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The Vulnerability of Young Refugees Living in Reception Centres in Luxembourg: An Overview of Conditions and Experiences across Subjective Temporal Imaginaries

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Abstract: Vulnerability has become a key concept in discourses and policies on international protection and reception of refugees. In this context, the notion has been described as a tool to provide special provisions to groups at higher risk or one to perpetuate political agendas within increasingly hostile reception systems. However, vulnerability as an analytical concept has received less attention, with both policymakers and scholars often employing different conceptualisations of vulnerability or treating it as a self-explanatory condition. Building on a previous conceptual elaboration, this paper sets out to apply an understanding of vulnerability as multi-layered, dynamic and embedded in a study of the lived experiences of a group of potentially 'vulnerable' migrants, based on 'fixed' contextual criteria. Drawing from in-depth interviews with young adults who obtained refugee status in Luxembourg but still live in 'temporary' reception centres, this paper provides a wide analytical overview of the conditions of vulnerability encountered by this specific group of migrants, in the process of building their lives in a new country. Following the participants' subjective temporal imaginaries of past, present and future, the analysis highlights and problematises conditions of structural, situational and experiential vulnerability emerging from their accounts and experiences, and discusses their possible implications.

Keywords: vulnerability; refugees; time; reception system; Luxembourg

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1. Introduction

Vulnerability has become a key concept in discourses, legislation and policies on international protection and reception of refugees (Freedman 2019; Smith and Waite 2019; Sözer 2019, 2020). Assessing and addressing vulnerability among forced migrants to provide special provisions and guarantees to 'vulnerable refugees' is emerging as an essential component of the international protection procedure and relative legislation at the international (i.e., UNCHR)[1] and EU level (i.e., EU Directives on asylum procedures and on reception conditions)[2] (Freedman 2019; Leboeuf 2022). Within this system, the notion of vulnerability is then conceived as a tool to safeguard services and rights of forced migrants at higher risk of danger (Flegar 2018; Pétin 2016).

However, some scholars have problematised the implementation of this notion in discourses and policies around the movement of refugees, highlighting, for example, how vulnerability is deployed in public and political discourses to serve narratives of deservingness within an increasingly hostile reception system and ever-shrinking humanitarian aid (Grove and Zwi 2006; Heidbrink 2020; Mesarič and Vacchelli 2021; Sözer 2019; Turner 2019). Besides these critical reflections on the (mis)uses of vulnerability in humanitarian and protection frameworks, the exploration and definition of vulnerability as an analytical concept has received less attention, with both policymakers and scholars often treating

this notion as a self-explanatory condition (K. Brown et al. 2017; Hruschka and Leboeuf 2019). Yet, when taking a closer look, it becomes clear that different conceptualisations of vulnerability are employed (sometimes implicitly) in scientific literature and policies: vulnerability is sometimes understood and operationalised as the result of an innate trait of a person or group, as the consequence of a particular situation or as the product of a structural system (Casadei 2018; Flegar 2018).

Starting from these observations, authors of this article elaborated in a previous contribution (Gilodi et al. 2022) a new conceptual model for the understanding and study of vulnerability in the context of migration and integration, which proposed to embrace rather than ignore its conceptual and political complexities. By understanding vulnerability in this context as a multi-layered, dynamic and embedded concept, it was argued that, as an analytical category, this notion could lead to new insights into the processes, systems and experiences related to migration and integration (Gilodi et al. 2022).

Building on this conceptual work, the current paper sets out to analyse the lived experiences of a group of migrants settling in a new country through the lens of vulnerability. Specifically, in this study, the conceptual model of vulnerability (Gilodi et al. 2022) will be applied to empirical data collected among a group of individuals who, based on 'fixed' contextual criteria, may be described as vulnerable, in an attempt to answer the following research question:

How can vulnerability, understood as an embedded, multi-layered and dynamic analytical concept, help us understand the lived experiences of young refugees living in reception centres in Luxembourg?

We propose to answer this question by providing an embedded analysis of the conditions of vulnerability encountered by this specific group of migrants, who are in the process of building their lives in Luxembourg. Our analysis starts from the individual and unique experiences and accounts of young refugees living in a particularly precarious or ambivalent position, having obtained their refugee status but still living in 'temporary' reception facilities. Yet, following the model, these experiences are situated in the specific socio-political system of Luxembourg, accounting for the material, structural and relational constraints affecting the lives of our participants, while simultaneously examining how each person subjectively interprets and reacts to such conditions. Finally, the analysis accounts for temporality by reflecting on how vulnerability is interlinked with individuals' imaginative construction of their past experiences, present conditions and future outlooks.

The main goal of the current study is to empirically assess how vulnerability as an analytical concept can promote our understanding of the lived experiences of a potentially vulnerable migrant group. In so doing, we aim to contribute to broader scientific debates in several ways. First, we want to contribute to the field of reflexive migration studies by acknowledging the complexities and power dynamics hidden behind the vulnerability label and problematising the boundaries of this notion as a rhetorical instrument and as an analytical category. Second, we wish to contribute to the field of refugee and integration studies, by giving a comprehensive and embedded overview of different conditions of vulnerability of a specific group of young refugees in the process of settling into a new country of residence. Similarly, this analysis will also provide scientific evidence on the challenges, needs and wishes of this specific group of migrants living in Luxembourg which may contribute to the development of local reception and integration policies. Finally, the paper intends to contribute to the literature on migration studies focusing on temporalities, by showing how an analysis of subjective temporal imaginaries may contribute to our understanding of vulnerability in the context of migration.

2. Vulnerability as an Analytical Concept for the Study of Migration

The current paper builds on the theoretical analysis and conceptual elaboration outlined in a previous contribution (Gilodi et al. 2022), proposing a new, multilevel conceptual model for the study and understanding of vulnerability in the context of migration.

A diverse range of scientific disciplines has engaged with the notion of vulnerability, producing a variety of definitions and understandings, which have, at times, been employed for the study of the processes of migration and adaptation of migrants and refugees (Alwang et al. 2001; Gilodi et al. 2022; Virokannas et al. 2020). For example, in the field of psychology, vulnerability is often defined as the higher risk of certain individuals and groups to be exposed and negatively affected by adverse events, and discussed in relation to the concept of resilience, which, in turn, is understood as the capacity of individuals to withstand such events (Daud et al. 2008; Masten 2014; Spini et al. 2013; Yaylaci 2018). A vast corpus of literature in this field has been devoted to the study of vulnerability and resilience among migrant populations, and particularly young refugees, contributing, for example, to the identification of stressors and protective factors which may affect their development and life courses (Bradby et al. 2019; Pieloch et al. 2016; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2018).

Yet, as it has been previously shown (Gilodi et al. 2022), in the study and governance of migration the implementation of traditional definitions of vulnerability, such as the one just described, may have (un)intended negative consequences, serving a patronizing rhetoric of refugee reception, depicting refugees as powerless and deficient individuals in need of the charity of powerful (western and white) benefactors (Bradby et al. 2019; Heidbrink 2020; Sözer 2020; Turner 2019). As such, vulnerability may contribute to perpetuate historical systems of power inequalities and promote the discrimination, stigmatization, exclusion, disempowerment and even oppression of people with a refugee background, categorized as vulnerable (Gilodi et al. 2022).

Being critically aware of such complexities, our conceptualisation of vulnerability starts from the assumption that every individual is vulnerable for the simple reason that, as humans, we each possess a physical body (and mind) that may be injured (Fineman 2008). However, different individuals and groups may be in different conditions of vulnerability (Cole 2016), more or less fixed or stable, originating and occurring at different levels of the specific context in which an individual operates (Casadei 2018). Thus, we first understand vulnerability as **embedded** or as the product of a specific and contingent combination of factors and conditions in a certain historical time and part of the individual life course, and in a certain institutional and geo-political context (which may be transnational in nature). Drawing from an ecological perspective, we conceive individuals and groups as situated in a system of nested structures which affect their lives and development through their interaction (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Examining individuals in relation to their environment is especially important during ecological transitions such as migration, when the effect of environmental events on individual development is more prominent (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Thus, vulnerability in the context of migration is produced and reproduced at different levels or in different interconnected structures forming the ecological environment in which each individual is embedded and is developing.

In this complex system of interactions, a person or group may be, simultaneously or at different points in the life course, in a condition of vulnerability related to different aspects of their environment, and thus vulnerability should be understood as a **multi-layered** concept. Vulnerability may originate at the macro level or in the economic, social and legal systems that promote unequal distribution of power and resources, which impact disproportionally certain groups in society, such as migrant communities (Quesada et al. 2011). Limited opportunities across different life domains (such as education and the labour market), institutionalised systems of discrimination as well as the corpus of migration laws and policies that (by design) regulate (and control) people on the move can contribute to the *structural vulnerability* of migrants (Heidbrink 2020; Szkupinski Quiroga et al. 2014). These structural constraints are not construed, in a deterministic lens, as insurmountable obstacles precluding any form of personal development, but we argue that their impact on the lives of migrants, as well as the systems of inequalities that produce them and simultaneously normalise them (Heidbrink 2020; Sözer 2019), must be recognised.

Vulnerability may also be the product of more transient or contingent situations affecting individuals in relation to their environment (Virokannas et al. 2020). This form

of *situational vulnerability* may affect a varying number of people also beyond the actual length of the event or circumstances producing it. A condition of situational vulnerability can occur at the meso-level when a migrant engages with institutions, is confronted with material and physical difficulties and interacts with other individuals and groups (Gilodi et al. 2022). Thus, situational vulnerability can also become social as it may occur, for example, when migrant and non-migrant communities interact. Additionally, situational vulnerability is both incidental, as its occurrence may be more likely given the presence of specific structural conditions, and accidental as, given the same circumstances, a certain situation may occur or not and may be interpreted as a vulnerable situation or not by the person experiencing it.

Finally, vulnerability can be the product of uniquely individual experiences, which may be affected, but not predetermined, by innate, situational or structural conditions. In other words, *experiential vulnerability* points to those conditions, events and circumstances that an individual interprets as subjectively relevant for the self, and thus points to how each individual actively adapts, reacts and makes sense of one's circumstances and experiences (Eatough and Smith 2017; Lado Gamsakhurdia 2019). Indeed, if, as Bronfenbrenner argued, "what matters for behavior and development is the environment as it is *perceived* rather than as it may exist in 'objective' reality" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 4, italics in original), any conceptual model wanting to capture all possible layers of vulnerability should also be able to capture how this notion is articulated in subjective and phenomenological terms.

Acknowledging the agentic power of each individual facing conditions of vulnerability means also recognising the **dynamic** nature of this notion. That is, we conceive vulnerability as the product of the continuous, active and unique negotiations of each individual with their environment and their subjective interpretations of such environments (Titzmann and Lee 2018). In other words, vulnerability should not be considered as a fixed trait or a mix of specific conditions equally faced by all members of a certain group, but rather as something that varies across individuals because of each person's unique experiential and agentic power (Eatough and Smith 2017; Lado Gamsakhurdia 2019), and across a person's lifespan, because as individuals progress in their personal development, so does their relationship with their environment (Elder 1998). While it is important to recognise that structural or situational conditions of vulnerability affect certain members of a society more than others, limiting their agentic power, vulnerability should never be understood as total lack of agency or powerlessness, because doing so would deny the unique subjectivity of each individual in conditions of vulnerability.

3. A Time-Sensitive Understanding of Vulnerability

Time plays a crucial role in our conceptualisation of vulnerability in the context of migration. First, as mentioned above, we consider time in relation to vulnerability in terms of the historical period under evaluation, as it contributes to shaping the environment in which individuals are embedded. Indeed, in each context, social life is defined and affected by an array of 'temporal issues' (Cwerner 2001) or 'ways of ordering time' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), including those referring to the functioning of the State or to (imagined) nations (Griffiths et al. 2013). Second, we considered time from a developmental perspective as the stage in the individual's life course, which will affect the interpretations and interactions of a person with one's environment (Elder 1998; Titzmann and Lee 2018).

We now would like to add two more ways in which time can relate to vulnerability. First, drawing from an increasing corpus of literature in migration studies articulating migration as a temporal process (Baas and Yeoh 2019; Griffiths et al. 2013), we acknowledge how migrants' vulnerability can intersect with what Cwerner has named 'heteronomous time', or the "temporal aspects of immigration" which can "be experienced as oppressive" (Cwerner 2001, p. 20). Indeed, vulnerability can be promoted by the governance of migrant lives exercised by migration regimes through temporal devices, such as the duration of permits and visas, the length of bureaucratic procedures and the suspended or waiting times of the asylum process (Baas and Yeoh 2019; Cwerner 2001; Robertson

2014). These temporalities can then be internalised by migrant individuals who are subjected to them, affecting their everyday lives and complex, non-linear migratory trajectories (Fontanari 2017).

Second, time plays a role in migrants' vulnerability also in terms of the qualitative experience of time manifesting in human experiences (Robertson 2014), which does not necessarily reflect institutional timescales (Robertson 2014, 2015). In our understanding, these would include a uniquely individual combination of past biographical experiences, the 'lived time' of the everyday and ideals about the future, but also the interpretations and reflections of these temporal realities and their emotional weight (Boccagni 2017; Crivello 2015; Robertson 2015). Indeed, past events can never be undone in the course of irreversible time (Valsiner 2013) and can have enduring effects on the present and future of an individual (Elder 1998). Yet, the unique way in which individuals interpret, negotiate, experience and represent their environment or social reality is affected by their human ability to imaginatively construct a "not-yet-known-future" and "presently reconstructed past" (Boccagni 2017; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Gamsakhurdia 2018; Valsiner 2013).

Following the literature on future orientation, we argue that the images individuals develop and report of their future are influenced by their past and present relationships and material conditions, while also having important effects on developmental and psychosocial outcomes, especially in the transition into adulthood (Klein and Shoshana 2020; Seginer 2009). Thus, on the one hand, conditions of vulnerability may affect one's capacity to orient oneself to the future and the content of those images, and, on the other hand, future orientations may affect present actions toward the imagined future which can perpetuate systems of marginalization, inequality and vulnerability (Crivello 2015; Klein and Shoshana 2020; Seginer 2009). Additionally, following Emirbayer and Mische's understanding of agency (1998), we argue that this critical capacity for 'imaginative distancing' or 'temporal orientation' is what guides social actors in shaping their relationship to the structure and expressing their individual agency. We use the term 'imaginaries' to refer to these subjectively constructed and emotionally thick temporal experiences and representations guiding individual agency. Thus, to situate the accounts and experiences of an individual within its environment and gain a comprehensive and ecological overview of a group's vulnerability, we argue that it is important to account also for the subjective temporal imaginaries, as part of the meaning-making processes of an individual in a context.

4. The Context of Luxembourg and the Identification of a 'Vulnerable Group'

The current study was conducted in the framework of the broader MIMY project[3] and as part of a research activity set to comparatively explore the experiences and lives of sub-groups of young people (18–29 years old) from non-EU countries who, based on fixed criteria, may be considered in conditions of vulnerability, in each of the nine countries of focus of MIMY. The data on which this paper is based were collected as part of the empirical fieldwork conducted in Luxembourg.

Luxembourg has been described as superdiverse and a special case for research on migration and integration (Bichler et al. 2020; Murdock 2017). Indeed, as of January 2022, almost half (47.1%) of its 645,397 inhabitants did not hold Luxembourgish nationality, the highest proportion in both the EU and OECD countries (OECD 2021). When including naturalised residents and people with a family history of migration, the number of residents with a migration background actually makes up the majority of the Luxembourgish population (Callens et al. 2019; OECD 2021). Luxembourg is also a multilingual country, with three institutionalised languages (Luxembourgish, French and German) and many more spoken languages (Kalocsányiová 2020). This multilingual landscape is often mentioned in political discourses as a symbol of the country's multiculturalism and openness, but in practice, such a system presents newly arrived migrants with significant challenges and contributes to shaping the opportunity structures available to them in the country (Kalocsányiová 2017; OECD 2021). Yet, following a relatively long history of immigration of European seasonal workers employed in the mines and then steel industries, Luxembourg

continues to be a destination country, with a flourishing tertiary and financial sector and the highest GDP per capita across OECD countries (Kolnberger and Koff 2021; Murdock 2017; OECD 2022).

Interestingly, the great majority (88%) of migrant residents are citizens of another EU country, but the number of third country nationals is increasing, in part because of the steady inflow of 'humanitarian migrants' seeking protection in the country (STATEC 2021, 2022). Since 2016, over 11,000 people have applied for international protection in Luxembourg, with a marked decrease registered in 2020 as result of the pandemic (EMN Luxembourg 2022). The main countries of origin of applicants in 2021 were Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iraq and the positive decisions granting international protection (including refugee status and subsidiary protection) made up 73% of the total decisions taken by the Directorate of Immigration (EMN Luxembourg 2022).

The reception system of applicants for international protection falls under the purview of the National Reception Office (ONA), an administration under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and, as of the beginning of 2021, is divided into two main phases (previously three). Upon arrival in Luxembourg, asylum seekers are accommodated in temporary first-intake facilities, where they undergo a series of health checks, including COVID-19 testing, and after several weeks are transferred to temporary reception facilities for applicants of international protection, where they are meant to stay until the end of their asylum procedure (EMN Luxembourg 2022; Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs 2022a). The 54 accommodation facilities (EMN Luxembourg 2022) are spread across the territory of the country unevenly (as a quota system is not compulsory, the development of reception facilities depends on the voluntary support of individual municipalities) (Vianelli et al. 2019) and include different types of buildings: from converted hotels and retirement homes to the so-called 'container village', a temporary structure made up of metal containers (Lemaire and Oesch 2022). Only 25 facilities are directly managed by ONA, while the others fall under the management of the Red Cross (n = 15) and of Caritas (n = 14) (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs 2022a).

The most notable 'fault' in the Luxembourgish reception system regards the supposed 'temporariness' of these housing facilities (Vianelli et al. 2019). Indeed, as of the end of 2021, 44.4% of the residents in the national temporary reception facilities, meant to host only asylum seekers during their application period, were migrants who had already successfully concluded the process, and thus held a valid resident permit for Luxembourg, but were unable to move out due to the difficult housing conditions in the country (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs 2022a). On the one hand, this, of course, creates what has been called a "bottleneck in the reception system" (Vianelli et al. 2019), with reception facilities operating at almost full capacity (93.9% occupancy rate at the end of 2021) (EMN Luxembourg 2022), with a continuous shortage of beds for new arrivals (Lemaire and Oesch 2022). On the other hand, among migrant youth in the country, those people living in reception centres may be in a particular ambivalent and difficult situation, as suggested by previous research (Vianelli et al. 2019).

5. Participants and Method

Based on the 'fixed' contextual criteria just described, young people who have obtained their refugee status but are still living in 'temporary' reception centres were identified as a group in potentially vulnerable conditions in Luxembourg and were chosen as the group of focus of this study. Yet, our methodological engagement with fixed and reified criteria of vulnerability is reflexive and aware of the constructed nature of these categories (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Dahinden 2016; Zetter 1991), which were used only as the starting point of our inquiry but were not imposed on our participants. Collecting the lived experiences of members of this 'vulnerable' group in the specific context of Luxembourg would allow us to question, problematise and possibly redefine assumptions of vulnerability while also analysing the specific experiences and challenges these young people face and how these may affect their life in the country.

Overall, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 2021 and March 2022 with young refugees living in reception centres located in the South and North of Luxembourg[4]. The young people who participated in the study covered the entire age range of interest, with the youngest being only 18 and the oldest having just turned 30. In terms of gender, our sample was not well-balanced, with only three female participants. The participants came from five different countries: the majority were originally from Afghanistan (n = 5), four from Eritrea, three from Syria, two from Iraq and one from Iran. These countries (except Iran) represent the main countries of nationality of the people being granted international protection in 2021 (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs 2022a).

The interviews were conducted following a topic guide with a broad scope, which focused on the participants' life experiences before and after the move to Luxembourg, their current situation, including challenges and opportunities and their plans and hopes for their future in relation to different life spheres (e.g., housing, education, social relations, family relations, work). Based on ethical considerations concerning the risk of re-traumatisation and stigmatisation of our participants, a specific effort was made to approach our interviewees, first and foremost, as young adults finding their direction in life, and as experts of their own lives, rather than as 'traumatised vulnerable refugees'. The interviews were conducted based on the language of preference of the interviewee, in English or French, and two interviews were conducted with non-professional interpreters in Arabic and Farsi (Dari)[5]. It is relevant to mention that limited language proficiency did affect communication in many of the interviews and influenced the data-gathering process. Yet, the focus in all interviews conducted remained on the participant, making sure that the interview process was not experienced as another difficulty but as an empowering encounter[6]. The interviews were then transcribed and coded using the software MAXQDA 2022, applying both deductive categories, following the vulnerability model previously developed, and inductive categories out of the material, following qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000).

6. Findings

The following sections will outline the results of our analysis of the conditions of vulnerability encountered by young refugees living in reception centres in Luxembourg. Following the conceptual model of vulnerability described above, the experiences and accounts of our participants will be presented following their subjective temporal imaginaries of past, present and future. For each of these imaginaries, different conditions or layers of vulnerability will be presented, highlighting forms of structural, situational and experiential vulnerability. It is important to acknowledge that our analysis does not aim to be exhaustive of all the possible conditions of vulnerability encountered by this group in Luxembourg, given the limited size of our sample and the analytical choices made for the purpose of this paper. Similarly, we do not claim to have captured all possible temporal imaginaries and related accounts of vulnerability of each of our participants, given the multiplicity and uniqueness of individual experiences not just as migrants but as young people. Yet we argue that the examples provided, taken together, can offer a wide overview of the embedded, multi-layered and dynamic vulnerability of young refugees living in reception centres in Luxembourg.

6.1. Past Imaginaries

Different types of vulnerabilities can be identified in the accounts and experiences our participants gave of their lives up until the moment of the interview, or of the most significant aspects of their 'presently reconstructed past'.

6.1.1. The Structural Vulnerability of the Asylum Process and Its Consequences

An event in their past, that was mentioned by several participants as particularly significant and difficult in their life stories, took place after their arrival in Luxembourg: the process of the asylum procedure. As an outcome of our specific methodological choices,

all the young people interviewed had completed the asylum process, had been recognised as beneficiaries of international protection (BIP) and were thus issued a valid residence permit for Luxembourg. Yet, this seemingly identical bureaucratic procedure, produced by 'objective' asylum laws and policies, took different shapes across our participants. The length of the process varied considerably, depending mainly on their nationality and their age at the time of arrival (i.e. if they arrived as minors). Additionally, some young people obtained refugee status through a family asylum procedure and were often not even aware of the complexities of the process, while few participants had to carry out this procedure alone and mindful of the far-reaching consequences it may have for the lives of their faraway family members. Indeed, based on current migration and asylum laws, one of the few safe and direct paths towards residency in Luxembourg for refugees is through family reunification. That is, once the asylum application is accepted, refugees' family members may be allowed to travel to Luxembourg directly to join them. Such structural restrictions may result in great distress and vulnerability, as the future of an entire family may lie on the shoulders of one young person, as Farah[7] explained: "*It was so difficult because I was alone and I wasn't with my mother. And I had a lot of responsibility to do, for example to get the protection. It was so difficult because I always thought, OK, if they say no what I have to do? It depends [on] me, the future of my sister it depends [on] me*!".

While some of the young people we interviewed received their status within six months, others had to live in the limbo created by the asylum system for years. Hakim, the participant who had to wait the longest (two years and three months), explains how that protracted waiting in his past has affected his ability to picture the future: "*For several years I was [a migrant] in several places, in different places in different countries, so it was not clear. And when I came here it was also not clear. I didn't know what I have to do and I didn't know what will happen to me and what I will become in the future*". Beyond limiting an individual's ability to picture the future, asylum laws also greatly limit the opportunities and mobilities of asylum seekers, which may greatly affect the way in which newcomers experience and perceive their country of arrival, as exemplified by Aref's story: "*I wanted to go to a school trip out of the country. I couldn't go because I didn't have any papers. And all of my friends went and I was left behind. [. . .] I was feeling left behind, emotionally. Because I think emotionally these things affect you a lot. You get disappointed from the country. Even I don't want to stay in this country anymore. Because of the thing they've done. But yeah, but they say [laughing] that you will forget all of those, you know, time heals everything. But I don't know*". As this quote illustrates, the asylum system produces conditions of structural vulnerability by limiting the agency of young migrants, which may deeply emotionally affect them. Even when such structural constraints are removed (i.e., a resident permit entitles those recognised as refugees to freely move within the Schengen area), the emotional wounds these limitations have left on the individual may persist, influencing the perceptions of the country which created the vulnerable conditions and future outlooks of life in that country.

6.1.2. The Situational Vulnerability of the Migratory Journey

Recounting critical events in their past, several participants highlighted the precarious, dangerous and stressful situations encountered on their journeys to Europe. However, the mobility stories of our participants were very diverse, with one participant taking up to six years to reach Luxembourg since leaving her country and others arriving directly through family reunification, some travelling alone, some with siblings, some with parents, some facing violence and near-death experiences in the sea or in the mountains, some spending years in transit, and others growing up between different national and political contexts in circular migratory patterns across bordering countries. Given the contingent and transient nature of their journeys, we consider the challenges and hardships faced on the way to their destination country as instances of situational vulnerability. As Kidane's words show, the conditions of vulnerability encountered en route, as perilous and dire as they may be, will change as the situation evolves and the journey unfolds: "*In Libya, [I was] too sick. [. . .] With all these criminals around, I always had to change the spot, I was worried [about] who was*

going to pay [for the crossing], always stressed, there was no strength, I was always sleeping. [. . .] I was always hungry, [. . .] always sleep, sleep, sleep, I was very stressed. After having paid for the money for the trip between Libya and Italy, I was happy, very happy. After that I was a bit stronger. Afterwards, in Italy, I got more strength, and I was always happy. [. . .] When I came here, I was not stressed, I was happy. I found some work, I got many opportunities for life here. I'm stronger".

Moreover, the conditions of situational vulnerability in the lived experiences of migratory journeys are both incidental, as influenced by migration and border regimes regulating entry into Europe (Fontana 2022), and accidental, as the exact way in which each individual journey will unfold is partially unpredictable and fortuitous. Indeed, when Farah reached Greece at 16 years old with her mother and sister, she did not expect to continue her journey to Luxembourg alone, but the car where her mother and sister were hiding was stopped by the police on its journey to Italy, and hers was not: "*When I arrived in Italy, I understood that my mother and my sister they were in Greece*". The overwhelming impact that one incidental and accidental event within the transient journey situation had in the life of Farah emerged throughout the interview and in relation to different aspects of her story: the loneliness she felt as a young girl alone in a foreign country, the speed but also stressfulness of the asylum procedure as an unaccompanied minor and the maturity, adaptability and resourcefulness towards new challenges gained by living through these challenging experiences. "*And I said: 'yes, I'm young, but I lived alone and [..] I solved my problems with myself and that's why that it makes me bigger. When I was in [country of origin] or Greece for example, when I was with my mother I was so... like a child. And I didn't care.. [. . .] But now everything is different. I'm grown more than before".*

Thus, the situational vulnerability related to the journey undertaken to arrive in Luxembourg highlights how vulnerability can be contingent and, hence, also highlights the multiplicity of stories and experiences of vulnerability within the 'refugee' group, often mistakenly considered as a homogenous unity (Clark 2007). Indeed, considering the different routes that took our participants to Luxembourg, the four young people who had reached the country directly accompanied by their mothers and siblings through family reunification, joining the father whose asylum application had been accepted, stood out from their peers who had made more arduous journeys. Simply put, they appeared younger and more naïve than the rest of the group and, interestingly, also held more positive and optimistic outlooks on their lives and future, suggesting that among young, forced migrants, being able to reach the destination through safer routes may be an important protective factor impacting not only their past imaginaries but also their present and future ones.

6.1.3. The Experiential Vulnerability of Past Experiences of Violence

Reasons motivating the migratory movements of refugees, such as fleeing war and persecution in their home countries, are often recognised in political and public discourses as criteria that qualify forced migrants as vulnerable (Flegar 2018). Indeed, narratives of vulnerability are often used to construct the image of vulnerable refugees (or forced migrants) deserving of protection, presented in a dichotomous and simplistic opposition to economic (or voluntary) migrants, often portrayed not only as invulnerable but even as undeserving manipulators gaming the system (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Griffiths 2015; Smith and Waite 2019). Within this rhetorical frame of deservingness, 'the refugee' is then implicitly considered vulnerable, without further problematising why, how and for how long, and without questioning the validity of this description across the group. Our data partially challenge such normative understanding of vulnerability, as the stories and experiences of our participants in their countries of origin were not homogenous: their exposure to direct episodes of violence and persecution varied depending on the context in which they lived and the presence of protective factors, such as the economic resources of their family or their role and responsibilities within the household.

Despite these differences, the lived conditions of all our participants in their countries of origin were always marked by challenges and adversities, which for some also constituted subjective experiences of vulnerability with enduring psychological and emotional

effects on their present and future life projects. This emerged clearly in the interview with Carim, a young man who, despite having faced very difficult events in his life, including the sudden and violent death of his best friend in childhood, reported being well-adjusted and happy with his life in Luxembourg. Yet, towards the end of the interview, when asked how he saw his future, Carim expressed lingering feelings of unsafety and recurrent thoughts of death: "*I always say to myself that I don't know if I'm going to live tomorrow. [. . .] I still think that maybe tomorrow I will be dead. [. . .] Yes, I feel [safe] but you never know... There are wars there, maybe I'll die with a bullet in the head, a car that . . . explodes. Here, we don't have that, but you never know . . . "*

In reconstructing past experiences of violence in their present, other participants explicitly attempted to distance themselves from their past selves, negatively judging their actions or inaction in the face of those events. Yet, the emotions accompanying such evaluations persisted in their present. For example, Aref expressed anger at the choices he made in his past, which exposed him to situations of extreme violence, and it is on those choices that he places the blame for his persistent recollections of past vulnerable experiences accompanied by feelings of impotence and powerlessness. "*I fought in a small war in [country of origin]. [. . .] I found so many friends there. None of them survived. Many of them died even in my hands. I cannot clear those images in my head. If I see myself in the past, I would tell me: 'don't be stupid! Don't go there!'. I was like so scared. And sometimes I just dream about these nightmares that I'm dead and I cannot do anything, because I couldn't do anything those times too. I was useless . . . "* Thus, Aref not only felt powerless to stop the violence in the past but feels powerless now to stop those memories from coming back, as he made even more explicit later: "*Even if like [there was] some program to clean my mind, memories [. . .] I would just clear everything. I'm a fresh human without these images and memories*." Instead, the fear of making again a choice he will regret and finding himself once more in such a position of powerlessness manifests not only in his dreams but also in the way he approaches his present and future: "*I believe that for example, whatever you do, you don't have to regret later on [. . .] because regretting is like a pain [that] burns in your soul. [. . .] every time, everything you do, you always think about: 'if I do that in the future [will] I have regrets?' So I avoid [doing] that. Maybe if I did that thing, I could go somewhere really high or something, I could be successful*." Past experiences of vulnerability made Aref highly aware of the irreversibility of time (Valsiner 2013), affecting his temporal imaginaries and orientations (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), as the anticipation of potential regret in the future inhibits his agency in the present.

For Ali, intrusive and persistent memories of a particularly violent event in his past were accompanied by feelings of guilt and shame: "*they attacked the compound [. . .] I was present there. [. . .] So, this was a moment that I... I won't forget in my life. [. . .] I could hear the voices of those people shouting for help. But I was afraid because I didn't know how to use a gun. And I was like, 'it's better to not move, to stay in your place'. [. . .] But yeah, it's something that I regret every time, every night. And sometimes I remember why I didn't help those people, but it's something . . . those shouts are still coming to my ear*". Thus, despite acknowledging his limited power to do anything to stop such violence, Ali feels guilty about his inaction and the fact that he "didn't help those people". Interestingly, *being able to help others* was often mentioned by Ali as a characteristic that defined him, especially in contrast with other refugees. "*In my camp there are 300 people or something . . . They are not well educated. And when they need help, they are just coming to me. They know me, that someone is here that he speaks good English, and he can help*". Indeed, throughout the interview, Ali, who has the highest level of education and socio-economic background of all our participants, has explicitly distanced himself from the 'other refugees' by highlighting *their need to be helped* and affirming his identity, position, and perhaps privilege, by underlying *his ability to help them.* Such a narrative can be interpreted as a strategy of resistance against the stigmatisation created by the refugee label, equating being a refugee with being helpless and powerless (Zetter 1991), which Ali rejects based on his ability to help. Thus, we argue that Ali's persistent guilt at not helping others in his past could be interpreted—rather than as the consequence of a 'traumatic'

event in the country of origin—as a by-product of Ali's present re-construction of his past, led by his present strategy of resistance against his position as 'another helpless refugee'.

6.2. The Present Conditions and Experiences of Living in a Reception Centre

In terms of reactions to the challenges posed by the context in which they live, finding any type of accommodation outside of the reception system was reported by the great majority of our participants as their greatest priority and challenge in their current lives in Luxembourg. Thus, this section will focus on this context-specific condition of vulnerability, applying the model to better understand and unpack its causes, consequences and contingent circumstances.

6.2.1. The Structural Vulnerability of Housing in Luxembourg for Young Refugees: The Housing Market, the Policy-Service Gap and the Housing-Integration Paradox

Of course, the main structural cause of this challenge is the saturated housing market in Luxembourg, characterised by a continuous increase in property prices, limited supply and "a deterioration in affordability of housing, which is particularly important for the young" (Claveres et al. 2020, p. 5). The limited supply allows property owners to be very selective in their choice of tenants, going beyond their ability to pay the rent. Indeed, even the few young people we interviewed who, after many obstacles and challenges, were able to find a job in Luxembourg, reported being unable to find accommodation in the rental market given their salary (usually requested to be three times the rent) and their work contract (a permanent job contract is often required to sign the lease). Given these conditions, for those refugees without a job or without an employed family member, almost the only option to move out of the reception system is social housing. However, the social housing offer in Luxembourg is one of the lowest in Europe, waiting times are very long and priority is given to bigger households with small children (Lemaire and Oesch 2022).

The reception centres where our participants live are part of the reception system of applicants for international protection in temporary accommodation and, thus, not designed for long-term stay. Once asylum seekers have gained refugee status, they have officially exited the reception system and, on paper, are no longer under the responsibility of ONA (the agency overviewing the reception system in Luxembourg). In fact, in terms of policy and service, at this moment, they are treated as other foreign residents with a valid resident permit[8], being entitled to the same welfare assistance accessible to the rest of the population, including the limited availability of social housing in Luxembourg, rent subsidies and the services aimed at promoting the integration of foreign residents, which do not cover housing needs (Vianelli et al. 2019). This is in line with Luxembourg's mainstream approach to integration, described in the latest national integration plan as an "inclusive approach to all non-Luxembourg nationals, whether they are beneficiaries of international protection, third country nationals or from the European Union" (Ministry of Family Affairs Integration and the Greater Region 2018, p. 13, original in French). Thus, integration policy and services are planned for all 'foreign residents' rather than targeting a specific sub-group, which may, at times, risk ignoring the specific needs of certain migrants living in the country (Osburg and Petry 2021).

Indeed, if the difficult housing conditions are a problem for the population at large, refugees have fewer resources to face them compared to other residents in the country (Vianelli et al. 2019). This is why migrants who have obtained refugee status are 'allowed' to stay (officially on a temporary basis) in reception centres, provided they pay rent to the State, in an amount corresponding to their income and household size (Vianelli et al. 2019). According to our participants, the rent is charged per person/bed and, for those residents without a high enough income (the great majority), it is basically redrawn from the social benefits given by the State to its low-income residents, also called social inclusion income (REVIS)[9]. Summing it up, the rent paid by a family living in one room adds up to be quite high, especially considering the living conditions offered by the centres.

Nevertheless, the continued stay of refugees in reception centres is envisaged as an extraordinary measure meant to be temporary, which does not address the structural conditions preventing refugees from moving out of these facilities. Indeed, Luxembourg's mainstream approach to integration prevents the creation of specific structured policies supporting refugees in the difficult transition into the private housing market, and instead seeks solutions with local authorities and other stakeholders, which are narrower in scope and cannot address the housing needs of all refugees in the group[10]. Thus, we argue that the mainstream approach creates a policy- service gap in Luxembourg between the reception of asylum seekers and their housing integration after receiving the status, which puts young refugees in a condition of structural vulnerability.

Indeed, without any other form of structured assistance, several participants mentioned how the challenge of moving out of reception facilities was connected to other challenges they faced in their integration process, such as learning the language, getting the level of education needed (also vocational) to find employment, then finding a job with a permanent contract, bringing family members to the country and having connections, etc. Habib offers one example of such links: "*You go to any housing agency, the first thing they ask for is a job contract. And then you go to ADEM [National Employment Agency] and say 'I want a job contract' and they say 'okay you need to speak French'. You go to the commune, and you say: 'ADEM told me that I need to speak French'. And they give you a voucher to go and learn French. And it's 2 days per week, so 4 hours of French [class] per week and they want you to learn French? [rhetorical question]*."

Thus, in order to move out of reception centres, young refugees seem required to be quite advanced in their processes of integration in Luxembourgish society: mastering one or more of the official languages, having a well-paid and permanent job, which often implies an educational advancement, and also having the social connections often needed to find renting opportunities. However, in research on integration, stable, good-quality housing is commonly considered a key element in promoting the integration of refugees in many of the domains just mentioned as well as in contributing to feelings of belonging to the new country of residence and overall well-being (Adam et al. 2021; Ager and Strang 2008). Therefore, we argue that the structural vulnerability of young refugees living in reception centres in Luxembourg is also the result of a housing-integration paradox, where housing in temporary accommodation is a barrier to integration in other domains, but integration in those domains is needed to find better accommodation.

6.2.2. The Situational Vulnerability of the Reception System: Isolation from the Local Population and Challenging Living Conditions

Following the housing-integration paradox, the structural constraints preventing young refugees from moving out of the reception centres can also limit their opportunities for social contact with long-term residents in the country, which in turn can promote conditions of situational vulnerability for our participants. Indeed, a striking result of our analysis is the fact that more than half of the participants reported having almost no opportunity for interaction in their everyday lives with members of the local population, highlighting how living in reception centres, where only asylum seekers and refugees reside, greatly limited their overall level of socialisation with people outside of the facilities. In line with previous literature (Adam et al. 2021; Ager and Strang 2008), this in turn hindered their integration process, as it prevented them from practising the languages they were learning, from creating social networks and from simply getting to know the country and its residents. As Kidane, who had been living in Luxembourg for almost four years at the time of the interview, argues, this lack of socialisation is what prevents him from fully 'entering the system': "*When I arrived in Luxembourg, I didn't know anything. I never heard anything about it... a lot of things were complicated. Now a lot of things changed. Now I work, I know some people, I entered a little bit the system. [But] the system is difficult, because I cannot leave this place, if I still live in a refugee housing. I cannot fully enter the system because I still live with Eritreans.*"

It is important to note that almost half of our participants were currently enrolled in so-called *reception classes for young adults* (CLIJA+)[11], which are classes offered to young people (18–24 y.o.) newly arrived in the country, mainly devoted to language acquisition, and meant to facilitate access to other forms of educational training, mostly vocational. Our participants' accounts suggest an almost complete separation between the students in CLIJA classes and the rest of the pupils enrolled in the school, indicating that the social isolation of young refugees from the rest of society was not limited to their living conditions but extended to the school environment, where their main social interactions were with the other newly arrived migrants making up the rest of their 'reception class'.

In this context, professionals working in reception centres were often the only long-term residents of the country with whom some of the young refugees had regular interactions. These contacts seemed to be mostly positive, with participants frequently naming social workers or volunteers who particularly helped or supported them. Yet, there appear to be significant differences across reception centres, in terms of the number of supervising and supporting staff on site and in terms of facilities, such as access to kitchen facilities (as opposed to cafeterias with catered meals), the number of residents per room and in the overall centre, and its location in the country. The situational vulnerability that can arise from challenging living conditions is well exemplified by the case of Hakim, a young man who lives in a facility located on the outskirts of a town in the more rural northern part of the country, where he shares a room with several roommates. When asked about life in the centre, he states: "*The main challenge is the transportation. [. . .] I am doing the [vocational apprenticeship] and I need to wake up at five o' clock to go to work. [Every day] I am spending five hours of my time on the way*." Thus, the remoteness of the centre and the bad transport links mean that Hakim's commute to work takes 2.5 h each way, which, of course, greatly impacts his quality of life. This is further complicated by sharing a space with other people who have different schedules: "*It is difficult [for me] because I am going to work and those roommates that are there, they are not going to work. And then they wake up at night [. . .] and I cannot sleep*". Issues related to noise, overcrowding and a general lack of privacy were mentioned by most of the young people interviewed. Thus, when it comes to living conditions in the reception centres, the vulnerability of its young residents can be construed as situational as it varies depending on the facility in which they live, its structure, its location and its management.

6.2.3. The Experiential Vulnerability of Living in a Reception Centre: Feeling Hopeless, 'Homeless' and Stressed

From a psychological and emotional perspective, the difficulty or even impossibility of moving into private accommodation, often mentioned together with the difficult living conditions in the reception centre, the feelings of isolation from the rest of society, as well as the other multiple challenges they faced in their effort to build a life in a new country, were described by many as a source of great emotional distress. Moving out of the reception centres was understood as a step that would mark their entrance into Luxembourgish society, from which they felt still disconnected, and not being able to reach that goal created feelings of hopelessness. As Hakim noted: "*when you are far away from the society, you have no contact with them, and you are quite like . . . you're feeling like hopeless...*". In line with previous literature (Ager and Strang 2008), our participants described their living conditions in reception centres as making them feel constantly unsettled and not completely at ease and as preventing them from feeling at home. As Farah explained, the simple fact of not being able to have guests is sufficient to trigger these types of feelings: "*[. . .] you know, it isn't for you. It's not your house. Everyone needs one house to do everything they want. But we can't though, we can't invite someone to our home. [. . .] when you can't invite someone to your room, that's something like... it's not your room, and you always think about it*".

Habib argued that the need to have a safe place that can be considered one's home emerges as especially relevant when considered in relation to the other challenges young refugees face in their everyday life: "*It is quite challenging because it's a big part of your life,*

the place you live at. For example, you go outside to school, lots of people, lots of noises, you go to work, lots of people and you go home, the home should be the place where you just de-stress, decompress you know, relax a little bit. But in our case, we go back home and we are faced with even more stress. So it's just a never-ending cycle of stress." Thus, the housing-integration paradox seems to reflect well also the emotional experiences of living in reception centres: those who would benefit the most from stable and safe housing are those who are embarking on the challenging task of finding their place in a new society, yet it is exactly that precarious position that prevents them from having a home.

The dreadful account from Kidane can perhaps be read as the extreme consequence of this 'never-ending cycle of stress': " . . . *people always talk this way: 'I don't have a house. I'm stressed a lot.' I think four persons died. They were stressed and committed suicide. I knew three of them well. They were friends. [. . .] They are dead, I was told because of stress. They killed themselves with a cable. [. . .] In Luxembourg, housing is very difficult. All the Eritreans live in refugee homes. In reception centres, you have always the risk, to face a lack of respect by other residents, that's difficult. [. . .] Here they have no family, no friends. It's many problems. If I'm stressed a lot, and I can't go to talk to somebody, I have to stay at home*." Undoubtedly, the tragic deaths of these three men are not to be entirely attributed to the living conditions in Luxembourgish reception centres, but rather to the convergence of multiple varied factors, beyond the scope of this analysis. However, in the mind of Kidane, the suicides of his friends and their living conditions were clearly connected: they died 'because of stress', and what 'stresses' him the most and other people he knows is living in a reception centre.

In these incredibly challenging situations, our participants again showed their resourcefulness by adopting strategies to deal with them. For example, Kidane explained how keeping an optimistic outlook is crucial and how he actively tries to change perspective or engages in activities to 'relax' when faced with stressful situations: "*If there is a problem, and one remains stressed, and there's no change, one is dead. [. . .] When I'm stressed here, because I don't find a room, I'll wait a little bit... Ok, I tell myself: 'today I didn't find it, tomorrow I'll find it.' [. . .] When I'm very stressed, I try to relax. [. . .] I go and have a walk, listen a bit to music or I call my friend*."

6.3. Future Imaginaries

It is important to note that in discussing their future, almost every participant explicitly referred to their plans to gain Luxembourgish citizenship. Applications for naturalisation can be launched after five years of residency (which starts after status is granted), provided applicants have followed a civic integration course[12] and have passed an exam of Luxembourgish language (EMN Luxembourg 2022). All participants seemed quite well informed on the procedure and relatively confident in their ability to achieve this goal, although several expressed uncertainty and anxiety about the language exam. Yet, getting their Luxembourgish nationality was not discussed as a part of 'not-yet-known-future' but as the inevitable next step in their migratory journey, which would eventually happen although it may be delayed (i.e., by the language test). Besides the acquisition of citizenship, the imaginaries held by our participants of their 'not-yet-known-future' included at least some plans and ideas: some made concrete and ambitious projects while others were more cautious and pragmatic. Nevertheless, from our analysis it emerged that the precarious and disadvantageous position young refugees hold in the country, coupled with their isolation in reception centres, did have an impact on their outlook, their plans and their ability to achieve their goals in the future.

6.3.1. The Structural Vulnerability of Limited Future Educational and Job Opportunities

When discussing their plans for the future, some participants made specific reference to the limited opportunities available to them in Luxembourg, often connected to the multilingual landscape of the country. For some, this awareness sparked from comparing themselves to their peers who were born and raised in Luxembourg. As Habib framed it: "[. . .] *you can't really compete with people who grow up learning five languages! And you come here*

. . . [. . .] But now I'm trying to learn French and Luxembourgish and maybe I can do something with that." Similarly, Farah also viewed her opportunities for the future as limited compared to the other residents of the country, which she explained as a 'natural' consequence of her position as a 'foreigner' in Luxembourg, but that also created uncertainty about what are the possibilities for a person in her position: "*Well, that's normal because the Luxembourgish people they are so rich, and they have a lot of opportunity to do. It's their country, you know? When I was in [country of origin] it was so easy for me to find a way, to get my future, but here? I don't know what's going to happen. That's my future.*" Interestingly, when asked whether he considered himself vulnerable, Hakim also referred to his limited opportunities compared to Luxembourg's 'native' population but framed it not in terms of status in the country but in terms of time lost in reaching his destination: "*I wasted a lot of time. And during this way I was far away from education and I'm quite [behind] other persons. If I was born here, I could choose whatever I want, I could choose what I wanted [to] become and then I could have the job that I really like, I really want. Yeah, I'm vulnerable*".

As this last quote exemplifies, one of the main areas in which our participants saw limited opportunities for their future was their education. Indeed, several young people mentioned how they valued education as a pivotal part of their personal development and integration process in Luxembourg. Yet, the limited recognition of previous degrees and the multilingual educational system of the country imposed significant constraints on their educational trajectories. The structural vulnerability affecting the educational opportunities of young refugees is well outlined by Farah's account: "*For us it's too difficult because we haven't any more opportunity to study, to continue the school. We can study one or two years of CLIJA and then if our languages are good, we can go to the [technical high school]. And after four years, it depends on the exams, we can get the certificate at the school. If not, we should work... [. . .] But for one person [it] is difficult to learn one language completely! It's so difficult!*" Some participants seemed more aware than others of the limitations posed by the system on their educational trajectories and related job opportunities. On the one hand, some were quite vocal about their dreams, but when asked how they planned to translate those goals into concrete plans, they often seemed to have limited knowledge of the Luxembourgish educational system and labour market, necessary to achieve their educational or professional objectives. In the future, this may create misunderstandings, possibly false hopes or even, in Cwerner's (2001) words, 'time traps', when the actual time effort required to reach that goal does not match individuals' expectations. On the other hand, some participants seemed almost reluctant to share their goals and ambitions, as pragmatic considerations of the limited opportunities available to them as refugees in Luxembourg shaped not only their expectations for the future but also their ability or willingness to picture it: "Tarik*: I have plans yes.. Actually I want to go on to do nursing school next year. So that's my plan... [...] I want, I want to be a nurse... maybe, I'll see... I'm not, I'm not very sure yet. [. . .] Maybe also something else, I'll see.. I mean, if it's possible, maybe a doctor even. I don't know if it's possible or not [. . .]* Interviewer*: Why do you think that may not be possible?* Tarik*: Because I need more French... Actually you need to have a very good level in French and in Luxembourgish. So that will take a lot of time for me, maybe 2 years, 3 years to get maybe 80% [from the test] in the language.. And also, I mean I am a refugee so... I don't know, maybe it could be hard. I don't know the system here, for refugees, I don't know . . . "*

Indeed, when confronted with their structural vulnerability, young people reacted differently. Farah seemed to actively resist the constraints posed by the educational system on her future: "*We have the right! We have the right to put a goal for our future. Of course, we don't have anything here, but we will reach*." On the contrary, according to Tarik, the only way to cope with the structural vulnerability created by the system is to lower one's expectations for the future, as he would advise any young refugee arriving in Luxembourg to do: "*Some good advice is to just always lower your expectation. [. . .] It is really important to have no ideas, no expectations like that [. . .] I had very big expectations, yeah... that's why I was very very disappointed. [. . .] I mean, not like [having] no expectations at all but just lower them*"

6.3.2. The Situational Vulnerability of Perceived Prejudice and Discrimination and Its Impact on Future Perspectives

Limited structural opportunities available for young refugees are then (re)produced in their everyday interactions with institutions and some members of the local population, which can have important consequences on their future imaginaries. For example, school personnel reportedly actively encouraged some young refugees to pursue vocational types of training rather than trying to reach higher levels of education, perpetuating the system of unequal opportunities just highlighted. Farah described an extreme case of this type of interaction, reporting being ridiculed by a social worker at her school upon sharing her plans to continue studying, get a university degree and then get her dream job. "*She always says to us: 'ok, go for a stage, or go to find a work in Zara. [. . .] you can't pass your test afterwards, you can't study, you have to work!' And she always says something like this*." Yet according to Farah, what could be a condition of situational vulnerability negatively affecting someone's ambition for the future only motivated her to move forward with her plans: "*For me it makes me stronger than before, but for the other girls or other people.... I don't know what they think. For example, the lady she said: 'you can't [pass] this exam!' I will study more than before. I don't care about what she says*". Indeed, when situational vulnerability is the product of an interaction between two people, it is contingent not only on the 'chance' of meeting a member of the local population holding prejudices towards young refugees and what they can accomplish, but also on how the young person reacts to such prejudices.

In line with this argument, several of our participants explained how the prejudices they perceived some people held against them, as migrants from 'developing' nations, as members of certain religious groups or as refugees unable to exit the system of care, were a source of motivation to prove themselves. This was well articulated by Hakim: "*that's what they're thinking, that's what they expect from us. So you have to work for yourself, you have to manage your own life, that to be independent, also to not be under support of Caritas or another association*." Despite this clear intention to reject stereotypes imposed on them by members of the local population, it is important to note that defying expectations can be a difficult and stressful process which will impact, at the very least, the future short-term plans of these young people. Indeed, Hakim's first priority was to finish his apprenticeship as a house painter and get a job that would allow him to earn enough to move out of the reception centre. Yet that meant at least postponing (as he did for many years already) his ambition to train in computer science and get a job in IT.

Negative interactions with members of the local population may not only affect future educational and job perspectives but may also impede or at least slow down the socialisation and integration processes of young people building a life in Luxembourg. Although experiences of blatant forms of discrimination or racism were rarely reported across all the interviews, Aref's words show how even just a few of such encounters may have important consequences: "*That's the thing that delays our mixture in this culture. First year, when I was trying to get in contact with people, go talk to them and they treat you like that? It's rare like one person in ten people: that one person that is the black dot in a whole white painting. But [. . .] I was sometimes afraid that maybe the next person is going to treat me like that. So I was avoiding to talk and stuff like that. But you get used to it sometimes*." Although we may argue that facing discrimination from one in ten people should not be qualified as *rare*, what this extract shows is how the situational vulnerability created by one interaction can lead to an emotional reaction of fear, which produces further vulnerability by influencing future interaction and relationships. Indeed, to cope with situational vulnerability, Aref's first reaction was avoidance, but, as he explained later, he then developed more sophisticated strategies when interacting with local residents: *" . . . if you show yourself, like you show some weaknesses [. . .] they try to override you, like they treat you like shit. So now when I'm with people I try to act like them. [. . .], in the second meeting, I try to be myself, but in the first I try to be like one of them, like one of these people [. . .] To avoid to get bullied or something like that."*

6.3.3. The Experiential Vulnerability of the Uncertain and Not-Yet-Known Future

As already hinted in previous sections, several participants reported not having a clear picture of or plan for their future. On the contrary, future imaginaries were often marked by feelings of ambiguity or uncertainty, of not knowing, or perhaps not trusting, that they will be able to reach their goals. Although a certain degree of anxiety regarding the future may be considered a normal part of the transition into adulthood (Titzmann and Lee 2018), limited opportunities and material challenges linked to socio-economic positions in society have been found to enhance feelings of uncertainty and vagueness regarding future plans in disadvantaged migrant youth (Klein and Shoshana 2020). Similarly, for some of our participants, the particular challenges faced in the past and the specific precarious positions they currently occupy in Luxembourg resulted in significant difficulties in picturing their future in any concrete terms. Aref represented quite an extreme example in this case: "*Because every time I'm starting to like put my mind on paper and think about the future, I start writing like, what is my situation right now? Where am I standing? And I'm standing nowhere. I cannot even imagine myself standing on a solid place, solid land, how I'm going to focus on the next step. So sometimes I feel like my future is getting vague and vague and vague and sometimes I get tired of thinking like this.*"

For other participants, their future was not quite as 'vague' but was still not quite clear. One of the elements which may have affected the ability of our participants to develop future imaginaries is the fact that they may have only recently started to think about 'what comes next'. Indeed, several interviewees mentioned how they were able to start concretely thinking of their future and make plans only since they received their refugee status. As Farah said: "*Before I was just thinking about the answer, I didn't think about my future. I just had one point, but now I'm free to do everything*." For some, receiving their residence permit not only meant being free to picture their future but also being able to finally settle in the country, as explained by Hakim: "*I had a very good feeling. Because my future is clear, my future was depending on this and after that I realised: I'm going to stay in Luxembourg and now I know what I have to do. Now I know what I can make a plan to continue*". Thus, despite the uncertainties that still influence their future imaginaries, these participants' experiential vulnerability is eased by their knowledge that their future life will unfold in Luxembourg.

This was not the case for two of our participants who expressed a wish to continue their migratory journey, which, ironically, will be feasible only after obtaining Luxembourgish nationality. Habib's plans are clearly led by the frustrations he is experiencing in his life in Luxembourg, and his mobility project appears as an attempt to imagine a future not afflicted by the same challenges rather than a concrete prospect: "Interviewer*: Where does that leave you? for example when you think about your future?* Habib*: Just get some money and [go] to New Zealand. [. . .] I don't care between here and New Zealand what I do here; even after 25 years.* Interviewer*: OK, Why New Zealand?* Habib*: I don't know... they have some big islands, and green stuff and they shot Lord of the Rings there, and that is enough reason for me... And they speak English, thank god! [...] And it is as far away from everything as you can physically be.*"

Similarly, due to a variety of difficulties, Aref reported feeling disappointed, rejected and even betrayed by Luxembourg, which made him feel unsettled in the country, being unable to picture his future there. Guided by his family's previous experiences, he sees further migration as the only possible solution in the face of difficulties: "*My family was refugees for a long time. [. . .] We're always on the move. And when I came here for the first two years, I was feeling that 'I am going to be settled in this country, for sure!' But after the third year I felt, no, actually not. I'm not settled. I'm on the move again. [. . .] I'd love to settle in a place! I'd love to come to a place and say 'this is my home. Okay. This is my place and I'm going to stay, grow my kids and stuff like that'. But still, in this country I haven't felt like this, because it still lies in my dreams. I see that I'm still . . . when I dream, I see my backpack on my back. I'm still walking the path. I don't see the future that is the whole of my life. I don't see the future.*"

7. Discussion and Conclusions

The current paper started from the argument that vulnerability, understood as an embedded, multi-layered and dynamic concept, could be a useful analytical lens to study and understand processes related to migratory movements and their consequences. After theoretically elaborating a conceptual model of vulnerability as an analytical category elsewhere (Gilodi et al. 2022), the current study proposed to apply this lens to the study of the lived experiences of a potentially vulnerable group: young refugees living in reception centres in Luxembourg. The analysis provided a broad overview of the conditions of vulnerability affecting this specific group of young people living in the specific context of the Luxembourgish reception system. This allowed us to draw connections between vulnerabilities at different levels of actions and analysis in the context of migration, while also simultaneously acknowledging individual experiences, imaginaries and actions, and thus problematising normative and reified understandings of vulnerability.

In line with previous literature (Clark 2007), our analysis indicates that assumptions of refugees' vulnerability based on past experiences in the country of origin need to be problematised. On the one hand, our data reflect the heterogeneity of the refugee group based on past imaginaries: marked by diverse biographical events, positions and resources, and, significantly, emotional and cognitive processing of past experiences. On the other hand, our analysis reveals how the past conditions of vulnerability that seem to affect our participants' present and future imaginaries the most did not take place in the country of origin but either during the migratory journey or after arriving in the destination country, through the asylum process. These findings are significant, as they suggest that real efforts to reduce the vulnerability of young people with refugee backgrounds living in Luxembourg and to promote their active participation in the country should not only look at supporting their integration efforts after receiving refugee status but should start sooner; for example, creating safe routes to Luxembourg and reforming the asylum process.

Another important result of our analysis points to the deep interconnections between present, past and future vulnerabilities in subjective temporal imaginaries. Following a linear understanding of time, difficult events experienced in the past (e.g., impotence in the face of violence) may affect how one feels in the present (e.g., feelings of regret and powerlessness) and one's plans for the future (e.g., avoidance in fear of regret). Yet temporal relations are not always linear, and reactions to present conditions (e.g., rejecting being stigmatised as a helpless refugee) can lead to re-constructions of past experiences (e.g., feeling guilt for inability to help in the past), while past experiences (e.g., episodes of discrimination) may create fear for the future and, in turn, inhibit interactions in the present. We argue that these findings could have interesting policy implications. Indeed, migration governance in the context of forced migration in Europe can be construed as following a linear temporal understanding of migration by regulating the migratory journey through border and securitisation policies, regulating the arrival in the country of destination through asylum policies and regulating migration-related diversity (or promoting the participation of migrant residents) through integration policies. Yet the separation of migration management into these three distinct policy arenas does not account for their interconnections and interdependences. For example, the restrictions on migratory routes posed by border regimes make regulating the flow of applications in the asylum systems and caring for the applicants more difficult to manage (e.g., by having to care for unaccompanied minors who were unable to travel with their families). In turn, the bureaucratic complexities of the asylum procedure and the difficult conditions in the reception system may affect migrants' perceptions of their new country of residence, which will be difficult to counteract by integration policies attempting to promote the contribution and participation of migrants to the country. Thus, we argue that these policy fields should not be conceived independently: policies in one domain may have important consequences on the other and, in the long term, may have unanticipated consequences for the future of European societies.

Finally, our analysis has shown how the vulnerability of young refugees living in reception centres is multi-layered, with different conditions of vulnerability being constructed at different levels of the context in which these individuals operate. This suggests that policy responses and strategies aimed at comprehensively reducing the vulnerability of an individual or group should also be multi-layered. For example, creating more opportunities for interaction between local residents and residents of reception centres may reduce the situational vulnerability of some young refugees created by their social isolation, may result in other opportunities for their future life in the country and may contribute to feelings of belonging. Yet this cannot be conceived as a comprehensive solution, as it does not address the policy–service gap creating the structural conditions of vulnerability and not allowing them to move out of reception facilities. With this statement, we do not mean to discourage types of interventions addressing vulnerabilities at the individual or meso-level. On the contrary, we argue that a multi-layered understanding of vulnerability would promote more oriented and effective interventions and policies while also promoting a more truthful and balanced image of young refugees, neither as passive and vulnerable recipients of care nor as autonomous and invulnerable actors, solely responsible for their lives and future in Luxembourg. Vulnerability as an analytical concept has the potential to highlight the uniqueness of experiences and agentic power of each individual with a refugee background, while acknowledging the structural systems and contingent conditions constraining them.

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Notes

1 To learn more about the UNHCR's perspective and assessment of vulnerability in the context of forced migration see (UNHCR 2017) and (H. Brown et al. 2019)

2 For an overview of the legal and procedural frameworks of the 'detection of vulnerability' across EU Member States, see (EMN Luxembourg 2021).

3 EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions (MIMY), funded through the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. See funding acknowledgement and project website for more information: https://mimy-project.eu/ (accessed on 22 December 2022).

4 One interview was conducted online.

5 In both instances interpreters were refugees themselves who no longer resided in reception centre (and thus did not qualify for participation) from the same country of origin of the participant. Thus, despite not being able to provide a professional-level quality of interpretation, they were well suited to relate to the experiences described in the interviews and contributed to promote trust in the interview setting.

[6] Overall, we have strived to keep the exact words participants used only making small adjustments necessary for their understanding, marked by []. Thus, some language mistakes may be present in the quotes.

[7] Throughout the paper we will refer to our participants with culturally-sensitive pseudonyms.

[8] Compared to other Third Country Nationals (TCN) Beneficiaries of International Protection do have access to more benefits (e.g., welfare benefits) and are subject to less restriction (e.g., for access to the labour market), but still have less rights than EU migrants.

[9] This does not apply to those residents of the reception facilities who are younger than 25 years of age (i.e., the majority of our participants), who are exempt from paying rent as they are not entitled to receive REVIS.

[10] Two programs were created by the biggest NGOs in the country with the support of ONA to address the housing needs of some beneficiaries of international protection. For more information see (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs 2022b).

[11] CLIJA: *Classes d'accueil pour jeunes adultes*-Reception classes for young adults. For more information see (Ministry of Education Children and Youth 2022).

[12] Course length: 24 h.

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