room in a flat with students. This housing arrangement gave his family even less privacy than before in the shelter, so he had to look for something else. He found both through people who offered help finding a flat. "I had some friends here in Lux. One of them could rent me a room […] And it was a very good price, I think it was 700 for an apartment of 70m^2. […] The space was maybe like this living room, space enough, but we shared bathroom, kitchen with others, living room of the house was next to our sleeping room. They are students, they don't have some commitment to get up every day. (…) so it was very annoying to stay here. And you know, my wife puts hijab, so it's a bit difficult for her for moving freely and…." (LUX2) After earning a salary, it was still difficult for this beneficiary to find housing as the housing prices were not affordable or cost nearly half of the earned salary. Property-owners were also unwilling to rent them a flat. In the end, he found a flat through friends using his social capital. (LUX2)

Secondary movement from Luxembourg is mainly related to skills and for most not the target once they became aware of the advantages life in Luxembourg can have (e.g. multiculturalism, job market). For example, some migrants consider French-speaking countries as possible destinations for secondary movements where they can study and then later return to Luxembourg to work.

"If I get accepted [into university] in Lux, I will stay in Luxembourg. I will see myself in Lux, if not, I have to move. […] I think France or Belgium, for study. Then maybe I come back to work here, in Luxembourg. I would like to work here in Luxembourg, because they offered me, the place where I lived, I want to offer them something back." (LUX1)

Another asylum applicant taught himself English as he planned to move on to the United Kingdom. "Only if they give me a negative and I got an appeal and they give me another negative. […] I would try to go to the UK definitely. Because this is the only place that I can go to. The only shelter. […] First of all, for language reasons and second of all, I have a lot of friends there. Even if I got negative or something I can stay with them. […] I know in some point the British government they have to accept my application any way or another. I guess this is the only choice for me, to go to UK. You see, the language thing is not an obstacle for me." (LUX6)

Even though Luxembourg was unknown to most migrants before their arrival, the incentive to move on is quite low. Studies and friends were the only two reasons named in this research. However, several interviewees said that their aspiration to move on to Germany, Belgium, France or the United Kingdom changed once they

realised the multilingual and multicultural environment of Luxembourg and had good experiences with the local authorities – different from the experiences they might have had during their journey to Luxembourg.

4.2.2 Arrival, reception and secondary mobility in Germany

The asylum procedure in Germany foresees an initial stay in a first reception centre where the asylum application is prepared. Distribution to the various first reception facilities of the *Länder* is made based on a distribution key (Königsteiner Schlüssel), which aims for a fair share. Asylum-seeking migrants have no individual choice regarding their final destination. After initiation of the asylum application, they are distributed to counties and municipalities in the relevant state (*Bundesland*). According to changes to the asylum and reception laws in 2018, asylum seekers may also be obliged to stay in the region of first reception for three years after status determination. This distribution policy means that the initial reception procedure has acute consequences for the further settlement process and locational choices of refugees.

Most of the respondents in our sample arrived in Germany via Munich main railway station where they came in contact with the authorities for the first time. After initial registration and temporary emergency accommodation, they were distributed to other federal states. Some interviewees initially undermined the distribution by not reporting at the border but continuing on to destinations within Germany where they have relatives. Only after several days of rest they reported to the authorities and faced the asylum procedure. GER1 for example, who took care of some unaccompanied minors on the route, first brought those minors to their relatives in Hamburg and then travelled to Dresden, where his brother lives: "Well, we stayed at my brother's place for a week. We ate, we took showers. Because it was, you know, a long journey. Two weeks. It took two weeks maybe. And after that, my brother told us, 'You have to go to the police. And you have to say that 'I am seeking asylum.'"

Most interviewees were transferred various times during the first reception phase, until they arrived at a temporary shelter where they stayed during the rest of the asylum procedure. Often, interviewees have difficulties remembering this period. They recall the type of accommodation or certain events, but not the place names where they were accommodated. "In Munich, we went to the police. (…) The police took our fingerprints. We stayed there overnight, then a bus came and brought us somewhere. And then again … I don't know where it was – then we lived near the border to Switzerland for one month. I forgot the name of the village. We lived in a refugee home, but I forgot the name of the village. We lived in four or five refugee homes. New refugee homes, new buses, new people, until we came here." (GER4).

It is striking that spatial proximity to relatives living in Germany was never once considered in the distribution process (GER2, GER8). Often, the procedural mobility decisions even appear antagonistic, as in the case of GER2, whose uncle lives in the Black Forest. While another family in his refugee group was sent to that very place,

he ended up in a reception facility in the east of Germany, almost 700 kilometres from his uncle.

After several shorter stayovers and relocations, most respondents then stayed in a refugee accommodation for the large part of the status determination procedure. Experiences were very striking depending on the location of these accommodations and the receptivity of the local population. As for group accommodations, most interviewees recalled that the cramped living situation and living together with other nationalities was exhausting. They report aggression among the inhabitants as well as deviant behaviour due to alcohol and drug abuse. For many, the time in the secondary reception accommodation was a time of confusion and waiting: "First of all, we did not understand what we ought to do. We had no school, nothing. I think six or seven months we were in [town 1] and [town 2]. (GER3) "

Those who were able to relocate to an individual flat during the asylum application process often report better integration opportunities due to more personal contacts with locals. "Everyday somebody knocked at the door and brought something. (…) They also checked the apartment and noted what was missing. Then they bought stuff for us, for example furniture, a carpet, kitchen stuff…" (GER11).

But most of our interviewees had to spend a long time in the group accommodation and developed various coping strategies such as staying outside most of the day (GER12), sleeping at the house of friends or trying to convince authorities to relocate them to another (more civil) group accommodation (GER13). Due to the huge amount of asylum applications in 2015 and 2016, procedures often took a long time.[1] While some of our Syrian respondents received their residence permit after a brief written hearing (GER11), one of the Iraqi respondents waited 18 months for finalisation of her status determination procedure (GER12).

After status determination, most interviewees stayed at the secondary place of reception as they had no other options, mostly due to residential restrictions or their reliance on social welfare. In these cases, relocation to another town, county or federal state depended on the discretionary decision of the foreigners or social authorities. Notably, those who were granted only tolerated status in Germany were subject to residence restrictions, so that they were obliged to commute several hours to their workplace and stay on in the undesirable atmosphere of a group accommodation (GER3, GER9). But those who received refugee status and had no residence restrictions sometimes also had difficulty finding housing. As they were dependent on social welfare payments, at least at the beginning of their stay, they needed to find a flat that suited the criteria for social housing. They were not only confronted with a crowded housing market, but also with discrimination (GER11, GER13). While some found support in ethnic networks or among locals, others also

[1] In the years 2015 and 2016, more than one million asylum applications were processed; due to this huge amount, the average duration of the asylum procedure increased from 7.9 months in 2015 to 13.2 months 2017, while the envisaged duration is three months (*BAMF* 2016, 2017, 2018).

experienced fellow countrymen exploiting the situation and brokering flats for high commissions.

Whether asylum-seeking migrants moved to another region or country strongly depended on the regulatory framework (see above), but also on their assessment of whether their life goals could be achieved at the current place of residence. Often, the social integration process at the place of residence kept migrants from moving on, mainly because of activities by volunteers and the feeling of being positively received by the social environment. Several interviewees highlighted the welcoming atmosphere they experienced at their place of reception, which ensured assistance in all stages of the integration process. GER11, for example, was able to pass her high school exams with the support of volunteers: "There is a girl who comes every day to help me with school work. Sometimes I call on my neighbour. Or I meet people from (town 3), who are nice, and ask them to explain me my school work. They all were very nice. And that's why I struggled so hard last year and reached my high school exam. Finally!" (GER11)

The evaluation of their current living situation in Germany, further goals in life and the framework to reach their goals are also crucial factors in the decision whether to move on to another country. While some interviewees could imagine moving on or going back to their home country one day, most of our interviewees have no such intentions. Their transnational social networks inform them about living conditions in other European countries, which brings them to the conclusion that moving on would bring no added value. An important factor is what has been achieved so far and what future ambitions they have for themselves and their families. Germany is assessed positively regarding educational opportunities and the material quality of life (GER5, GER11). It is also clear that they would need to start all over with integration in case of secondary mobility, or, as interlocutor GER4 put it, he would fear becoming "a child" again: "Other countries I cannot speak the language and I don't know the culture. I didn't want to be a child again. Now, I was a kid, and I would again become a child for three years. I could not speak at all, had no contact. No, I don't want to go through that again."

5 Discussion

While section 4 provided empirically grounded, deep insights into forced migrants' mobility trajectories, evaluations and aspirations in Luxembourg and Germany, this section will now take a comparative perspective and discuss the findings in the light of selected approaches, notably the aspiration-ability model, the concept of migration thresholds, social capital theory and transnational theory. While those approaches, as we argued in section 2, are largely used in the context of migrations that are labelled as "voluntary," our endeavour is to examine if they also offer explanatory power regarding secondary movements and locational choices of forced migrants. In the following, we will relate our findings to those approaches, following the stages of our interviewees' migration trajectories.

As our data revealed, the decision to move on from the first country of refuge was shaped to a large degree by detrimental economic conditions and the cognition of bad or worsening future prospects, which did not meet with migrants' own aspirations for themselves and their families. Both the aspiration-ability model and the concept of migration thresholds offer high explanatory value at this stage of the migration trajectory.

Social capital and transnational theory provide an adequate explanatory frame for the realisation of onward migration: The narratives on mobility trajectories to the reception country revealed that destination choices are strongly influenced by the availability of information and social capital embedded in transnational social networks. Transnational social networks provide support before, during and after flight: they help to find and finance smugglers, give information about escape routes and are also available during the arrival process. They are therefore an important determinant in the choice of the destination country and the ability to reach it. Those who do not have transnational social networks based on kinship rely more on peer advice and meta-narratives that are produced, shared and reproduced during the journey. However, the quality of this information seems less valid than that transported through kinship networks. The interviews conducted in Germany indicate a stratification of migrants based on social capital (monetary resources, education, social networks) and nationality, the latter being related to varying prospects of being granted refugee status. Thus, nationality can be perceived as a specific type of capital in this respect.

For the alignment of relevant information with mobility and destination decisions during the journey, material aspects such as the availability of digital communication tools are crucial. Digital information is used for navigating on the route and for making and changing decisions during the journey. Again, transnational social networks play a major role in the availability of digital information, as their information is perceived as reliable.

Regarding the migrants' choice of location, our data indicate the fluidity and volatility of initial aspirations and the ability to reach the designated goal. The aspired destination can change depending on shifting social networks or additional information, but also as a consequence of incidents during the journey such as having been identified by police forces, having found a group to travel with or having accepted smugglers' services. While information and meta-narratives were rather prominent for the case of Germany and other larger countries in Europe, the small European country of Luxembourg was less well (if at all) known before the journey, so that the destination choice appears quite accidental. However, once migrants arrived there and learned about the special characteristics of Luxembourg, such as its multilingualism, manifold labour market options and high-quality educational system, it was perceived as an attractive location to raise children or form one's own further career and thus as a good choice – or fate.

In both countries, the initial reception foresees several mobility steps that are imposed upon asylum-seeking migrants without considering individual characteristics or choices. Especially in the case of Germany, those initial redistributions largely turn out to be decisions with long-term consequences as

recent changes in relevant laws and regulations impede moving to another place even after finalisation of the asylum procedure. But in both cases, the housing market also turns out to be a barrier for individual locational choices after status determination. Social capital is needed to integrate in the housing sector and the local community. In both countries, further mobility steps are considered if individual aspirations, individual ability and local opportunities don't match, while integration efforts are a strong incentive to stay put. Notably in the German case, this finding can be connected to migrants' refugee status. Thus, a high proportion of migrants with poor status are involuntarily immobilised. While their mobility aspirations call for onward movement, searching for better opportunities, their poor status and policies related to their status prevent them from moving.

6 Conclusion and Outlook

As this study aimed to show, forced migrants' settlement choices and decisions regarding onward migration can be conceptualised by approaches originally implemented for the case of voluntary migration, notably the aspiration-ability approach, migration thresholds, social capital and transnational theory. However, forced departure and more substantial mobility constraints imposed by migration regimes, not only before or during, but also after flight constitute notable differences. Moreover, we can show that mismatches between migrants' mobility intentions – based on life aspirations, transnational social networks, experiences and selective knowledge – and restrictions imposed by migration and asylum governance, are evident in our research results.

Furthermore, it became clear that forced migration means a specific vulnerability compared to other types of migrants: There is a lack of preparation, there are mostly informal sources of destination country information and there is no free mobility after arrival, nor after finalisation of the asylum procedure. Being aware of these differences could help to assess how reception procedures can be refined: by more tailored information about processes and destinations, resettlement programmes with prepared migrants and prepared municipalities who host migrants as recently explored by a pilot study in Germany aiming to match migrants and receiving localities using an algorithm-based matching procedure.[2] Being aware of these mechanisms also allows us to predict considerable onward movements of migrants with refugee status, if life aspirations cannot be fulfilled in the country of reception. A considerable increase in the numbers of Syrians who received refugee status in Greece and moved on to Germany in 2021 highlights the relevance of this aspect (*Wipfler* 2021). Even though this might not be desired or foreseen by the European mobility and asylum framework, theoretical approaches from migration research suggest that these movements – resulting from migration autonomy – cannot be fully contained by migration and asylum policies.

2 https://matchin-projekt.de/

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