Migration as crisis.
Framework paper

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**MAGYC**: The MAGYC (Migration Governance and AsYlum Crises) project seeks to assess how migration governance has responded to the recent “refugee crises” and has since been influenced by it, and how crises at large shape policy responses to migration. This four-year research project (2018–2022) brings together twelve international partners: the Hugo Observatory from the University of Liège (Coordinator), Sciences Po, the University of Economics in Bratislava, the GIGA institute of Global and Area Studies, Lund University, the IDMC, SOAS University of London, the University of Milan, the Lebanese American University, the University of Macedonia, Sabanci University, IfPO/CNRS.

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Abstract
This framework paper intends to construct the 2015 “migration crisis” as a scientific object, moving away from the naturalisation of the crisis operated in media and political discourses and rather exploring the dynamics of migration crisis-making. To do so, it offers insights on the semantic and political genealogy of the notion in the context of Western European discourses. We argue that an ideal type or generic “migration crisis” was brought about in the early 2010s, building upon previous situated crises in discourses produced on migration. This ideal type is constructed as a category of power, which in turn gives way to particular ways of dealing with and responding to migration. Therefore, in line with previous work, this paper adopts a constructivist stance on crises that seeks to investigate “migration as crisis” in policy, media and academic discourses.
**Introduction**

A crisis is commonly portrayed as an extraordinary event, or set of events, leading to instability and danger and affecting a pre-existing normality. Although crises are mostly deemed temporary, a widely used oxymoron refers to states of permanent or long-term crisis. As far as migrant or refugee flows are concerned, this is for example epitomised by so-called “protracted refugee situations”, such as Palestinian refugees in the Near East, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, Somalis in Kenya, Eritreans in Sudan and Ethiopia, Colombian IDPs among others. In such cases, human displacement generates enduring political and humanitarian crises.

Far from the theatrics of staged crises in specific sites and moments, Myron Weiner (1995) also coined the idea of a more structural “global migration crisis” in the 1990s. Weiner’s crisis however was not only made of mass inflows as statistical facts. It was also and mainly a social and political construction. Analysing the changes in migration politics in the eighties and early nineties, and the transformation of migration into a major security issue, Weiner argues that the global migration crisis is both a matter of data (i.e. numbers of immigrants) and a consequence of how these numbers are socially assembled and interpreted. In other words, Weiner showed that once migratory movement has become perceived as a critical event – a phenomenon pertaining to a “crisis” – the perception prevails regardless of the statistical reality unfolding on the ground. As a result, even if numbers remain broadly unchanged, or if they reflect other social processes that may be understood, deconstructed and responded to.

Analytically, a crisis also sheds light on unseen or unanticipated issues and situations. As such, crises are “critical moments:” they both break away from the normal course of things and involve taking a reflexive or critical perspective on normality. In sum, crises are moments that are out of the ordinary and that lead to interrogation, reassessment and reconsideration. Crises are fashionable items in politics and public life and, even beyond migration,
become omnipresent in the public discourse and as ways of seeing and understanding the contemporary world (Aguiton, Cabane & Cornilleau, 2019). They also are a topic of choice for social scientists, both empirically grounded in the effective use of crisis discourses and valid analytical categories as crises have been conceptualised as operators of modernity or a modern “mode of thinking” (Gilbert, 2019).

In line with this perspective, this paper intends to construct the 2015 “migration crisis” as a scientific object, moving away from the naturalisation of the crisis operated in media and political discourses and rather exploring the dynamics of migration crisis-making. To do so, it offers insights on the semantic and political genealogy of the notion in the context of Western European discourses. We argue that an ideal type or generic “migration crisis” was brought about in the early 2010s, building upon previous situated and individualised crises in discourses produced on migration. This ideal type is constructed as a category of power, which in turn gives way to particular ways of dealing with and responding to migration. Therefore, in line with previous collective work (Lindley, 2014), this framework paper adopts a constructivist stance on crises that seeks to investigate the articulation of migration and crisis. The exploration of the migration-crisis nexus leads to investigate “crisis migration” and “migration crises” as socio-political constructions instrumental in specific contexts for specific actors and about specific migrant groups. For instance, migration crisis can be instrumental to discard routinised asylum and immigration policies as invalid to cope with unusually massive flows, while crisis migration can be instrumental in the labelling of certain migrant groups as victims of forced displacement. Crises are thus a sort of self-fulfilling terminology which discursively creates or enhances extraordinary perceptions and responses of a given phenomenon by placing it outside of ordinary management.

On an epistemological level, the notion of crisis is contested. Crises tend to be apprehended through their effects and perception, rather than through objective definitions. They thus remain an “unresolved notion” (Carrera et al,
2019). In this paper, migration crisis is understood as a critical moment, which creates opportunities to re-evaluate and recast the appreciation and perception of migration as well as path dependent responses to migration dynamics, across host and origin countries, for policy, civil society and media actors, as well as migrants themselves. As such, it is not necessarily a vector of change but it can offer a magnifying lens to decipher existing trends. This framework papers seeks to open a discussion for future work undertaken within work package 3 of the MAGYC project and along the following research questions:

1. What is a migration crisis? Two major ways of defining the ongoing crisis emerge from the literature and from policy debates. The first is about states’ incapacity to control and monitor human mobility and points to a political/governance crisis. The second concerns the vulnerability of migrants and stresses the humanitarian nature of the crisis (migrants’ deaths, trafficking, etc.).

2. How do actors define the crisis? Different actors (governments, civil society organisations, migrant associations, media, IOs) are all concerned with the crisis, but apprehend it in different ways. This points to complex patterns of interactions and negotiations in how the crisis is perceived – and therefore governed and communicated.

3. What are the boundaries of the crisis? How is a crisis inscribed in space (geographical boundaries) and time (temporal boundaries)? Migration is perceived as a crisis-generating phenomenon: while this is a lasting and worldwide phenomenon (Weiner 1995), this raises the issue of when, how and why a given situation is constructed as a crisis.

4. Is the migration crisis constructed as a structural pattern of governance? While the idea of a crisis usually points to a temporary phenomenon (for example in the economic literature), migration seems to be chronically apprehended as a crisis, at least since the nineties. This raises the issue of the relationship between crisis and politics, and of the challenges raised by a structural/lasting crisis.
In order to open this preliminary discussion, the paper is structured in the following way. The first section provides an overview of the literature on migration, crisis and security since the nineties. The paper then describes three key moments through which migration crisis narratives were deployed since the 1990s in a variety of ways. It focuses on the last episode (the 2010s) and show that while the phrase “migration crisis” became near unanimous, it remained a contested and challenged term that took on different meanings for different actors. The paper then reflects upon the use of “crisis” in the scientific literature and reviews scholarly critiques that were raised against the notion. Finally, the paper examines the relation between crisis discourses and policies. In spite of its limited analytical validity, “migration as crisis” must be understood and studied insofar as its performative aspects and material consequences in particular through policy are substantial.

**Migration crisis in the 1990s: global, local, ad hoc permanent?**

The association of migration and crisis is not new. In the late 1980s, Aristide Zolberg et al. (1989) published a book covering “the refugee crisis” of the developing world. In their introduction, they identify three refugee crises in the twentieth century: the first two are “European refugee crises”. The first concerns the inter-war period, following in particular the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires and the construction of nation-states in their stead, which generated intense mobility. The second European crisis occurs in the aftermath of World War 2, over the course of which more than 30 million people were displaced and at the end of which 11 million people found themselves outside their territory of citizenship and in need of protection. The third refugee crisis, according to them, emerges in the 1960s and is characterised by migratory pressure from the Global South. Interestingly, they consider that previous forced displacement episodes in Latin America or the Middle East (in the 1940s and 50s) did not equate to crises insofar as most refugees found haven in neighbouring countries. In this sense, according to Zolberg et al., what constitutes the crisis is the moment when displaced people
are from/in the Global North or attempt to move towards it. A notable exception is the case of the Palestinians, whose experience of forced displacement has been considered to amount to a crisis for decades. Their investigation into crises caused by migration reflected the zeitgeist of the end of the cold war and emergence of an anxiety rhetoric regarding mobility in the “new world order.” In 1995, Myron Weiner coined the “global migration crisis”. Important global changes, he argued, were affecting not only the nature and volume of migration flows, but also their perception and place in the geopolitical order. The collapse of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall led to increased East-West mobilities, which took place in a changing world and thus acquired a new meaning. It follows that the crisis-rhetoric is as much about a changing reality as about changing perceptions: in fact, once an association has been established between migration and crisis, and even when the reality does not significantly change, the discourse of crisis may prevail and shape the perception of migration dynamics.

The "migration as crisis" rhetoric in the Global North can be traced back to the 1990s, when migration became an overarching preoccupation in political, media and academic debates beyond vernacular concerns for migrants' integration in specific contexts and localised migration phenomenon. In 2001, Aristide Zolberg and Peter Benda reviewed this obsession with migration and critically assessed crisis-rhetoric, writing that “recent developments in the sphere of international migration … do not provide evidence of a crisis ... In this light, the widespread talk of a “crisis” appears as an irrational phenomenon” (Zolberg and Brenda 2001: 1). Yet, however ungrounded, by the early 2000s, such rhetoric had nonetheless become pervasive and, in the introduction, Zolberg pointed to the way in which it penetrated the US media and public discourses throughout the 1990s.

Crisis-rhetoric is often associated with panic talk and structural collective anxieties, which developed in the 1990s, at times of momentous historical change at the global geopolitical level and of transition towards a new order that was yet to be understood. In this context, migration became central to
discourses of crisis, regardless of statistical evidence. From the perspective of the Global North, the 1990s constitute a historical shift, as the separation between the Western and Eastern blocs that had characterised global politics since the end of WW2 came to an end - thus leading to questions about new forms of inter-state relations and connections (including through human mobility). The 1990s were therefore a time of changing world structures, marked by debates about the new global order, globalisation and the end of the nation-state. Such new developments spurred anxieties, a process that strongly affected perceptions of global migration. The notion that states were threatened by globalisation, from above, and multiculturalism (Ryan 2010), from below, gains in currency. Of particular relevance was the implication of the end of the Cold War in terms of control over out-migration. The end of the ban on exit placed the burden of migration control onto Western states' shoulders, while leading to fears over uncontrollable migration flows (which did not materialize however). In the Global South, the shortcomings of the postcolonial developmentalist agenda were becoming increasingly obvious in a context of rising local and global inequalities, in turn leading to fears about departures towards more prosperous northern and western regions.

Social sciences reacted to this context by discussing states' capacity to regulate and control migration in a globalised world (Guiraudon & Joppke, 2001; Sassen, 2015). This literature included in-depth discussions on the compatibility between welfare regimes and migration, as well as on the making of migration policies and the trade-offs involved in migration decision making processes, on the efficacy of border and development policies in controlling migration etc. In 1986, already, Gary Freeman wrote that “the openness of national economies poses enormous challenges to the viability and character of welfare states” (1986: 54). This led to a perception of migration as a threat to social cohesion - an issue all the more acute in a context of market-based reforms and welfare state retrenchment.

Crisis-rhetoric also found an echo in some of the most influential ideologies of the time, such as neo-conservative theories depicting migrants as coming from
different and incompatible civilisations. As Huntington’s idea of a “clash of civilisations” gained traction within and beyond academic circles, the (Christian) West was described as opposed to the rest of the world, which represents a form of absolute otherness. These discourses gain in currency at a time when the historical counter-point of a certain political imagination of the West, the Soviet Other, had collapsed and when new figures of alterity were in the making. Such representations of the world as hermetic ‘cultural’ areas emerged at a time when global connections were rising; they also responded to a certain type of post-national liberal discourse centred on the end of the national form. In this context, “migrants” became a key illustration of these critical changes: they became a symptom of the crisis, and soon turned out to themselves embody the crisis.

Migration crises and EU policies

This section now looks at the implication of the rising discourse of migration as crises in the European Union context. This growing description of human mobilities as abnormal and usually unforeseen emergencies also permeated Western European political debates: migrations are seen as threatening an established national and sovereign order, and in need of quick rectification. The quest for “migration control” is neatly tied with the narrative of sovereignty and the “monopoly” or “tyranny” of nation-states over the legitimate use of mobility within and across national borders (Noiriel, 1991; Torpey, 2000). In Europe particularly, the 1990s witnessed the emergence of a “migration policy domain” (Guiraudon, 2003) through various policy instruments, entangling different actors reconfiguring sovereignty issues at the national and European level. In a context of rising discourses and policies on migration in the European

1 Samuel Huntington strongly connected the geopolitical threats observed at the global level with localised identity and political threats represented by migrants in later work Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity published in 2004 and based on the article “The Hispanic Challenge,” in Foreign Policy, March/April 2004.
(and more broadly Western) world, migration has been associated to the notion of crisis for at least two decades. Far from remaining within the realm of ideas and debates, this contributed to shape particular political responses. In particular, these representations produced an association between migration and security both in discourses and policy-making (Bigo 2000, 2002, 2008; Bigo and Jeandesboz 2009; Bigo and Guild, 2005a, 2005b; Bigo, Jeandesboz, Ragazzi, and Bonditti, 2011; De Genova 2007; Huysmans 2000, 2006, 2011, 2014; Ilgit and Klotz, 2014; Jeandesboz, 2009, Lazaridis and Wadia 2015, Leonard, 2010, Togral 2011). The securitisation of migration led to frame “border crossers” primarily as a threat and it has characterised European policy debates around migration at least since the early 2000s (Karamanidou 2015). The rational response to migration as a security issue then amount to the deployment of all possible efforts to impede and control population movements. New border control devices were thus created (both at the EU borders and beyond through processes of externalisation of border control to non-EU countries), while legal migration channels were drastically reduced (including for people seeking protection). One of the key effects of securitisation is that migrants seeking to escape reinforced patterns of control reinforce the migration crisis and fuel further securitisation.

In the EU, the sense that migration needs to be securitised has been reflected in the process of supranationalisation of migration management frameworks. This process can be traced back to the mid-1980s with the signature of the 1985 Schengen Agreement leading to the implementation of the Schengen Area in 1995. Already at the time, there was a widespread idea according to which a zone of free movement for EU citizens (and in some cases long-term residents) could only be possible if the movement of people from outside the EU was heavily regulated. This called for a reinforcement of the external borders of the Schengen Area. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty followed, effectively launching the process of harmonisation of visa, migration and asylum policies across member-states. Interestingly, migration and asylum
already became conflated. This problematic development is highlighted at the time by human rights' groups who remind the EU and its member-states that while migration control is seen as a sovereign prerogative of the state, seeking asylum and protection is considered as a fundamental right in international conventions – one that should not be affected by changing and exclusionary migration policies.

The process of both harmonising and reinforcing migration and border control continues with the 1999 Tampere Summit where “fighting illegal migration” was a key priority.\(^2\) Already then, a 10-point plan was agreed on by member-states, with a focus on reducing migration through (1) reinforcing border control including by technology and knowledge transfer across member-states, (2) partnerships with countries of origin to prevent departures and increase readmissions and returns; and (3) fighting “organised crime, smuggling and trafficking of persons”. In other words, the policy framework and underlying logic prevailing to address migration has remained the same in essence since 1999. This is not to say that there have not been important evolutions in “border and migration management” in the EU: in particular the actors (for instance with the creation of FRONTEX, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, in 2005) and the budget (which is continuously and significantly rising e.g. from 4 billion euros in 2007-2013 to 13 in 2014-2020 and an expected 34,9 billion for 2021-2027)\(^3\) have significantly evolved. Yet these developments remain at the service of an unchanged vision of migration and its management based on fighting irregular migration and its facilitators through increased security-oriented measures and devices.

The idea that migration amounts to a crisis and that the EU is only stable if and when it manages to control, and as much as possible refrain, migration has thus been at the heart of European immigration management for almost three

\(^2\) Source: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/tam_en.htm?textMode=on

decades. In turn the association has become so normalised that regardless of numbers, statistics and scientific proofs, the idea that a migration crisis is ongoing or imminent remains. The case of France in 2015 is interesting in this respect considering the country received only 6% of all new asylum applications in Europe, and yet considered itself as equally involved as the crisis as neighbouring Germany, where over a third of all new applications were filed (Eurostat, 2016). This reveals not only the normalisation of crisis narratives, but also their elasticity and the way in which they can upscaled and extended rather easily. The case of Hungary is also interesting in this respect: while the country has seen very large number of transiting migrants in 2015, its extremely restrictive immigration and border policies, including the building of border fences, have led to a drastic reduction of the numbers of asylum applications which plummeted with less than 300 people receiving refugee status in the country in 2017. Yet, the “migration crisis” has become, as per Orban’s own words, “the number one issue in the country” and has become an un-mistake feature of all public debates, electoral campaigns and political speeches. Although the situation on the ground is in no way comparable to a “crisis”, the discourse retains its currency and public opinion around migration has seriously deteriorated over the last few years. The next sections provide further evidence of the way in which the discourse of migration as crisis has generalised over the last decade, shifting from the representation of localised situations of crises to the generic idea of “Europe’s migration crisis”.

European migration crises: genealogy of a generic migration crisis

This section empirically documents three well-identified migration crises that took place in Europe and its immediate peripheries and highlights the emergence of a generic “migration crisis” in the 2010s. These three episodes are not the only occurrences of increased migration flows towards Europe that have occurred in recent decades, yet they are chosen in order to illustrate the

4 The notion of Europe’s periphery is of course changing across time, and expands with EU enlargement.
process through which the crisis narrative grew into a generalised notion. From a series of localised crises seen as humanitarian, sanitary or security emergencies in the 1990s and 2000s, the crisis discourse became a multi-sited and generic representation of a migration or migrant crisis. The first situation dates back from the mid to late nineties, when the surroundings of the French town of Calais on the shore of the Channel leading to the UK became the stage for both a local and Franco-British political crisis anchored on the shores of the channel at the entrance of the so-called “Eurotunnel.” In front of increasingly large number of people (many from Kosovo) stranded in the vicinity of the port of Calais and hoping to reach the UK, the French government opened a reception centre administered by the Red Cross in Sangatte in 1999, which was closed in 2002 under pressure from the British Prime Minister of the time David Blunkett. The closure of the reception centre led migrants to relocate in makeshift settlements in the surroundings, leading to the emergence of the infamous “Calais Jungle”. While the representation of a refugee or migration crisis already featured in the media coverage of the time, the rhetoric was far from hegemonic, as illustrated in an analysis of the media coverage of the situation between 2002 and 2004 (Article 19, n.d.). The “Jungle” has since been dismantled several times, most recently in 2016, yet the “crisis” in Calais remains endemic and inflammatory for both local and international politics. It serves as a cornerstone of the migration and asylum debates in France and a fixation point for migration diplomacy between the UK and the EU (notably in the context of the Brexit campaign of 2016), affecting both domestic and regional politics. It also features as a key image of humanitarian emergencies on EU grounds with hundreds of people living in the woods and facing regular brutality at the hands of the police, the confiscation of their tents and sleeping bags and tension between NGOs

5 A few examples of representations of the Calais and Sangatte situation as crisis in key media outlets can be found on world media outlet like CNN in 2011. See URL:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1988627.stm;
involved locally, municipalities and national governments around normative and pragmatic stakes of the “crisis."

The second date from the mid-2000s, when crisis discourse starts to describe flows of north African and Sub Saharan immigrants towards Spain, first through the Canary Islands then to the Spanish enclaves in Morocco of Ceuta and Melilla. In 2006, thousands of people reached Europe via the islands off the coast of Western Sahara, while hundreds died in shipwrecks. A “crisis meeting” is then called by Spain in the context of the October 2006 EU Summit. Already at the time, the spectacular failure of European policies that aimed at closing borders and turning Europe into a “fortress” as an echo to war-torn Europe of the 1940s, were denounced by left-leaning political parties within the EU parliament and right-based Civil Society Organisations (CSO) who asked for more stable routes into Europe and effective reception infrastructure for migrants. But European member-states rather responded with Operation Hera in 2006, coordinated by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (FRONTEX) created just a year before. It aimed at stopping irregular migration from Western Sahara and was considered opaque and unaccountable by human rights CSOs.

Simultaneously, the situation deteriorated in Ceuta and Melilla, where in October 2005 more than 10 people were shot with real bullets by Moroccan police, armed with European-purchased weapons and tasked with controlling the border through cooperation agreements, a tool of the external dimension of migration management or “externalisation” (Lavenex, 2016). Today, over a decade later, the “crisis” is still ongoing, with regular news of migrants trying to break through the fence separating the Moroccan from the Spanish side and being routinely disbanded at best and molested by border guards and police on both sides.

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6 http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/04/spain.mainsection
7 See the resolution of the European Green https://europeangreens.eu/content/migration-crisis-canary-islands
9 See also: http://www.migreurop.org/article1241.html?lang=fr
In the early 2010s, the third manifestation of the migration crisis moved to southern Italy and most notably the island of Lampedusa, which has by now become a symbol of the ongoing tragedy of migrants in the Central Mediterranean. Before a major shipwreck in the Spring 2015, the capsize of a boat off the coast of the island on 3 October 2013 led to over 360 deaths and to the launching of an extended operation of search and rescue (SAR) by the Italian government. Several years later, boats continue to sink or capsize, people die at sea and operations carried out by NGOs face the increased criminalisation of SAR operations.

This most recent crisis, the one that is most central in MAGYC investigation, soon became multi-sited and echoed in Eastern Mediterranean or Aegean Sea towards the Greek shores and across the borders of Balkan states. It connected the images of overcrowded ships in the central Mediterranean with waves of border crossers across land. As such, this last instance, although strongly anchored in images of Mediterranean Sea crossings, and then of Balkan land routes, acquired a more general dimension and the phrases “migrant crisis” or “migration crisis” or “refugee crisis” or “asylum crisis” became widely used in the media, in political discourses and, with an expected time-lag, in academic debates. This last instance is therefore the first one that acquired a full generic status across actors: both policy makers, media, academic have endorsed, albeit with critical stance, the terminology.

If one compares the evolution of terminology with actual migration dynamics, these different moments highlight at least two well-known characteristics of recent migration flows to Europe. First, they illustrate the impact of political, economic and humanitarian crises in regions neighbouring Europe. From that perspective, a ‘migration crisis’ stems, in an almost tautological way, from a crisis in neighbouring sending countries, such as wars, political instability, environmental pressure, poverty and economic downturns. All these factors can lead to forced departures and exiles and global data make clear that refugees and displaced people are overwhelmingly located next to their country of origin. Crises happening in the neighbourhood of Europe are bound
to spill over from their immediate surroundings and impact European borders and member states. As a consequence of EU geographical expansion Eastward, the Balkans wars became neighbouring crises to Western Europe in the 1990s, just like Syria in 2011.

Second, these different moments illustrate the volatility of migration routes. As migration research has made clear, anti-immigration policies deployed against irregular border-crossing either at the border or in third countries of transit or circulation do not stop migration flows, but displace them and lead to the emergence of new routes (Czaika & de Haas, 2013; Dustmann, Frattini, & Preston, 2013; Fitzgerald, Leblang, & Teets, 2014; Haas et al., 2019; Helbling & Leblang, 2019). In this sense, crises inevitably move from one point of EU borders to another across time.

However, while all the above-mentioned moments share common features that evoke a crisis, it is worth noting that phrases associating crisis with “migration/migrant” or even “refugee/asylum” were not used before 2011. Some sudden large inflows of refugees or migrants were not termed migration or refugee crises and did not even lead to specific media frenzy. For instance, the flight of Yugoslav refugees during the Balkan wars in the nineties was of similar (or even higher) statistical relevance, but was not apprehended as a crisis. Similarly, the return of ethnic German nationals after German reunification was never portrayed as a crisis (Perron & Bazin 2018). The same applies to the current exodus of Ukrainian nationals towards Poland and other countries of Eastern and Central Europe (including Germany). In the case of Sub-Saharan migration to Morocco and Spain in the 2000s, the notion of ‘crisis’ was hardly used.

The emergence of a generic “migration crisis”

As mentioned above, the emergence of what we call here a generic migration crisis in various types of discourses is made clear by the salience of the words “migration crisis” and its epigones. Using exploratory analysis on media discourses, we find that the press only started to talk about migration
crisis in generic terms in the 2010s. In the French press for instance, the main
newspapers in the early 1990s and in the 2000s mostly talked about “Sangatte”
or “Calais” and terms related to the vernacular translation of the asylum inflows
through France towards the UK. The terms remained salient during the most
recent sequence as Calais (and later the small neighbouring city of
Grande Synthe) continue
to host informal camps or “jungles” of asylum seekers
looking for opportunities to
cross the Channel towards the UK.

We showed that three
cameos described earlier
are embedded in three different sites of various scales: Calais, the Spanish-
Moroccan borders and -initially at least- the central Mediterranean and its
Italian islands. The terms echoed in the French press for instance (see graph 1)
offer powerfully suggestive illustrations of how migration crises are portrayed
and constructed as cameos of localised problems. Rather than a state of
permanent crisis described by Weiner and connected to integration and
diversity issues in host societies, they epitomised the highly theatrical dimension
of this first type of migration crises as singular but recurring events or episodes
of a longer history. But in the 2010s, a shift occurred towards the generic use of
“migration crisis” as an overall framework to comprehend, describe and
manage migration and asylum flows.

In the same French newspapers, phrases connecting “migrant, migration,
refugiés, asile” and ‘crisis’ only became the main discursive framework to
categorise migration events in 2014, at the time of Syrian migration to Europe.
As shown in graph 2, the term “migration crisis” was not used in the early 1990s
and 2000s. In other words, rather than merely describing migration dynamics,
discourses centred on the notion of crisis interpret them and operate as filters along various lines. Such discourses selectively identify certain episodes and moments across time and space; in so doing, they convert or translate migration dynamics into migration crises by (re)phrasing, (re)framing, (re)formulating and potentially distorting observable phenomenon. Both operations of selection and translation are crucial to understand the social production of crisis discourses. The purpose of Working Package 3 (WP3) is not solely to perform discourse analysis but precisely to assess and document the interplay between migration dynamics and crisis discourses, with a particular (but not exclusive) focus on the most recent migration crisis, namely that of 2015 and beyond in Europe. WP3 also proposes alternative analytical frameworks to think through and study the construction of migration crisis as categories of power, representations and resources for mobilisation and action. In what follows, this framework paper further documents some of the key themes and questions pertaining to the analysis of migration crises as a way to chart the WP3 research agenda.

**Exploring crisis narratives since 2015: semantics, framing and controversies**

This section discusses the uses of the notion of “migration crisis” in Europe since 2015 and interrogates the different meanings attached to the expression as it becomes mobilised by a growing range of actors, including states and the EU,
political parties, but also media outlets and civil society groups. It argues that while the perception of a “crisis” was broadly shared, its nature and causes became the subjects of heated debates. This plurality of meanings attached to the notion of crisis encourages us to study crisis discourse as a changing signifier, which requires contextualisation and explanation.

The recent migration crisis in/of Europe started in April 2015, when yet another tragic shipwreck in the Central Mediterranean led to the death at sea of 850 migrants. The following day, on 20 April 2015, a special meeting of Interior and Foreign Affairs Ministers of the member-states was held in Luxembourg to design an emergency action plan. On April 23, the European Council called a meeting to adopt measures to respond to the “crisis”. Over the following months, relentless boat capsizes in the Central Mediterranean resulted in increasing migrant deaths at sea and in a growing sense of crisis. As explained below, the immediate response by the EU and its member-states mainly centred around a reinforcement of control.

As the Central Mediterranean became more heavily controlled, movement partly redirected towards the so-called Balkan route, taking people from Turkey to the Greek Aegean islands and through the western Balkans into Central Europe and beyond. The Balkan route emerged in the public discourse as a new epicentre of the ongoing crisis, in particular as it became the stage of new tragedies. On 27 August 2015, an abandoned refrigerated truck containing the bodies of 71 migrants was found in Austria, near the border with Hungary. Only a few days later, on 2 September 2015, the photo of the corpse of a drowned three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, on a Turkish beach quickly spread across social and mass media, triggering compassion and indignation in important segments of the European public. By then, the notion that Europe as a whole was engulfed in a migration crisis had become omnipresent, not only in the political debate but also in the mass media and on social media platforms.

However, the consensus around the experience of a crisis becomes complexified as soon as the crisis requires definition and specification. Indeed,
in the months following the naming of the crisis, a battle of qualification ensued: is the crisis that of migrants or that of refugees? Is it a political crisis of the European project and its bordering attempts, or perhaps a humanitarian crisis affecting primarily people on the move? Does the crisis point mainly to the lack of efficiency of the European Union and its member-states at implementing security measures and border control devices, or does it highlight a crisis of solidarity between Europe and its outside, and across member-states themselves?

Refugee vs migrant in editorial disputes, policy discourses and academic debates

A striking manifestation of such disputes was the editorial disagreement opposing BBC News to Al Jazeera English in 2015 over whether to qualify the crisis as one of migrants or rather one of refugees. This debate was not confined to the media sphere, and questions around the best way to describe the protagonists of the crisis also animated policy debates and scholarly discussions, as discussed below. Yet the opposing positions defended by each broadcaster constitute an important illustration of the ways this debate unfolded, and the implications that came with it.

In the summer of 2015, at the peak of the “crisis”, all articles on the topic of migration published on BBC News started appearing with the following disclaimer:

A note on terminology: The BBC uses the term migrant to refer to all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum. This group includes people fleeing war-torn countries such as Syria, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives, who governments are likely to rule are economic migrants.

A few weeks later, in response, news outlet Al Jazeera English (AJE) took a different editorial decision. Referring to migration paths across the Central
Mediterranean, in August 2015, online editor Barry Malone (2015) explained that,

For reasons of accuracy, the director of news at Al Jazeera English, Salah Negm, has decided that we will no longer use the word migrant in this context. We will instead, where appropriate, say refugee.

The decision taken by AJE was justified not only insofar as “refugee crisis” would be a more accurate qualifier from a descriptive perspective, but also because of the changing meanings and moral implications associated with the terms under discussion (Blanchard & Rodier, 2016). In his editorial, Malone (2015) explained that “the umbrella term migrant is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean. It has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative”. Conversely, BBC News seems to withdraw its right to name and categorise mobility until the state, seen as the appropriate and qualified authority to do so, has emitted its judgment. The British broadcaster argues that relevant state authorities are expected to establish the identity of the protagonists of migration events of 2015, and that it is therefore impossible to qualify the crisis in terms other than generic.

This debate about the qualification of the crisis and the appropriate denomination of people on the move is in reality highly political insofar as it echoes the distinction on which the overall European architecture of migration management and in particular the governance of irregular flows has been built, namely that between “economic migrants” and “refugees”. Within this system, the former are seen as undesirable and need to be promptly returned to countries outside European territory, while the latter, after being recognised as such through arduous asylum procedures, are granted the right to stay. Interestingly, while AJE articulates its editorial decision as a gesture of compassion and solidarity towards people on the move, it has been criticised by migrants’ rights groups. Critics argue that AJE’s position reinforces this dichotomic view of mobilities, and the idea according to which people can be neatly categorised as either “migrants” or “refugees”. In doing so, it
attributes a higher moral validity to refugee mobilities and fails to challenge stereotypes surrounding other forms of mobility. Judith Vonberg from the British NGO Migrants’ Rights’ Network for instance argues that “[b]y rejecting the term “migrants”, Al Jazeera gives credence to the illiberal voices telling us that migrants are not worthy of our compassion” (Vonberg 2015).

This brief overview of one of the most striking illustrations of the debate around whether the crisis pertained to migrants and refugees already indicates the political nature of the discussion. Disputes over the qualification of the crisis are not merely terminological disagreements or divergences about representing reality accurately: they already anticipate the ways in which different ways of describing this reality will produce different material responses. In this sense, the battle over words has implications beyond the realm of representation, and is truly about shaping answers. When right-wing formations and anti-migrant parties describe all people on the move as motivated by exclusively economic reasons, they are already calling for their push back from the territory of Europe (Perraudin, 2015). Such discourses can tap into longer-term policy debates about the distinction between migrants and refugees. In this sense, the representations animating crisis representations and debates are not new, they rather seem to be exacerbation of already existing social and cognitive categories. The “crisis” in some sense represents a moment of intensification of ongoing tensions and contradictions. This is also visible in another terminological debate that characterise discussion of the 2015 crisis.

Migrants or refugees in migration governance and academic debates

The distinction between forced and voluntary migrants, between humanitarian and economic mobility historically works as a sectoral boundary between migration and asylum policies. It does so despite the empirical

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10 This section is adapted from a communication by Thiollet, H. (2019) “Mixed Migration from the Horn of Africa to the Mediterranean: Discussing the Multilateral Politics of Migrant Labelling,” within the panel “The Global Refugee Crisis: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions” at the 115th Annual Meeting of the American Political Sciences Association, Washington DC USA from Aug 30 to Sept 2 2019
incongruity of such clear-cut dichotomy. It constitutes the corner stone of contemporary migration policies at the national and multilateral level. It breeds two realms and policy-making, and allocate responsibilities to specific agencies and agents as illustrated in recent researched conducted on mixed migration in multilateral governance.

In the discourses of multilateral organisations, the distinction seeks to create legal and operational sanctuaries, and crafts a division of labour among international organisations and within national governments and administrations, as illustrated by the title of “The UN migration organisation” granted to the IOM in 2016 opposed to the UNHCR, “the UN refugee agency.” But these boundaries are far from rigid: organisations’ mandates and consistencies evolve along the lines of multilateral politics. The IOM’s website thus claims “to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.” In practice, boundaries are even more blurred in times of crises: these open moments and venues of reconfigurations for policy domains. These reconfigurations are organized as part of organisations’ strategies to produce and disseminate data and information about migration: by generating information on the numbers of migrants and their characteristics (gender, nationality, status, age etc.) they make and unmake migration as crisis. The labelling of migration as crisis migration (refugee flows) or a migration crisis (of both irregular migrants and asylum seekers) is crucial to the emergence of migrations crises which in turn, are crucial to the legitimization of policies, fundings and programs.

Academic discourses have also long claimed that the dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration is irrelevant. Researchers explain that both belong to a “continuum of experiences” (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018; Fussel, 2012; Richmond, 1994). Migration are thus “mixed”, because of the mixed nature of “causes” or “motivations” for mobility and the de facto heterogeneity of population flows. Lines are difficult if not impossible to draw both within the drivers of mobility and among travelers (Carling & Collins, 2018) which directly contradicts the foundation of “migration management” which is grounded in
operations of labelling and triage between “forced” and “economic” migrants. The “stickiness” (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018) of the distinction is not only policy driven. It is also supported by concerns within academia to avoid undermining the fragile rights to protection that refugees enjoy under the global refugee regime. The normative and discursive distinction between migrants and refugees has served from the 1950s onwards as a ground for “at least” protecting the latter at the expenses of the former (Long, 2013). Scholars have tried to avoid categorizing mobile people and people “on the move.” They introduced alternative terminologies such as “asylum migration” (Koser & Van Hear, 2003), “crisis migration” (S. Martin, Weerasinghe, & Taylor, 2013) or “survival migration” (Betts, 2013b, p. 4). The “migration-displacement nexus” was thus coined a “new concept intended to capture the complex and dynamic interactions between voluntary and forced migration, both internally and internationally” (Koser & Martin, 2011) allowing to overcome the epistemological deadlocks and bypass the political dangers of labeling. But the “categorical fetishism” that distinguishes migrants from refugees has proven quite resilient both in policy and in scientific discourses. It resurfaced with more political momentum in times of “migration crisis” as in Europe in 2015 (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Both in academic and policy discourses, the lines between categories were organised as battle fronts in a highly politicised arena to discard migrants claims or protect refugees' rights (Thiollet 2019).

Security vs humanitarian: political framing to define policy intervention

The oscillation between calling the crisis one of refugees or migrants mirrors another debate around the nature and response to the crisis: that opposing a security approach to the events to those evoking a humanitarian reading (Panebianco, 2017). For the former, the crisis is seen as a crisis of the EU and its

11 Similar debates have happened within “refugee studies” or “forced migration studies” (Chimni, 2008). Critical histories of refugeeism (Chimni, 1998) have questioned the role of knowledge production or “refugee studies” in creating a “myth of difference” between refugees in the North and in the South legitimizing a differential legal treatment of asylum seekers in both contexts and the “solutions” offered by the UNHCR to refugees, between voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration (Chimni, 2004).
member-states’ ability to control their border and govern human mobility. This reading has itself two variations: on the one hand, some people call for further reinforcement of the border control measures taken by the EU to stop irregular migration, while on the other hand a diverging analysis sees the crisis as evidence of the inadequacy of the European approach to mobility and calls for a shift in paradigm. In both cases, the crisis is seen as a political one: for those advocating further securitising, the crisis represented by migration is translated into a broader yet disaster, one of an existentialist nature, threatening “European culture and way of life”. As mentioned, this portrayal is not new (Huysmans, 2000; Bigo, 2002; Buonfino, 2004) yet it finds renewed fuel with the discourse of crisis (Murray & Longo, 2018). In turn, this depiction of migration as menace has been mobilised by right-wing formations in order to call for further exclusion of people trying to reach Europe: far right and nationalist groups have made electoral gains in many EU countries over the last decade by promising to crack down on migration, to “properly close” borders and to “effectively end the crisis” (see Toscano, 2015; Lazaridis and Konsta, 2015; Lazaridis and Tsagkroni, 2015, 2016 for case studies of the intersection of far-right politics and immigration in Italy, Greece, the UK, and Scandinavian countries). This can be seen for instance, in the case of former Italian Deputy Prime Minister Salvini, PM Orban in Hungary, Czech President Zeman, among others.

Among those supporting a political reading of the crisis, there feature also many scholars and rights’ groups who highlight the failure of the existing EU migration management framework and its security-oriented approach. In those analyses, the crisis was not only predictable, it was in fact a product of these very policies, which force people towards illegal and dangerous routes (Andersson, 2017; Cornelius, Martin & Hollifield, 1994; Blanchard et Rodier, 2016; Lendaro, Rodier & Vertongen, 2019; Collyer and King, 2016, but also Castles as

13 See also Open Democracy (2012) dossier on “Security and the Far Right”.

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early as 2004). In this approach to the crisis, important elements are highlighted. The first one concerns the gap between migration research and policy (Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz and Crawley, 2019; Boswell, Geddes, and Scholton, 2011; Sutcliffe and Court, 2005; Ruhs, Tamas and Palme, 2019). This observation concerns the fact that a wide range of scholarly (Andreas and Snyder, 2000; Bigo and Guild, 2005a; Andersson, 2016) and civil society studies (Amnesty International, 2014; PICUM, 2019; Migreurop, 2016) have long shed light on the shortcomings and counterproductive implications of the European approach to migration and border control. In spite of the availability of these investigations, and the fact some of them are paid through European funds, their impact on policy has been minimal. In other words, critical scholars highlight the fact that not only governing authorities at the national and European levels could have anticipated the “crisis”, but also their own complicity in its emergence through their reproduction of ineffective and often dangerous policies focused exclusively on control (Andersson, 2016; Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz and Crawley, 2019; Crawley and Blitz, 2019; Bojadžijev & Mezzadra, 2015; Lendaro, Rodier & Vertongen, 2019, Morice, 2019; Rajaram, 2015). Authors have also connected counterproductive and humanely damaging migration policies with the rise of powerful interests: they argue that controlling borders has become a lucrative field for some actors who have thereby developed incentives to push for a continuation and intensification of security-oriented practices at the border (Andersson, 2016; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen, 2013, Rodier, 2012). This development has been coined the “illegality industry” by Ruben Andersson (2016) and the “business of xenophobia” by Claire Rodier (2012), who both show how migration control devices and the production of migrant illegality have become a field of profit for the security industry. In this perspective, the framing of migration towards Europe as a security-related crisis can play a key role in the shaping of policy responses that in turn benefit particular actors.

Critical scholars have also highlighted another type of gap concerning migration policies, best known, in the formulation of Cornelius et al. (1994), as
“the gap hypothesis”. The main idea behind the gap hypothesis is that the perception of a crisis emerges when there is too wide a disconnect between claims made by politicians and policy-makers regarding the control of migration and borders, on the one hand, and the reality on the ground, on the other. In other words: ‘the gap between the goals of national immigration policy (laws, regulations, executive actions etc.) and the actual results of policies in this area (policy outcomes) is wide and growing wider’ (Cornelius et al., 1994: 3). This hypothesis thus highlights that there are at least two variables shaping perceptions of migration: promises made by politicians and the reality of migratory movement. In turn, the gap between the two variables, which give rise to perception of “crisis” or “uncontrollable flows”, may widen if either of them intensifies. In this sense, the perception of a crisis may result from a boldening of political claims that all migration will be stopped (see Trump’s “zero-tolerance” for instance, HRW, 2018) and from dynamics internal to the political discourse, rather than from a rise in migration numbers themselves. Besides the fact that migration policies may not succeed in their goals, and thus suffer from an effectiveness deficit, there is also the fact that existing policies are not always applied or that policy-making does not in fact follow its proclaimed objectives. For instance, scholars have highlighted that the objectives presented by migration policy may in reality be unrealistic or even undesirable. This may be because migrant workers are in fact needed in a given country leading to contradictions between nationalist discourses of border control and capitalist need for labour (Cantat, 2016; Marfleet, 2016; Fysh and Wolfreys, 2003) or because certain policies and measures are not actually implemented (see De Genova and Peutz on “deportability” 2010; also Morice, 2015 on deportation and regularisation in France). For an earlier period, the 1960s, a key illustration of the gap between discourses, practices and policies can be found in the words of a former French Minister of Labour who claimed that “clandestine immigration in itself is not without benefit, for if we stuck to a strict interpretation of the rules and international agreements, we would perhaps be short of labour” (Gaspard & Servan-Schreiber : 28-29).
In other words, there is a way to speak of migration (as a problem, as a crisis) that is readily utilised by politicians, but it is not necessarily reflecting policy practices. A crisis can emerge when there is too large a difference between discourse and practice, between expectations and reality. In Europe and beyond, contemporary realities of migration are broadly disconnected from the exclusionary discourses of “closed borders” and “zero migration” formulated by many politicians who readily instrumentalise migration for short-term electoral gains. This is because the reality of the migration situation in the world, linked to a variety of complex and often interconnected factors, including changing global relations, the constant need for migrant labour as well as growing number of forcefully displaced people, tends to be overlooked in policy and political discourses which promise to stop a phenomenon that exists way beyond their control and for important structural reasons. In turn, the growing breach between what is promised and the socio-political reality of Europe comes to feed perceptions and feelings of crisis.

On the other hand, a humanitarian assessment of the situation also exists, in particular on the part of NGOs engaged in search and rescue operations at sea and in helping people on the move along migratory routes. This interpretation, which tends to qualify the political aspects of the situation, calls for immediate humanitarian action to save lives and alleviate the conditions in which migrants stranded at various stages of their journey find themselves. The operation manager of MSF, for instance argues:

The response by European governments to the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea and Libya has been a race to the very bottom. One year ago, we implored European governments to put people’s lives before politics. We pleaded for a humane response—for an end to the dehumanization of vulnerable people at sea for political gain. Yet one year on, the European response has reached deplorable new lows.14

The humanitarian crisis narrative is thus mobilised to call on governments and the EU to act “humanely” and to separate their response to the crisis from party and electoral politics. A similar rhetoric has been put forward by a range of important non-governmental actors, including the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) or Human Rights Watch, as well as political foundations such as the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Activist groups also borrow to the humanitarian and/or solidarity register: they insist on the deadly situation at the border and on moral responsibilities to provide support to people on the move.

EU member-states struggle to find a common voice. A mere few days after German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Syrian refugees would be welcome in Germany and would not face deportation to the first country of entry under the Dublin Convention, in early September 2015, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was applauding the completion of a new barbed wire fence at the country’s border with Serbia. In some cases, contradictory positionings appeared within the discourse and practices of a single member-state, like when French interior minister Laurent Fabius chastised Hungary for its ill treatment of migrants, and its lack of respect for European value, at the very same time as plans were being made for evicting the makeshift camps around Calais home at the time to around 3 000 people. At the Union level however, the official narrative tends to oscillate between both the security and the humanitarian register (Panebianco, 2017). In particular, although the adopted policies in the name of crisis have been overwhelmingly conservative, there remains a façade of care for people’s rights through the invocation of the Union’s commitment to saving lives at sea. While this is not a new tendency, the conflation between security and humanitarian aims becomes more salient in times of “crisis”, when conflicting accounts of the nature of and solution to the crisis become articulated by opposing commentators. In 2006 already, Ilkka Laitinen, then Frontex director, speaks of Operation Hera (to prevent irregular migration from West Africa to the Canary Islands) as follows:

Operation Hera stands out. By implementing preventive measures off the West African coast, Hera has almost completely stemmed the flow of irregular migration to the Canary Islands via this particularly hazardous route. As a result, hundreds if not thousands of lives have been saved. I think this has to be considered one of our most important achievements. In 2015, following the April tragedy, Fabrice Leggeri, head of Frontex, explained that the mandate of the agency was not to save lives and to pursue search and rescue operation. Commenting on an ongoing Frontex operation he explained:

Triton cannot be a search-and-rescue operation. I mean, in our operational plan, we cannot have provisions for proactive search-and-rescue action. This is not in Frontex’s mandate, and this is in my understanding not in the mandate of the European Union.

A few years later, on the front page of the agency, the same mister Leggeri boasted:

Last but not least, Frontex officers involved in search and rescue operations have helped save more than 65,000 lives in the Mediterranean since the new mandate came into effect. Fundamental rights are integrated into Frontex operations from their inception, ensuring that all those fleeing war and persecution are able to apply for international protection.

This emphasis on fundamental rights and the humanitarian mission of the agency has been mainstreamed into official communication following public outcries regarding repetitive deaths at the EU’s borders and the observation that the agency prioritised border control over human lives.

These examples show how important the dispute over the qualification of the crisis may be and how each interpretation is in turn connected to a particular conceptualisation of the social world, not only in interpretative terms (what is happening) but also in ethical terms (what is our responsibility and what we should do). In turn, this has crucial implications over the types of responses that are offered to the crisis, as will be explored below. This section has also already
pointed to an important paradox that comes to concur with Weiner’s argument: migration crisis discourses tend to feed into further migration discourses. Before exploring in more detail the mechanisms of crisis construction in Europe since the 1980s, which will be at the heart of WP3 critical conceptualisation of crisis, the document now introduces further debates that question the very notion of crisis. There have indeed been critiques to the very idea that there existed a migration crisis in Europe.

Critical narratives on the crisis: meta-narrative in migration scholarship

As shown in graph 3, the occurrence of the term “crisis” has spiked in academic literature. Scholarly debates however have adopted a critical stance on the framing of migration as crisis very early on. If the crisis rhetoric is so highly contested and possibly of little analytic value, we may then wonder why it retains such currency and recent work have attempted to “unravel” the migration crisis (Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon and Sigona, 2017). WP3 is specifically concerned with exploring possible causes for this phenomenon and interrogating the ways the “migration crisis” has been constructed over time, as a discourse that has global resonance and has become a naturalised association. This recourse to representations of migration as crisis often occurs in the absence of strong statistical data regarding the situation on the ground. This is particularly true due to the difficulty to obtain reliable data on arrivals and

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**Figure 3:** Number of academic documents including the terms "migrant crisis, refugee crisis, migration crisis, asylum crisis" in their title, abstract or keywords from 1995 to 2018 (no occurrence before 1995) in social science scientific outlets. 
Source: Scopus
border crossings, as discussed in some of the critical migration literature (Collyer and King, 2016).

In response to this interrogation, critical migration scholars have emphasised the limited number of arrivals to Europe compared to the scope of displacement in other regions of the world (Thiollet, 2013), in the Middle East itself as the broader region is a site of protracted mass displacement or enduring crisis (Fargues, 2017; IDMC, 2019) or again in proportion to the overall population of the EU (Andersson, 2017). They also proposed historical perspectives that relativize the scale of the ‘crisis’ in relation to previous episodes of migration, such as European colonialism, or European emigration to North America in the early twentieth century at a time of capitalist expansion (Menjívar et al., 2019). Even in shorter-term historical perspective, scholars have shown that current displacement episodes are not in radical discontinuity with previous trends, and have reminded us that the conflict in Syria is ‘not the first to push civilians to the borders of Europe: before it came the civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1989; the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, the civil war in Algeria in the early 1990s, and the wars that affected Iraq from 1980s onwards’ (Rigoni 2019: 130).

Other studies invite us to think crisis narratives in relation to a politics of fear (Altheide 2002; Glassner 2010) and to assess their productive and performative aspects, by reflecting on what responses become authorised when a social phenomenon is named as ‘crisis’ (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins, 2016; Cantat 2016; De Genova 2017). Another set of questions also arises when examining why some migrations are seen as ‘crisis’ while others may not (Allen et al, 2018). Migration spoken of as ‘regular’, insofar as it is organised and sanctioned by states through visas and residency permits, is generally not constructed as ‘crisis’. It thus seems that what produces the crisis is not arrivals and settlements as such, but rather their uncontrolled nature. In turn, this has led scholars to shift their gaze away from studying the mobilities that are framed as crisis, and rather towards the norm that is putatively endangered by this ‘crisis’. Finally, an important strand of scholarship, along the lines presented
above, questioned “whose crisis” this truly was (Rajaram, 2015). For Lendaro, Rodier et Vertongen (2019), the crisis in question is not that of migrants or refugees but one of the practices of welcoming, while Agustín & Jørgensen (2019) see it as a crisis of solidarity. Others yet consider the crisis as pertaining to European migration policies (Bojadžijev & Mezzadra, 2015) or to the overall European project (Cantat 2015).

In the scholarly literature, the notion of migration crisis is therefore contested and debated. MAGYC is offering to go a step further by engaging with these critiques within an examination of the crisis as a scientific object, a set of social realities that give rise to certain discourses, representations and practices that structure the social world and call for certain ways to organise or response to it. In this sense, we see “crises” as fields of enquiry that are crisscrossed by tensions and debates, and which engage a multiplicity of actors and definitions. In the next section, the paper focuses on policy actors in relation to migration crises.

Enacting the crisis: policies of crisis, crisis of policies

This representation of migration as always potentially a crisis and a danger become particularly important when we look at the way it shapes policy responses. The crisis discourse implies that something needs emergency response, and something is flawed and needs to be corrected (Lindley, 2014). In the name of getting out of the crisis, emergency interventions become legitimate. In the context of security-oriented approach to migration, these have often amounted to deploying brutal strategies of bordering and intensifying already existing practices of migrant control, detention and deportation across Europe (De Genova and Peutz, 2010; Squire, 2009; Jansen, Celikates and De Bloois, 2015; Walters, 2002). As Zolberg and Brenda already suggested in 2001: “Indeed the prevailing sense of an 'international migration crisis' has profoundly inflected the consideration of policy alternatives. In particular, it has been invoked to justify draconian to protect national borders, even at the expense of obligation” (2001:1). Other analysts have highlighted the continuity of policies through the crisis and shown that “the current crisis
management builds on pre-existing practices and enables their consolidation” (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2016) and in fact only build upon routines of policy making processes and consolidate previous trends.

Regarding the 2015 crisis, the EU response was thus path dependent of heavily security-oriented policies. A consensus emerged around the idea that the crisis was due to a deficiency in terms of border control and surveillance, as illustrated by the political answer at the European level: n April 20, the day after the shipwreck that killed 850 people, a special meeting of Interior and Foreign Affairs Ministers of the member-states is held in Luxembourg, to design an emergency action plan. On April 23, the European Council calls a meeting where it builds upon the 10 points enunciated in the action plan and brings them under three key objectives: (1) strengthening EU presence at sea through Frontex and its ongoing operations, Triton and Poseidon, which budget will be tripled for 2015 and 2016; (2) fighting traffickers who are described as the main causes of deaths as sea (in a move that tends to invisibilise both root causes of migration and the effect of journeys of European policies); (3) preventing “illegal migration flows” through an intensification of the EU’s cooperation with departure and transit countries (including Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Mali, Niger and Turkey) and through an intensification of returns (called “readmissions”). A final point regarding “reinforcing internal solidarity and responsibility” including through a voluntary pilot project regarding internal resettlement across the EU is added to the program.16

While the supranational response is focused on reinforcing border surveillance in the Central Mediterranean, the emergence of the Balkan Route on the East side of the Union leads to uncoordinated responses and to member-states responding in a chaotic manner. Faced with the mass arrival of people at its eastern border, Germany briefly suspends the Dublin Regulation and invites Syrians to enter the country to claim asylum. Yet the country is alone in this stand, as Hungary finalises fences at its southern and eastern borders on 15

Septembre, which is shortly followed by Sweden announcing new border control at its border with Denmark, which follows lead in few months later at its border with Germany. Meanwhile, Austria has introduced barbed wire fences at its border with Slovenia. By early December, a proposal that border controls might be reintroduced for two years inside the Schengen free movement area was put forward by the EU’s Luxembourg presidency. Eventually, in mid-December, in order to ‘save’ Schengen, the European Commission proposed the creation of a European Border and Coast Guard, which would inherit from and considerably extend the powers held by the previous EU border agency, Frontex. The final agreement for the creation of the new agency was signed in June 2016. Additionally, measures adopted to ‘control the crisis’ included the right for border guards and Frontex agents to use various so-called non-lethal weapons including tear gas and water cannons, as well as new enhanced ‘technical means’ such as CO2 detectors and service dogs (for more details of the ‘rapid interventions’, see Frontex Activity Report, 2015). Not only does this series of measures evidence the violence that can become authorised through discourses and dispositifs of crisis, it also exemplifies an issue long identified by social scientists when they assess border and migration policies, namely their reactive and, at best, palliative nature. In other words, besides the fact that European responses to mobilities have been brutal and security-oriented as discussed below, national and European authorities have also merely adjusted to events in an often-disparate manner, and have proven unable to imagine and implement coherent policies (Lacroix 2016). Carrera, Santos Vara and Strik (2019) also show how the disparate and urgent actions deployed in the name of the crisis tend to overlook the rule of law and checks and balances. They argue that the ‘crisis labelling’ has in fact allowed for the continuation and intensification of already existing mechanisms and logics of EU cooperation focused on security, in ways that tend to move away from the decision-making rules and institutional principles of earlier European Treaty and have weakened fundamental rights for migrants.
Thereby, putting aside the issue of which policies may provide a better response to mobilities, what we see is that the temporality of the crisis approach seems to impede the very development of long-term, systemic policy measures that could consider root causes rather than immediate effects. As noted by MacAdams, approaching a situation as a crisis ‘risks side-lining everyday systemic issues such as poverty, vulnerability and environmental fragility (...) and overlooking relevant legal frameworks, such as human rights law’ (2014: 30). Crisis representations, because they isolate and de-historicise the social situations they pretend to describe, do not account for entrenched inequalities and social hierarchies. Moreover, because they justify the adoption of quick and emergency measures, they represent an opportunity for various actors to push forward their agendas and interests (Andersson, 2016; Carrera et al, 2019; Blockmans, 2016). They tend thereby to reproduce unequal power relations and, in this sense, they may already prepare the next ‘crisis’ by cementing the very circumstances that produce situations seen as crises in the first place.

**Concluding remarks and research agenda**

The repetitive naming of the crisis has thus a history and has developed in a particular context. By illuminating the steps through which the association between migration and crisis has been built, WP3 allows not only a critical assessment of crisis narrative, it also encourages us to deconstruct mainstream representations and to think of migration beyond crisis. It evidences of looping effects between policies that are produced to respond to perceptions of a migration crisis, and the recurrence of situations seen as amounting to migration crises. In turn, WP3 will be concerned with ways to step out of this crisis loop by deconstructing the ways crises are built and challenging the naturalised and normalised forms they have gained in recent decades. The deliverables leading to this consolidated model will comprise of a series of working papers and articles on the definition, narratives and perceptions of migration 'crisis' focusing on the 2010 European migration crisis. In addition, an
D3.1. Working Paper

Open access timelines and mapping of the revolution and war in Syria (2011-2017) based on narratives (videos, images, testimonies) will be provided.

D3.1 : Production of a research/policy document on the definition of a ‘migration crisis’ [12]
D3.2 : Special issue of a journal on the topic Narratives of the migration crisis [24]
D3.3 : Working paper on the construction of the crisis-invasion discourse by different stakeholders in Italy [6]
D3.4 : Policy Brief on the asylum management process of hotspots in Southern Italy [8]
D3.5 : Two conference papers on the crisis narrative of the asylum emergency in Italy, and the multiplicity of actors involved in the hotspot governance approach in Italy [14]
D3.6 : One peer review paper will be written on the humanitarian/securitization contrast of discourses and control practices in Italian hotspots [18]
D3.7 : Working Paper on the Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Parliamentary Debates [24]
D3.8 : Open access timelines and mapping of the revolution and war in Syria (2011-2017) based on narratives (videos, images, testimonies) from below [48]
References

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