

# Asylum Related Organisations in Europe

Networks and Institutional Dynamics in the Context of a Common European Asylum System

Bearbeitet von  
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Anna Mratschkowski [ed.]

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## Preface

This book is based on the interdisciplinary teaching–research project ‘MApping REfugees’ arrivals at Mediterranean borders (MAREM)’, which was conducted from 2013 through 2016 at the Ruhr-University Bochum (RUB). The MAREM project was carried out by members of the Department of Sociology/Organisation, Migration, Participation at the Faculty for Social Science under the direction of Prof. Dr. Ludger Pries.

The research team studied various asylum-related organisations, their cooperation networks and their responses to the implementation of the Common European Asylum System. The team was divided into groups based on specific geographical areas in the Mediterranean, including Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Malta. In addition, although the original intent of the project was to focus on these five countries, we chose to include Germany because of its situation in 2015 relative to the so-called refugee crisis.

Representatives of the selected asylum-related organisations in each country were interviewed periodically, and the project consisted of three rounds of interviews (2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16). The chapters of this book present the main results of the research conducted during the most recent round and in part the results based on data collected during the two earlier rounds.

The inStudies project at RUB serves to develop teaching and supports students in building their individual profiles. By providing learning through research, it successfully concentrates on specific subjects to deepen individual students’ understanding. The inStudies project received generous funding from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany, enabling us to combine teaching, learning and research in carrying out the MAREM project.

I am most grateful to all the research groups for their fruitful work. I also cordially thank inStudies and the University’s Faculty of Social Science, whose interdisciplinary approach, supportive atmosphere and encouragement in exchanging ideas with colleagues contributed to the success of our project. My thanks go to Professor Pries for initiating the MAREM project and helping to organise the associated seminars, excursions and international workshops. Although I was responsible for the last

*Preface*

round of MAREM, I always welcomed his support and enjoyed working with all members of the project.

Many students and research assistants helped compile this book as the main product of the study. Juliana Witkowski, Rafael Bohlen, Natalia Bekassow, Katrina Böse, Jana Komorowski, Tobias Breuckmann, Lara Elliott and Megan Costello provided great help in bringing it to fruition.

I would also like to thank William White, René Reinholz and Diane Q. Forti, who provided editorial support during manuscript preparation. Special thanks go to Nomos, the publisher of the 'Migration & Integration' book series, for their kind offer to include our book in this series, for which I acted as editor.

During the project an interactive learning platform based on Google Earth was also created and is accessible to the broader public for free at [www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/marem/en/map.shtml](http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/marem/en/map.shtml). It includes an informative map showing the results of our three international workshops, offers comprehensive basic information concerning the asylum-related organisations working in Europe and displays the major routes of migration to Europe. Moreover, it highlights a variety of personal stories about people who arrive in European countries seeking asylum. To Mara Hasenjürgen, as well as many other project members and assistants who made this possible, I owe my heartfelt thanks.

It is hoped that this book will help fill a gap in the research on asylum-related organisations. In the MAREM project, we applied the theoretical approach known as neo-institutionalism to our research involving selected countries and have relied on the latest data available. To reach a broader audience, we are releasing these results in English in the belief that accessibility to asylum-related research is critical in setting the groundwork for improving the refugee situation both in Europe and elsewhere.

Anna Mratschkowski  
Bochum, November 2016

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## Qualitative Research on the Role of Asylum-Related Organisations in the Context of the Common European Asylum System

*Anna Mratschkowski*

### *Introduction*

This book reflects one of the main products of the teaching–research project “MAPPING REFUGEES’ ARRIVALS AT MEDITERRANEAN BORDERS (MAREM)” carried out by the Ruhr-University Bochum. Initiated in 2013, the MAREM project was undertaken to take a closer look at the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and its implementation in several Mediterranean countries.

Since 1999, the European Union (EU) has been working to create such a system and to improve the current legislative framework in order to establish fair and effective procedures that could be used throughout the member states, thus guaranteeing high standards of protection for people “fleeing persecution or serious harm” (EU Commission 2014: 3). The main aim of CEAS is to provide better access to asylum procedures for those who seek protection, which would lead to

*fairer, quicker and better quality asylum decisions, [ensuring that] people in fear of persecution will not be returned to danger [and] providing dignified and decent conditions both for those who apply for asylum and [for] those who are granted international protection within the EU (EU Commission 2014: 1).*

To achieve its aims, CEAS provides rules with regard to responsibility for asylum applications (the Dublin System), asylum procedures, qualifications of applicants for international protection and related rights and also sets common standards for the conditions of reception (EU Commission 2014: 5). Since 2005, considerable progress has been made towards greater harmonisation of these rules across Europe through joint decisions about the direction CEAS should take. In 2008 and 2009, the EU Commission submitted several legislative amendments to the Council of the European Parliament concerning improvements to CEAS.

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In June 2013, the second stage of this system (CEAS II) was adopted in order to strengthen such harmonisation (EU Commission 2014). The aim of CEAS II was to implement fair and more efficient procedures for asylum seekers in Europe by raising the processing standards and strengthening solidarity among the member states receiving them (Bendel 2014: 2). The legal framework of CEAS II consists of two regulations and five directives. Two EU agencies play a particularly important role in the implementation of CEAS – the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the border agency Frontex (EU Commission 2014).

Although major changes in legislation at the national level were driven by the implementation of CEAS and its directives and regulations, EU member states have adopted unilateral measures to deal with the inflow of asylum seekers into their territory (EU Parliament 2015) instead of consistently applying the CEAS provisions. The CEAS directives and regulations are intended to ensure that all those who apply for asylum in Europe undergo a fair and consistent asylum procedure regardless of the member state to which they apply:

*The revised Asylum Procedures Directive aims at fairer, quicker and better-quality asylum decisions. Asylum seekers with special needs will receive the necessary support to explain their claim, and in particular there will be greater protection of unaccompanied minors and victims of torture.*

*The revised Reception Conditions Directive ensures that there are humane material reception conditions (such as housing) for asylum seekers across the EU and that their fundamental rights are fully respected. It also ensures that detention is applied only as a measure of last resort.*

*The revised Qualification Directive clarifies the grounds for granting international protection and therefore will make asylum decisions more robust. It will also improve access to rights and integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection.*

*The revised Dublin Regulation enhances the protection of asylum seekers during the process of establishing the state responsible for examining the application and clarifies the rules governing the relations between states. It creates a system to identify problems in national asylum or reception systems early on and to address their root causes before they develop into fully fledged crises.*

*The revised EURODAC Regulation will allow law enforcement access to the EU database of the fingerprints of asylum seekers under strictly limited circumstances in order to prevent, detect or investigate the most serious crimes, such as murder and terrorism (EU Commission 2015).*

Even though CEAS defines common standards and procedures, there are major differences in the living conditions and recognition rates of people seeking protection among the European countries (EASO 2015: 27). There

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is an obvious gap between official declarations ('talk') and actual behaviour ('action') within the EU, between national governments and NGOs. Applying the theory of neo-institutionalism, the MAREM project examines the role of asylum-related organisations and their cooperation networks with respect to CEAS and the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe. The MAREM project seeks a solid scientific understanding of current European migration policy, of the situation of asylum seekers and refugees and of the scientific, governmental and non-governmental organisations and their networks that are involved in this area. Moreover, available and examined information concerning this timely and up-to-date issue will be made accessible to the broader public. The project aims to draw public and scientific attention to the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe and to share knowledge as a means of supporting the improvement of this situation and asylum politics.

*Current State of Research*

The current asylum situation in Europe has been the subject of considerable debate within the scientific community. Although much research has been done in the field of asylum-related issues (e.g. Mainwaring 2008; Lambert et al. 2013; Cabot 2014; Pastore and Roman 2014; Tirandafyllidou 2014; Vellutti 2014; Kalpouzos and Mann 2015; Karakayali and Kleist 2015; Katsiaticas 2015; CEAR 2016; Mogiani 2016), refugee-related organisations and their cooperation networks have been overlooked. The MAREM project is an attempt to fill this gap in the research, and reports of some of the earlier studies (carried out prior to 2016) are already available (Gansbergen 2014; Gansbergen and Breuckmann 2016; Gansbergen and Pries 2015; Gansbergen<sup>1</sup> et al. 2016). These studies involved one or two (at most five) Mediterranean countries and had a less theoretical background than do those described in this book. For example, Pries (2016) described the refugee movement that occurred in 2015 in Europe with a focus on Germany.

In this book, the authors describe the main outcomes of their research in six European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Italy, Spain and Germany)

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1 Gansbergen (now Mratschkowski) is my former name.

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as part of the MAREM project in which the theory of neo-institutionalism provides the scientific basis of the investigations. Their analyses contribute to our understanding of the asylum-related organisations currently at work in Europe.

### *Neo-institutionalism*

Because the MAREM project focuses specifically on the cooperation networks of asylum-related organisations, the theory of neo-institutionalism was chosen as the scientific basis of this research. Sociological neo-institutionalism (see Meyer and Rowan 1977) approaches institutions from a sociological perspective, defining them as a collection of more or less formalised rules and traditions (Schimank 2007: 162). As a theory, neo-institutionalism is concerned with the emergence of new institutions, interactions among institutions and their effect on their environment. Attention is also given to the organisations operating within these institutions and the expectations and influences of their environment with regard to the organisations' appearance and behaviour. This theory can also be used to explain the requirements for the successful implementation of a homogeneous asylum system across Europe.

*This new orientation proposed that formal organizational structure reflected not only technical demands and resource dependencies, but was also shaped by institutional forces, including rational myths, knowledge legitimated through the educational system and by the professions, public opinion, and the law. The core idea that organizations are deeply embedded in social and political environments suggested that organizational practices and structures are often either reflections of or responses to rules, beliefs, and conventions built into the wider environment (Powell 2007: 975).*

Neo-institutionalism is concerned with the adaptation of organisations to their organisational field. Organisations within the same field can influence one another in certain ways, and taking a closer look at an organisation's network will reveal its environment. Therefore, analysing the cooperation networks of asylum-related organisations can help us learn more about the role of these organisations within specific environments, and vice versa, including the role of these environments in forming the structure and operating principles of the organisations.

We focused on the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) to explain certain actions organisations take, interactions between organisations and

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changes and structuring within institutional fields. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 147–160), the main goal of an organisation is its survival and legitimation, both of which are achievable with the help of appropriate structures and action. Organisations tend to observe their organisational environment in order to endure on local, national and even international levels and to legitimise their work. Often the organisational field becomes institutionalised, allowing what has become known as the ‘myth of rationalisation’ to emerge. This concept refers to certain rationalised structural elements binding organisations that want to become or remain a part of the institutionalised field (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 343). In trying to achieve rational, effective and efficient action, organisations might even adapt certain structures and copy practices. In the long run, this can lead to a homogenisation of the organisational field, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 148), who define the organisational field as

*those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 148).

Institutions can influence organisations in three ways that are central to the theory of neo-institutionalism: regulative requirements and compulsion, normative exceptions, and cultural–cognitive structures of meaning that are not questioned within the societal system (Sandhu 2012: 76). This can lead to a homogenisation of the institutional field – a process known as isomorphism. This process occurs in organisations within an institutional field that know and observe one another. Such observation leads to mutual learning and to an institutional alignment through the previously mentioned pressure of legitimisation (Sandhu 2012: 77). DiMaggio and Powell differentiate three types of isomorphism:

- *Normative isomorphism* occurs in response to the pressure of meeting normative expectations owing to professionalisation in the organisational field. It is possible to analyse the extent to which the organisations’ internal structures and working procedures converge as a reaction to an increasing degree of professionalisation.
- *Coercive isomorphism* is a result of the influence of political institutional frameworks and the problem of an organisation’s legitimation. Coercive isomorphism indicates the adaptation of an organisation to the paradigms of action of another organisation on which it depends

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for funding. It results from the formal pressures exerted by one organisation on another organisation.

- *Mimetic isomorphism* is the phenomenon that occurs when organisations orientate themselves towards well-established organisations because of uncertainties.

These three types of isomorphism display an ideal typical distinction. Because of general social and organisational complexity, their characteristics influence one another and are often indistinguishable (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150).

One reason for isomorphic change is professionalisation based on the “*resting of formal education and of legitimation in a cognitive base produced by university specialists*” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152). Organisations professionalise by choosing staff members with a certain educational background, thereby becoming more similar to one another because organisational norms and behaviour are developed among professionals in universities and professional training institutions (Ibid.). According to *normative isomorphism*,

*the greater the reliance on academic credentials in choosing managerial and staff personnel, the greater the extent to which an organization will become like other organizations in its field* (Ibid.: 155).

Hence, having the same criteria and standards when it comes to choosing staff would be regarded as an increase in homogeneity in this field and would eventually lead to decreased diversity in their ways of working. However, research shows that often just the formal structure of an organisation is influenced by cooperation and pressure of legitimisation, whereas the informal and actual strategies of action differ from these institutional paradigms. This leads to the emergence of what can be called a ‘talk-and-action gap’ in the everyday institutional structures, whereas actors formally follow the institutional paradigms but rely on the former structures of their own organisations (Sandhu 2012: 74). Institutions influence the formal structure (‘talk’) but leave actual strategies (‘action’) untouched, because organisations prefer to rely on their informal structures. This phenomenon can be seen in relation to the normative power of institutions. Organisations often depend on these institutions to survive, so to receive maximum support, it is necessary for them to be legitimised. Consequently, they must follow certain discourses of institutions in a formal way yet this reveals little about their informal organisational structure (Sandhu 2012: 76).