

Constructing “Asylum”: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Greece’s Migration Policy in 2025

Efthymia Garidi & Spyros Apergis – New Frontiers, Iceland 2025



An Ideological Appointment

Makis Vouridis: from the Far Right to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum

➤ Political background:

- 1980s: Youth leader in *EPEN*, pro-junta party symbolically led by imprisoned dictator **Georgios Papadopoulos**.
- Later member of **LAOS** (far-right), then **New Democracy**.
- Represents **mainstreaming of far-right discourse** in Greek politics.

➤ Continuity of ideology:

- Never distanced himself from far-right past.
- Declared commitment to “strong ideological views” on migration (March 2025).

➤ Symbolic function:

- Appointment served as **affirmation of restrictive migration agenda**.
- **Not administrative but ideological** — a political statement of intent.

➤ Aftermath and continuity:

- **Resigned following OPEKEPE scandal** (EU funds misuse).
- **Succeeded by Thanos Plevris**, also linked to far-right rhetoric.
- His succession **indicates continuity in the government’s ideological stance** on migration.

Research Design

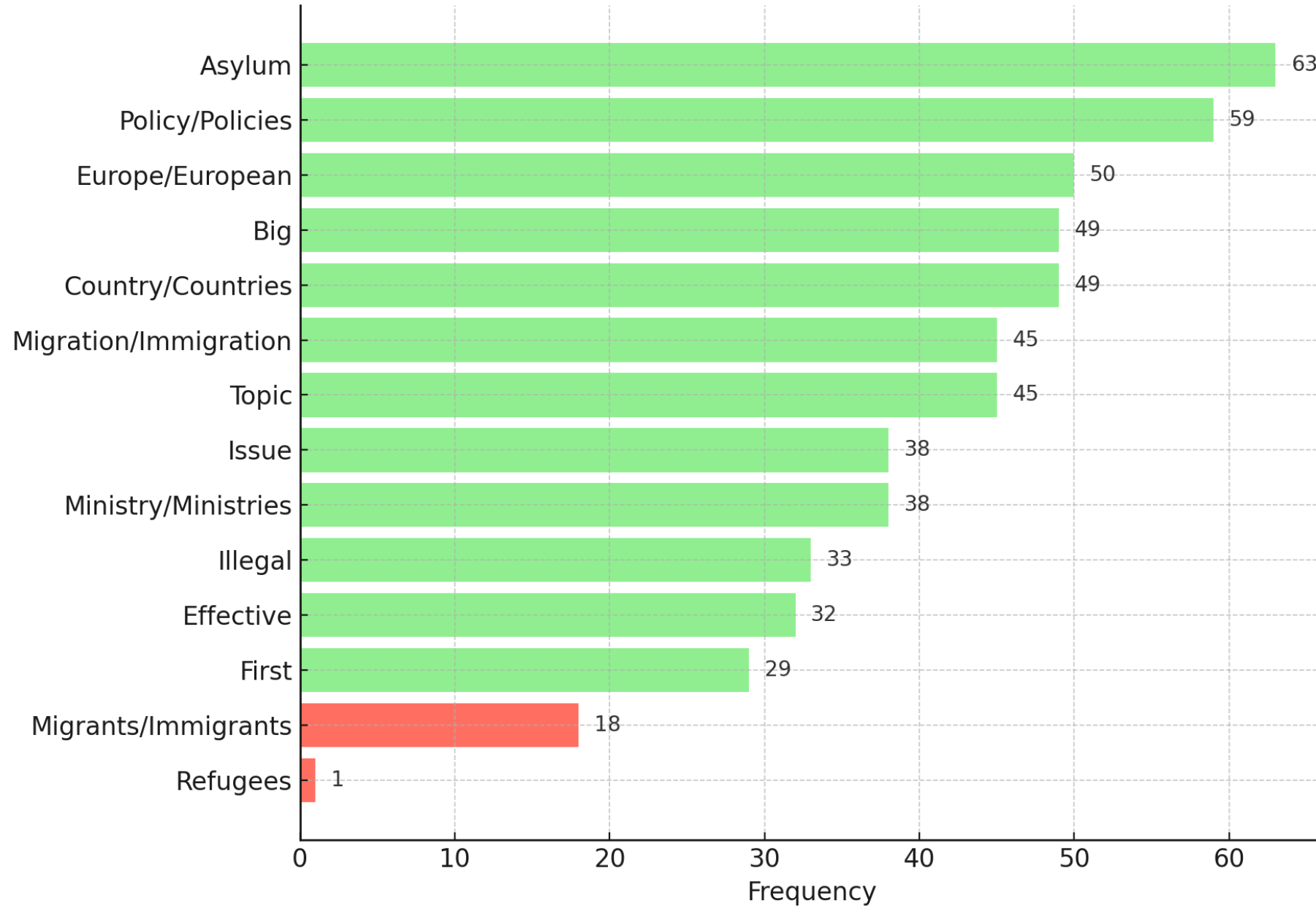
➤ Corpus

- **Size:** \approx 13,800 words
- **Texts:** first speeches and interviews by Vouridis as Minister of Migration & Asylum
- **Function:** initial statements that set the tone and frame the ministry's agenda

➤ Methodology

- **Approach:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) combined with corpus-based methods
- **Rationale:** integrates qualitative interpretation with quantitative patterns of language use
- **Focus:** uncovering ideological dimensions of migration policy discourse
- **Analytical tools:** frequency patterns, collocations, transitivity, representation of social actors

Key Lexical Items in VoriDis Corpus (13,819 words)



Method of Qualitative Analysis

- Transitivity Analysis (Halliday, 1985): how actions are described, who acts, who is acted upon
- Representation of Social Actors (van Leeuwen, 2008): who is included/excluded, active/passive

Halliday's Transitivity (Processes & Participants)

In Halliday's **Systemic Functional Grammar** (1985), transitivity explains how language **encodes experience** through **processes, participants, and circumstances**.

➤ It distinguishes **six process types**:

- **Material** – doing, happening, causing change
- **Mental** – sensing, feeling, perceiving
- **Relational** – being, identifying, attributing
- **Behavioural** – physiological or psychological behaviour
- **Verbal** – saying, reporting
- **Existential** – expressing existence or occurrence

➤ Each process brings in **participants** (who is involved)

➤ **Circumstances**: when, where, how, why

Van Leeuwen's Representation of Social Actors

➤ Role allocation:

- **Activated** → represented as dynamic forces
- **Passivated** → represented as objects to be managed
 - Subjected** (undergoing action)
 - Beneficialised** (receiving outcomes)
- **Circumstantialised** → relegated to time, place, etc. roles

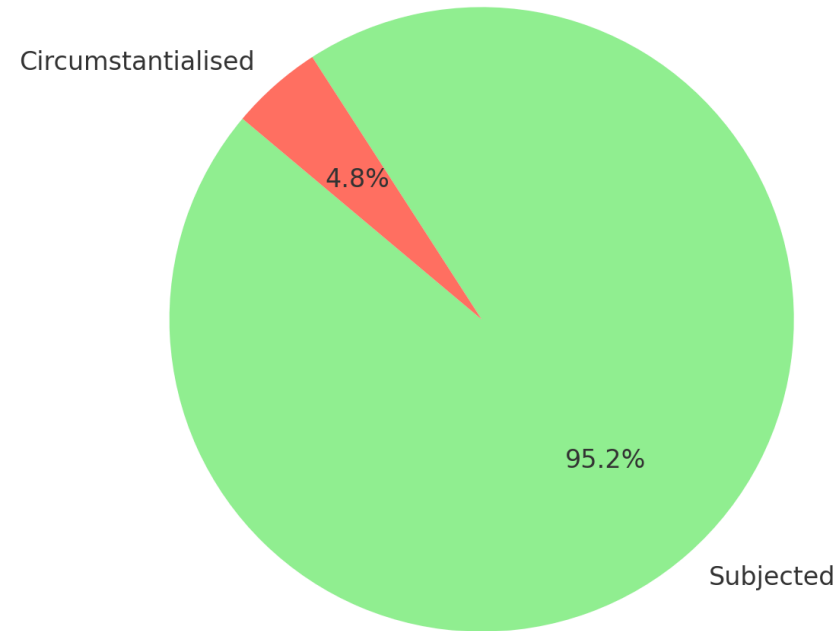
➤ Inclusion & Exclusion

- **Inclusion** → actors explicitly mentioned or foregrounded
- **Exclusion** → actors backgrounded or omitted

➤ **Analytical function:** Reveals who is made visible or invisible in discourse, exposes ideologies of power, control, and accountability

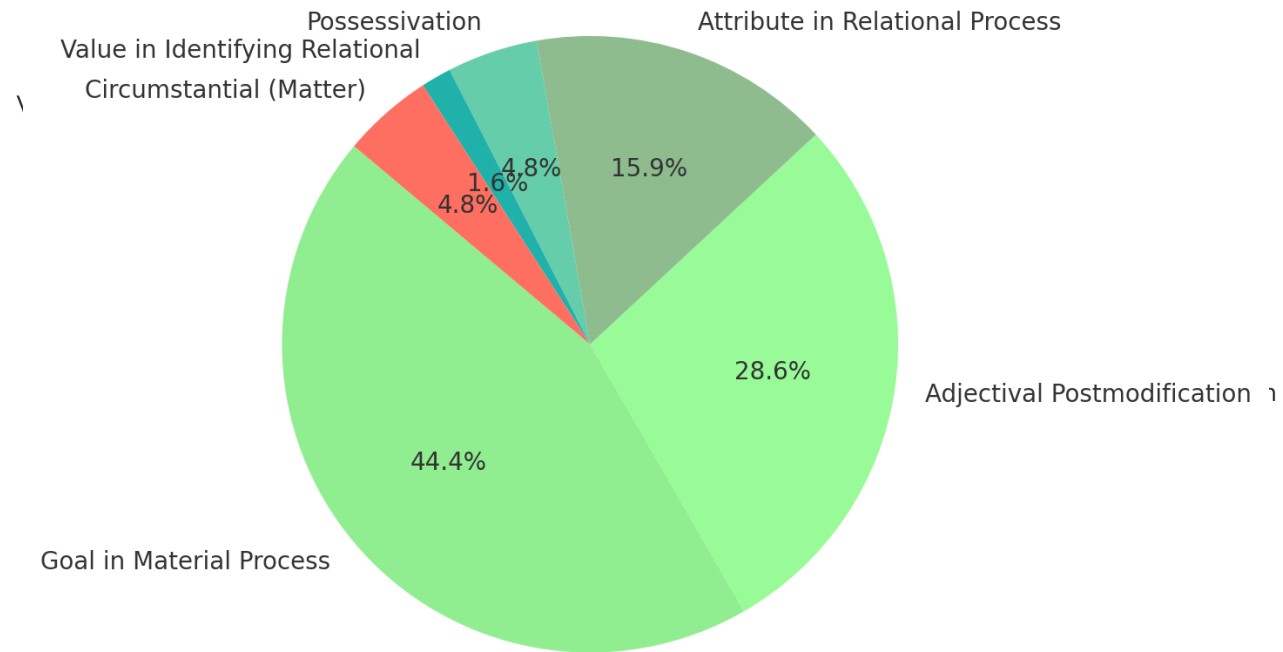
Asylum Representations

Representations of 'Asylum' in Vovidis Corpus (63 instances)



Transitivity analysis

Realisations of 'Asylum' Representations (63 instances)



Asylum as Goal in Material Processes

- Consistently framed as an **object**: granted, denied, processed, rejected
- Surrounding processes = **bureaucratic mechanisms of control**
 - filing applications
 - examining claims
 - rejecting petitions
- Focus on **limiting recognition** and **deterrence**
 - “how many entitled” vs. “how many not”
 - a threat that needs to be deterred
- **Not** a humanitarian obligation, but an **administrative burden and a problem to be addressed**

Asylum subjected through Adjectival Postmodification

- **Asylum** appears as a **postmodifying element** after bureaucratic nouns
 - αίτηση ασύλου (*application of asylum*), καθεστώς ασύλου (*status of asylum*)
- This grammatical pattern **attaches asylum to administrative entities**, making it a **category managed by institutions**
- **Foregrounds procedure over principle**
 - asylum is linguistically positioned as something to be **processed**, not exercised
- **Constructs asylum as dependent** on state action and approval
 - reinforces **institutional ownership** of the concept
- Indicates **discursive subordination**
 - asylum lacks agency, functioning as a **bureaucratic label** within official discourse
- It is implied that it is **threat** that needs to be managed

Example 1

Είναι μια συζήτηση που αποκτάει νόημα όταν μπορείς να επιστρέψεις αυτόν που του απορρίπτεις το άσυλο.

[It is a discussion that only makes sense when you can return the person whose asylum you reject.]

Example 2

Άρα, ο αιτών άσυλο δεν θα έχει λόγους να ζητήσει άσυλο στην Ελλάδα, προερχόμενος από την Τουρκία.

[Therefore, the asylum seeker will have no reason to request asylum in Greece if coming from Turkey.]

Example 3

Αν κάποιος ξέρει ότι θα απαγορευτεί το άσυλό του δεν θα 'ρχεται εδώ.

[If someone knows that their asylum will be rejected, they will not come here.]

Example 4

Αν γίνεται δεκτή μια αίτηση ασύλου υπάρχει ένα όργανο πρωτοβάθμιο που το αποφασίζει.

[If an asylum application is accepted, there is a first-instance authority that decides it.]

Example 5

Φτιάξαμε ένα αξιόπιστο σύστημα χορήγησης ασύλου, υπό την έννοια ότι κυρίως είναι ταχύ, και μας επιτρέπει να έχουμε μια αποτελεσματική διαχείριση των μεταναστευτικών ροών.

[We have created a reliable asylum-granting system, in the sense that it is primarily fast, and it allows us to have an effective management of migration flows.]

Discursive Strategies: Securitisation & Bureaucratisation

Securitisation

- Frames asylum as a **security threat**
- Links protection to **border control & deterrence**
- Justifies exceptional measures in the name of safety

Bureaucratisation

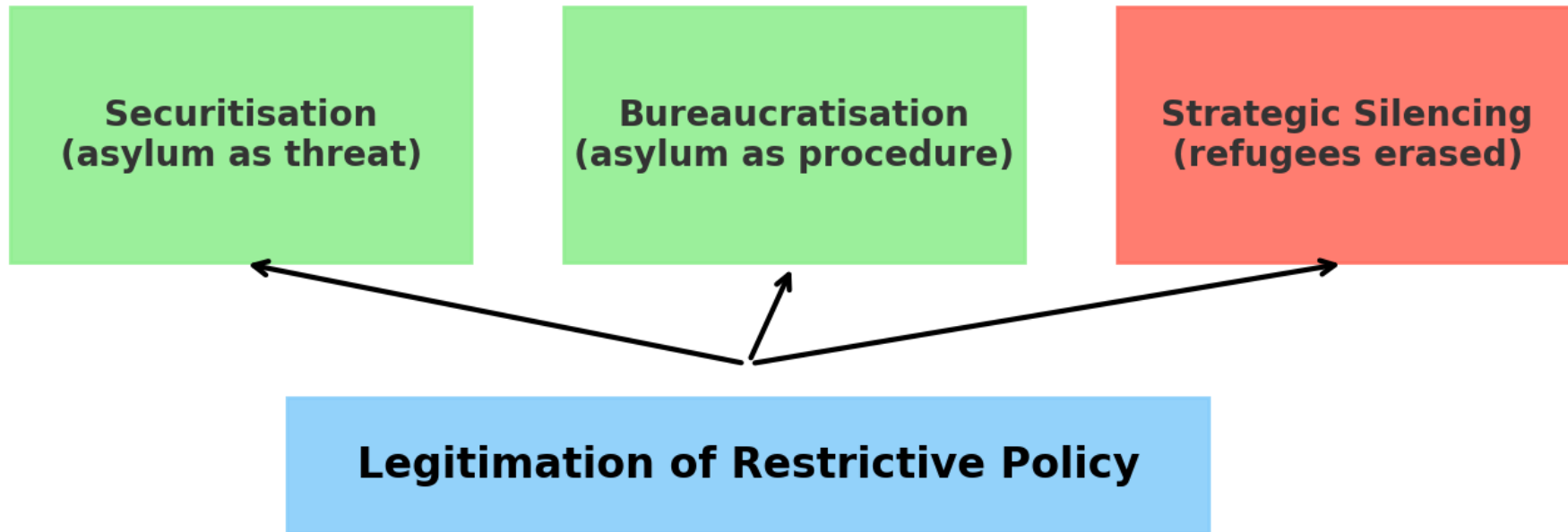
- Reduces asylum to **procedures, files, decisions**
- Language of **efficiency, legality, numbers**
- Turns humanitarian rights into **technical processes**

Discursive Strategy: Strategic Silencing

Strategic Silencing

- Systematic **erasure of refugees** from discourse
- This erasure is **intentional** and not accidental
- Focus on institutions & procedures instead of people
- Refugees reduced to **abstract categories** (“applications,” “flows”)
- Consequence: needs and rights become **invisible**

Legitimation of Restrictive Policy



Refugee Children in Greece: Living Conditions

Main problems:

- **Overcrowded** facilities (safe zones beyond capacity)
- **Guardianship crisis** (few, unpaid, delayed appointments)
- **Education gaps** (delayed placements, missing supplies)
- **Discrimination & vulnerability** (Roma, minorities, asylum-seeking children)

Unaccompanied Minors in Greece (Sept 2025)

Population: 1,989 unaccompanied minors

- 92% boys, 8% girls
- 12% under 15, rest 15–18
- **Main origins:**
 - Egypt 62%
 - Afghanistan 11%
 - Somalia 8%
 - Syria 7%
 - Sudan 2%
 - others 9–10%

Unaccompanied Minors in Greece (Sept 2025)

Accommodation

- 1,291 in **child reception facilities**
- 169 in **independent living apartments**
- 142 in **emergency structures**
- 367 in **closed controlled centres**

Unaccompanied Minors in Greece (Sept 2025)

Challenges

- **Safe areas overcrowded** (over 2× capacity)
- **Very young children** also present
- **Guardianship crisis:** only 145 guardians nationwide, unpaid, delays → backlog in registration & asylum

Education of Refugee Children

Progress

- Enrollment in public schools **increasing**
- Registration procedures largely **normalized**

Persistent Problems

- **Delays** in staff placements (including kindergartens in facilities)
- Lack of **basic supplies** (bags, notebooks, essentials)
- Parents often **not informed** about educational opportunities
- **Local resistance** in some communities to children's enrollment

Interpretation Services

2024 Crisis

- **Severe shortages** in facilities & Asylum Service
- Contract with METAdrasi expired → **services suspended**
- **Payment delays** left staff unpaid for months

2025 Situation

- Services resumed after **outstanding payments** cleared
- Still reliant on **NGOs + EU funding (AMIF 2021–2027)**
- Interruptions = administration **unable to provide services**

Best Interests of the Child

Legal Obligations

- Binding principle in **EU Charter & UN Convention**
- Must guide **all decisions** affecting children

What it Means

- Assess harm from the **child's perspective**
- Includes **child-specific rights violations**
- Courts must give **significant weight** to best interests

Practical Implications

- Children must be able to **express their views**
- Requires a **safe, respectful environment**
- No child can be heard effectively in **hostile/indifferent settings**

Need for a Comprehensive National Strategy for Children in Greece

- Urgent need for a **comprehensive national strategy**, particularly for unaccompanied minors affected by trauma and family separation.
- The strategy should include:
 - A **coherent legal framework**
 - An **effective guardianship system** ensuring the child's best interests and long-term protection
- **Current situation:**
 - **No unified approach** to child protection and welfare
 - **Multiple bodies** act without coordination or shared mandates
 - **Lack of a permanent authority** overseeing the Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - Results in **fragmented, temporary, and often ineffective solutions**

Conclusion

Key Points

- **Asylum discourse:** securitisation, bureaucratisation, strategic silencing
- **Result:** legitimisation of restrictive policies, neglect of humanitarian dimension
- **Impact:** refugee children face overcrowding, guardianship crises, education barriers, lack of protection
- **Need:** a **child-centred national strategy** grounded in the best interests of the child